European External Action Service (EEAS)

Remarks by High Representative / Vice- President Federica Mogherini at the press conference of the Union for the Mediterranean Conference "Towards a common development agenda for the Mediterranean", Barcelona

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Thank you and welcome to this press conference, that comes at the end of our first Ministerial session. A second one will now take place.

It is an honour for me to be here, co-chairing with my good friend Nasser Judah, Foreign Minister of Jordan, but co-chair of the Union for the Mediterranean together with the European Union, this Ministerial that comes for the first time since 2008. A long time, which coincides with the 20th anniversary of the Barcelona process.

There is not much to celebrate in these times. It is hard times both for Europe and for the Southern and Eastern part of the Mediterranean. Still, we are here today, 43 countries united. We share geography, we share history, we share most of all the same problems and first and foremost the issue of terrorism, radicalisation but also a refugee crisis and the migratory flows that concern us all, Europeans and our friends from the Southern and Eastern shore of the Mediterranean.

We also share the common priority we put on solving the crises, the many crises that our region is facing, starting from the Syrian one, but also the Libyan and the Israeli-Palestinian one. We have common interests and that is why it so important, especially in these difficult times, to come together, united, because our unity is our strength. And it is also our realistic possibility to solve the many different and difficult challenges we have in front of us, jointly.

You would maybe be surprised of knowing that not only the Mediterranean is at the centre of the most turbulent events in these last months and years, but it is also the least integrated region in the world. I am always shocked when I remember the numbers.

If you think of trade, 90% - in our region – 90% of trade happens within Europe. 9% between Europe and the Southern shores of the Mediterranean and only 1% across and within the Arab world, across the Southern shore of the Mediterranean.

This tells us that priority number one for our common work is to accelerate and towards a better integration of the region. Regional economic development or regional projects to tie together the countries of the region, not only North - South and East, but also across our region is the priority number one. Because a better economic and regional cooperation and development is key to improve lives of our citizens, on all sides of the region. And, we know very well that this is also a key element for preventing and solving conflicts and crises, and to tackle radicalisation of our youth.

We agreed today, with the Ministers of the 43 countries, that a special focus of our common work has to be on our youth. On offering job opportunities, education opportunities, and exchanges for our young people across the Mediterranean. Because it is through economic and social opportunities for our youth, and through dialogue among our different societies, that we have the real possibility to not only understand each other, but also to build bridges for cooperation. It is, again, not only through our institutional unity that we will increase our strength, but it is also by increasing the resilience of our societies, the unity of our societies and of our people that we respond in the best possible way to the threat that terrorism poses to our societies; everywhere, in Paris as in Tunis, in Beirut as in Egypt or elsewhere in Europe. We are united in this as well as we are united in all the political agenda we have. We are united working on the political solutions on Syria. We are united trying to push for a meaningful resumption of peace talks between Israel and Palestine. We are united in hosting and protecting refugees and trying to manage the migratory flows. We are united in offering a future of peace for this region that is so beautiful and still so difficult in this moment. So, a strong political message of unity from today but also some very concrete projects on which the Union for the Mediterranean have been working over these years. The Secretary General [of the Union for Mediterranean] will be more detailed on this but it is not only political messages that bring us here today; it is also many different concrete projects for development at local level in all of our countries for employment, education, women, human rights and bringing opportunities for all our countries in the region. Because only together we will face this difficult time and give to our region the beauty of politics that the beauty of its nature calls for.

I thank you very much and I will pass immediately the floor to the minister Judeh.

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