

Cooperating to Address the Challenges of Energy and Climate in the Mediterranean Region

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The strategic importance of the Mediterranean region has been proven throughout history and is still visible today. This implies both opportunities and challenges that must be addressed collectively and from a regional perspective. Cooperation is the only mechanism that will allow both shores of the Mediterranean to foster their economic and social development without abandoning the sustainability imperative. The Union for the Mediterranean, based in Barcelona, facilitates and promotes regional dialogue and carries out concrete projects in order to optimize economic development and sustainable practices at the same time. In the field of energy security, the Union for the Mediterranean has worked for the integration of energy markets, stimulating efficient energy measures and supporting local value chains.

The Australian historian Geoffrey Blainey stated in one of his books that “No stretch of water exerted such a pervasive influence on the rise of today’s world as the Mediterranean. Without that Sea and its peculiar qualities and unusual position, the world’s political, economic, cultural and social life would have veered in another direction.” Undeniably, our Mediterranean region was for centuries the epicenter of the world and remains today, on the twentieth anniversary of the Barcelona Process, a rich and diverse region full of opportunities and challenges.

Regional cooperation between Mediterranean countries is essential today to face

the existing common challenges and to make the most of the opportunities that this region offers. The areas for cooperation are immensely diverse. In the current international context, cooperation in the energy field is not just an option, but a need, and potentially an opportunity for both shores of the Mediterranean to foster their economic and social development in accordance with sustainability criteria.

While oil and gas still remain the main sources of energy today, renewable energies and energy efficiency offer a unique opportunity for countries to reduce their vulnerability in terms of energy security – which is at the top

of the international political agenda –, building climate resilience in our societies and fostering the transition to new sustainable development models. The deployment of renewables as well as of energy efficiency measures represents a number of benefits for net importer countries as well as for net exporter ones, including technological transfers, skilled jobs and potential for attracting private investment. This is not to mention the direct impact on the reduction of disruption risks due to economic, technical or political instabilities and of the dependency on oil markets.

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Energy security and stability in the region are two key issues, closely interlinked. The urgency to address climate change effects and its close connection with other vulnerabilities in the region, namely water scarcity, food security, urban development and resilience to extreme weather events, have further accentuated the need to tackle energy issues from a regional and comprehensive approach.

In this context, the Union for the Mediterranean, an intergovernmental organization born in 2008, provides a privileged forum to strengthen the cooperation in the Mediterranean region, with the support of its 43 Member States and a number of relevant stakeholders. Through its Secretariat based in Barcelona, Spain, the Union for the Mediterranean acts as a unique platform to facilitate and promote regional dialogue and cooperation as well as concrete regional projects with the ultimate goal of fostering the integration and the social and economic development of

the Mediterranean region. Among the fields of cooperation, the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean has the mandate to work on the deployment and promotion of renewable energy, energy efficiency and climate change, which are considered key priority areas.

The elements on the ground that allow and activate such essential cooperation are mainly geographical proximity, the existing complementarities between the countries of the Union for the Mediterranean, the common challenges to be faced and the economic interdependencies between the two shores of the Mediterranean Sea. The improvement of cooperation provides a high added value to economies since it reduces investment costs; it gives markets the critical size to scale up investments and it represents an opportunity for the region to become more an active player in the new economic paradigm.

It is therefore clear that the comprehensive approach needed can only be developed through a structured dialogue between all the relevant actors in the region, allowing the exchange of experiences and the identification of concrete initiatives to achieve common goals, while creating synergies between a complex system of various structures and programs and reinforcing strategic partnerships with other international and regional institutions that share the same objectives.

While respecting the principles of inclusiveness and variable geometry, the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean has been able to progress on the identification of regional priorities and lines of action, focusing on those common concerns where regional cooperation can have an added value. Advancing towards the integration of the energy markets, promoting energy efficiency measures and supporting local value chains and job creation are some of the main priorities agreed by our Member States. In parallel, an important



Wind energy and solar power project in Tafilah City, Jordan (EU/Neighbourhood Info Centre).

effort is being made to adapt financial instruments to these core concerns, while removing obstacles to fully leverage private investment, a key aspect for the deployment of renewables, as the project of the Tafila Wind Farm in Jordan clearly shows. Tafila breaks new ground for renewable energy projects in the Mediterranean; it has a high trans-boundary demonstrative effect on growing business opportunities in the region and provides a best practice model.

The international agenda will continue to be shaped over the coming years by the need to advance towards more secure and sustainable energy models in the region, concerning both demand and supply. The challenges ahead of us require common approaches, clear strategies and policy goals translated into a set of articulated, sequenced and integrated actions. Only by cooperating and uniting efforts will successful results be achieved. Remaining aloof is no longer an option.