

West Mediterranean Sea Basin Initiative

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Distinguished guests and colleagues,

Today's intervention will focus on the **Western Mediterranean Basin Initiative** and its role within a wide geopolitical context. The West Mediterranean Basin covers an area of 830,000 km² touching the shores of nine countries with the vast majority of it falling outside of the national jurisdiction of such states.

The entire Mediterranean Basin is strategically and geographically situated touching 3 main continents namely **Europe, Africa and Asia** and for this reason has historically been the **cradle of different models of civilizations &** witnessed the earliest forms of blue economies through the carriage of persons and goods occasionally interrupted by wars and other conflicting events.

Although the role of the Mediterranean Basin within the carriage of goods sphere has witnessed a less predominant role over the last centuries, in particular following the discovery of new maritime routes (Indies and Americas), the opening of the Suez Canal has enhanced the role of the Mediterranean Basin and once again confirmed its fundamental role within **modern maritime commercial routes** and proven how a depressed economy can, through targeted investments, be easily regenerated. However, the **recent Arabic Spring up rise** and the **Post 2008 Financial Crises** has seriously undermined stability within the region and made the need for cooperation between states even more evident.

For this reason **COOPERATION & RESPONSIVE GOVERNANCE** across states is fundamental, in particular with respect to:

- Management of Maritime Activities;
- Protection of the Marine Environment & Heritage;
- Prevention & Combatting of Pollution;
- Safety & Security at Sea; and
- Promotion of Blue Growth & Job Creation

If a lesson was learnt from more than two thousand years of activity in this area this is that the key solution to issues affecting the Mediterranean areas is **DIALOGUE** and today it is crystal clear that dialogue needs to be accompanied by **ACTION**. Resources within the Shipping World are commonly shared and there is no alternative to a **COMMON AND UNIFORM APPROACH**. It's only through consistency and uniformity of action that future generations will be able to inherit a region of **expanding growth, peace and prosperity**.

It is in this particular scenario of **renovation and regeneration that the West Med Basin will be able to play a crucial role**. The western Mediterranean Sea has an enormous wealth in **natural resources, cultural assets and diversity of people and places**. The various sectors of the maritime economy have a huge potential for development.

The region has **200 ports and terminals** representing close to **40% of Mediterranean values in goods transport** (circa **700 million tons freight and 14 million TEU traffic**).

It is a traditional and consolidated tourist destination and it records the highest share of total tourist arrivals in the Mediterranean, with **millions of tourists visiting its coastal areas**.

It is a **hotspot for biodiversity with** hundreds of marine protected areas and Natura 2000 sites.

HOWEVER

The western Mediterranean region is facing growing **socio-economic and environmental pressure** due to a **longstanding economic and financial crisis**. Youth unemployment rates are very high all around the western Mediterranean, accounting from a **minimum of 14% to a maximum 58%**. The maritime workforce is also ageing in the EU Member States, while **careers in some maritime sectors are no longer attracting young people**. In turn, **businesses don't have access to the desired skills and knowledge** either in traditional or emerging maritime sectors, and are facing a shortage in the needed labour force.

Anthropogenic pressures (e.g. urbanisation of its coasts, overexploitation of fish stocks, increased marine pollution), and more recently the **refugee crisis**, due notably to the **overall geopolitical instability of the Mediterranean region** is creating great challenges. Ensuring the safety and security of sea-related activities is an essential prerequisite for the sustainable development of a range of “blue” economic sectors and for the prosperity and stability of the region. On average, there are **60 maritime accidents annually in the western Mediterranean**, out of which **15 involve tankers transporting petroleum or chemicals**. The development of certain activities may expose the sub-sea basin to potential safety risks mainly in areas in which maritime traffic is particularly congested due to narrow passages such as the **Strait of Gibraltar, the Bonifacio Strait or due to high traffic intensity like in the Sicily channel**.

Efforts have been made to address these risks and threats in a more general way *inter alia* through the **European and Mediterranean Coast Guard Functions Fora**, the **EU Maritime Security Strategy** and its **Action Plan (SAFEMED)** projects and through numerous activities under the **European Agenda for Migration** and the **EU-NAV-FOR-MED-Sofia**. A pilot project was also launched in 2016 in order to improve operational co-operation between three EU agencies (**FRONTEX-EFCA-EMSA**) in the western Mediterranean.

This pressure will increase by a multitude of powerful, highly complex and interconnected forces, the so-called **MEGATRENDS** – large-scale social, economic, political, environmental or technological changes that are slow to form, but which then exercise a profound and lasting influence on many if not most human activities, processes and perceptions.

Examples are global population growth, migration and urbanisation and the demographic unbalance of ageing societies in many parts of the world; global warming, rising sea-levels and the acidification of oceans and seas; the deepening of globalisation and the growing momentum of digitalisation, big data and bioengineering.

IT IS FOR THESE REASONS that Good Governance needs to be enhanced in order to address issues such as **climate change and environmental protection**. **Tailor-made measures** are crafted to foster coordination and cooperation amongst the countries, raise awareness and stimulate networks and partnerships among stakeholders across sectors and maritime borders.

Maritime – Sea basin strategies are an effective instrument envisaged by the Integrated Maritime Policy to **provide solutions to various cross-sectorial challenges and develop a shared blue economy**. A number of sea basin projects were established in areas such as the **Atlantic, the Baltic Sea and the Adriatic-Ionian Seas**. All these sea basin strategies **recognised the need to enhance blue growth and jobs**, whilst **protecting the health and productivity of our seas and oceans**.

The Initiative was designed on the guidelines set by the **Union for the Mediterranean process** and its **Ministerial Declaration on the Blue Economy adopted on 17th November 2015**, which invites the UfM countries to explore the “added value and feasibility of maritime appropriate strategies, including at sub-regional level, notably building on the experience of the **5+5 dialogue**”, involving countries like **Algeria, France, Italy, Libya, Malta, Mauritania, Morocco, Portugal, Spain and Tunisia**. In the 5+5 Ministerial Declaration of Foreign Affairs adopted on 28.10.2016, Ministers “*encourage further work on this Initiative and stress the importance of a synergy with the secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean in this framework*”.

Such vision has developed a Western Mediterranean sub-sea basin area as a **conceptual interconnected system** proposing concrete actions and remaining open to other partners in the region. It aims to promote **sustainable economic** and **social prosperity** of the western Mediterranean region through growth and jobs creation by **improving its competitiveness and attractiveness**, while at the same time **preserving healthy and balanced marine and coastal eco-systems**.

The ambition is to agree on concrete areas of cross sectorial **coordination and cooperation** that will address the identified specific challenges by achieving the following specific objectives:

1. Boosting innovation, skills development and research and industrial cooperation to create job and investment opportunities;
2. Ensuring safety and security for the sustainable development of the blue economy and for the prosperity and stability of the region; and
3. Promoting sustainable management of maritime economic activities and preserving ecosystems functioning and biodiversity.

CONCLUSIONS

Competing national priorities together with **instability in the region** so far have prevented a full coordination and harmonisation of maritime policies and practices across the Mediterranean. However, the current political momentum, following the recent UfM ministerial Declaration, has prepared the ground for a mutually **beneficial commitment and joint actions** involving the various stakeholders across the western Mediterranean region.

Extensive consultations of stakeholders were conducted to identify clear needs specific to the Region. Those needs have been assessed against existing frameworks relating to the sustainable development of the blue economy to highlight possible gaps. Those have been identified in terms of:

1. **Strategic Scope**
2. **Information and Knowledge**
3. **Implementation, Enforcement and Monitoring**

The key solution going forward is 'less talking, less buzz words - more ACTION'. Thank you.