Acknowledgments

- Allow me first of all to send you warm greetings from our Secretary General whom I am representing today and who would have really wanted to be with you today.

- On behalf of the UFM Secretariat, I would like to thank the Greek EU Presidency, for inviting me to this second Greek EU Presidency Conference. The Greek Presidency has been a very active and fruitful presidency. It is a very dynamic Mediterranean presidency and we were fortunate to hold many important events this semester: the senior officials meeting last January, the 13th Joint ECOFIN - Facility for Euro-Mediterranean Investment and Partnership (FEMIP) Ministerial Meeting that was celebrated at the beginning of April and the UfM Ministerial on Environment and Climate change that will take place here in Athens next week. Finally, Greece will host the third ministerial meeting of the EU/League of Arab States on 10-11 June 2014, another Milestone for strengthening relations between the EU and the Arab World. We are very grateful for all the Greek initiatives aimed at giving a new impulse to Euro-Mediterranean cooperation.

- I would also like to seize this opportunity, since we are dealing with the topic of Europe and the Arab World, to acknowledge the very active role played by the League of Arab States in the Mediterranean region. The League of Arab States is a key partner for the UfM. This partnership has been strengthened significantly in recent years and will be strengthened even further.

- I also would like to express my gratitude and congratulations to the Economist for partnering on such an important event dealing with a very strategic issue on which I am happy to share with you some thoughts.

- I would like to elaborate on three points.

1/ The importance of regional cooperation in the Mediterranean.

- The Mediterranean region has seen unprecedented evolutions in recent years both at the political and socio-economic spheres. The push for change across the region has been partly driven by socio-economic factors. There is obviously a national response to many of these challenges, to the hope expressed by citizens for a better future. But there is undoubtedly a regional response as well, all the more as many of these challenges are, as a matter of fact, shared challenges by all countries in the region.

- In this regard, let me stress that, if a challenge should be first and foremost addressed, as it is on the basis of many other challenges, this is the one of regional integration, that is to say the economic integration of Arab countries, and in particular, Southern Mediterranean countries.
And to provide the ground for this assertion, let me begin by mentioning some figures on EU-Arab world relations: the relations between Europe and the Arab world are intense. The EU is the major trading partner of the Arab world (almost 50% of total Arab trade and 62% of total Maghreb trade). The Arab world is an essential partner in the energy sector: More than 50% of EU imports of oil and 18% of EU imports of gas come from the Arab world. These figures show the extent these relations are strategic for both sides, and account for the number of initiatives and cooperation schemes that have been carried out in the last 60 years: from the Global Mediterranean Policy, the Euro-Arab Dialogue, the Renewed Mediterranean Policy, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, the European Neighborhood Policy, and the Union for the Mediterranean.

But insofar as economic relations are concerned, the focus of our attention should not only probably be the in the existing or future economic ties between Europe and the Arab world, but more on the startling low levels of regional integration. The existing data on regional integration accounts for this fact: intra-regional trade between south Mediterranean countries is between 3 to 5%! Compared with other regions in the world, (ASEAN-22%, MERCOSUR-20%), this figure is one of the lowest in the world. Regional integration is of utmost importance for the economic development of the region, but also as a driver for Europe’s economic growth and competitiveness. To this regard, I will provide you one figure: the North African market- from Morocco to Egypt- is as large as the one in Russia. A more prosperous and integrated Mediterranean may translate into greater investment opportunities, trade, transfer of knowledge, joint projects and other economic advantages and complementarities for EU countries.

The strategic importance of regional integration should also be gauged in the wider scope comprising the African dimension of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership:

2/ Greater coordination, synergies and complementarities

If regional integration is the major all-embracing challenge facing the region, at a more institutional and policymaker level, **the need to act in coordination** with all different actors, initiatives and cooperation schemes operating in the region is crucial to maximize the results of all activities being carried out, particularly since there are indeed many actors (international organizations, bilateral cooperation agencies, sub-regional fora, etc.) involved in the Mediterranean, all of which with their own competences, their own priorities and their own lines of action. To this regard, the success of any specific endeavor that we launch should be gauged by asking ourselves whether we were able to fully draw on existing synergies and complementarities with other activities and initiatives underway. As there as, as a matter of fact, many synergies and hence a huge potential for collaboration between all stakeholders in the region.

As there is, as well, **a need for concrete action**, for tangible results on the ground, for activities, for projects with a real impact on citizens’ wellbeing. We must pass from abstract discourse to concrete action to tackle, for instance,
youth unemployment (the Mediterranean region has one of the highest level of unemployment rates in the world, especially among young people and women. 30% of youth are jobless), to reach, as well, a more inclusive growth in terms of environment (the Mediterranean Sea, rich in biodiversity and natural resources, is one of the most threatened seas in the world through both population or economic growth and Climate Change), in terms of water consumption (180 million people in the Mediterranean region are considered ‘water poor’) or in terms of women empowerment, for instance.

3/ The role of the Union for the Mediterranean

- The Union for the Mediterranean, under the leaderships of its two co presidents the EU and Jordan, acts upon the fundamental conviction that the goal of regional integration will be reached by the means of concrete action on the ground and with coordination with all actors concerned in line with their national interests. And we are convinced that we are the very useful instrument to foster regional integration.

- Inclusive governance: thanks to our inclusive governance based on the principle of co-ownership between both shores of the Mediterranean, the UfM offers both the politically balanced and the regional-wide approaches required for countries in both shores of the Mediterranean to engage in a coherent and comprehensive way. We are pleased to note the active participation of the League of Arab states in all the meetings of the UfM.

- We take a pragmatic approach based on concrete projects, directly dealing with citizen’s needs. And we implement them on an ad hoc variable geometry basis, which allows to a group of countries who share the same interests and objectives to implement a specific project or initiative. This means that projects are only implemented in those countries interested. The UfM ensures nevertheless that projects have a regional dimension and that they can be eventually extended to other countries. Since regional integration is, it could not be otherwise, the underlying horizontal objective guiding all UfM activities. Activities that deal with some of the aforementioned challenges of the region, such as environment, energy, urban development, student mobility, job creation, youth employability, women empowerment.

- To move projects forward, the Secretariat does not work alone. We act as an operational platform seeking to foster coordination efforts in the Mediterranean, by drawing on the synergies and complementarities with and between all other institutions, stakeholders and cooperation schemes in the region. At the Secretariat itself we have seconded staff form the European Commission, from the EIB, the EBRD, institutions that are partners to our activities.
I would like to acknowledge in particular the excellent support of the European Commission and the European External Action Service to the UFM in full coherence with the Neighborhood Policy.

The UfM institutional framework encompasses, in addition, all Euro-Mediterranean cooperation dimensions: parliamentary (PA-UfM), local (ARLEM) and the civil society dimensions of the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. This is an added value for the organization.

In conclusion, let me take this opportunity to tell you that we wish to continue working further with all of you to implement concrete initiatives that could contribute to the well-being of the populations of the region. You can count on the UFM Secretariat as partner in the efforts of all to strengthen the relations between Europe and the Arab countries for the benefit of peace, stability and prosperity.