

IV EUROMED YOUNG RESEARCHERS FORUM

25-26 October 2021

Report

Opening statements

Roger Albinyana

Managing Director, European Institute of the
Mediterranean (IEMed)

Karina Melkonian

EuroMeSCo Research Officer, European Institute of
the Mediterranean

Mr. Albinyana introduced the IV Euromed Young Researchers Forum and welcomed the participants to one of the IEMed's first face-to-face events after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. He recalled that the event is organised in the framework of the "EuroMeSCo: Connecting the Dots" project, co-funded by the European Union and IEMed and the IEMed's most strategic project, which aims to provide policy-oriented and evidence-based research relying on a truly Mediterranean and multidimensional approach.

One of IEMed's objectives is to stimulate reflection and action that contribute to a mutual understanding while exchanging and cooperating between both shores. It builds a space to exchange, discuss, and contribute to peace and stability in the region. In doing so, it contributes to the objectives of the European Union (EU) neighbourhood policy and of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM).

Mr. Albinyana stressed how the COVID-19 pandemic aggravated long existing political, economic, security and social challenges in a region that has been affected in the past decade by shifting developments by regional and global actors. From a geopolitical standpoint, the mounting lack of interest on the side of the United States to shape Mediterranean dynamics and the incapacity of the EU to fill the gaps has created a vacuum that has been leveraged by emerging global and regional powers such as China, Russia, Iran, and the Gulf countries, in a new multi-polarity.

These new powers have cemented their regional influence through military, economic and political cooperation. The emergence of the African continent as a political and economic bloc has weakened the Euro-Mediterranean partnership in light of a reinforced partnership between Europe and Africa that has gained centrality and momentum. In the future, the big-



gest dichotomy for the Euro-Mediterranean partnership is whether the Mediterranean region can emerge as a new geopolitical and economic centre between Europe and Africa, or whether it will remain a peripheral area in this context.

In the view of human and sustainable development, the region is confronted with five main challenges that affect all the countries alike, even if situations vary widely with some of the Southern Mediterranean countries in fragile contexts or situations of conflict. First are labour markets that are not capable of generating enough jobs for citizens, especially young people, and that massively exclude women, which triggers migratory flows to Europe. Second, a climate emergency crisis that has placed the Mediterranean region as one of the most critical hotspots on the global stage and which requires accelerating the transition toward sustainable economies, energy production, and societies. Third, a rapid urbanisation process which has highlighted the vulnerabilities and inequalities of societies with very high demographic growth rates. Fourth, stagnating economic models that are not geared toward innovation 4.0 and technological change and which might widen digital divide while triggering inequalities. Finally, the inability of public administrations to improve the quality of public policies which unveils enormous deficits in terms of public governance as a challenge that is cross-cutting to all these sectors.

Against this background, the EU now has a new opportunity to revamp a mutually beneficial cooperation in more creative ways based on lessons learned from the current cooperation and the COVID-19 pandemic. The Joint Communication on a Renewed Partnership

with the Southern Neighbourhood that the EU institutions adopted earlier this year offers a new chance to bolster key policy of the EU considering changing strategic issues.

Of all these strategic priorities, decision-makers of the Southern Mediterranean countries have embraced digitalisation because they know it is an enabler and accelerator of economic growth. Their concern about climate change though seems less evident, even if there is an imperative urgency to make decisions today that will directly impact the evolution of the crises of tomorrow. Remarkably, after so many years of confronting other economic and governance challenges, decision-makers from the Southern Mediterranean seem quite sceptical on the possibility of tackling them in the short term. In addition, the challenge of urbanisation is very much intertwined with the climate crisis.

Mr. Albinyana invited young researchers gathered for this event to think of how their research can influence decision-making at national and regional level and build on the political momentum that is growing. This year, we have witnessed UfM ministerial meetings on the blue economy, energy, and environment. He explained that the Euromed Young Researchers Forum is part of the Euromed Young Researchers Lab, an initiative of the EuroMeSCo project, and that it aims to boost the research capacities of young experts in the Mediterranean, give their work visibility, and strengthen exchange and stimulate research on common interests, in the field of economic development, migration and security. The lab offers young professionals a springboard to gain visibility in broader circles as well as the possibility to participate in other activities not only or

The EU now has a new opportunity to revamp a mutually beneficial cooperation in more creative ways based on lessons learned from the current cooperation and the COVID-19 pandemic

ganised in the framework of the EuroMeSCo network but also in other activities coordinated by the IEMed. It is an opportunity to connect a larger community of stakeholders and to offer networking opportunities with peers. It is a unique opportunity to foster young and innovative perspectives on key issues in the Mediterranean region from a group that is a key target of Euro-Mediterranean policies and who will determine the future of Euro-Mediterranean relations.

Mr. Albinyana thanked the donors and supporters of the event, the Directorate General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations of the European Commission (DG NEAR) and the Agency of International Cooperation of the Spanish government (AECID), the banking foundation la Caixa, as well as the EuroMeSCo team for their hard work.

Ms. Melkonian then welcomed all the participants to the IV Euromed Young Researchers Forum. She recalled that the IEMed is very proud of this initiative which aims to consolidate and empower a community of young experts across the Mediterranean. Four activities are held in this context. One is the Euromed Young Researchers Forum which will gather each year 40

participants from across the region to exchange and network with policy-makers and other young researchers from the region, as well as the opportunity to present proposals with the possibility for remunerated publication. Additionally, free skills training is organised, as during this event, where participants are given the opportunity to learn about data visualisation and policy brief drafting. Last, but not least, the Lab will launch Facebook and LinkedIn groups to provide opportunities for young researchers to network with peers from all over the region, to exchange views and share resources, as well as stay up to date with the activities of the Lab, job openings, PhD positions and fellowship opportunities.

Ms. Melkonian thanked the members of the Lab, who moderated the sessions of this forum and who will be in charge of presenting the conclusions and recommendations formulated during the working group sessions. The Young Researchers Lab will renew its board of 5 young experts on a yearly basis. The Board will play an integral role in shaping and coordinating the activities of the Lab. She introduced the three parallel working group sessions and thanked the project's team for their collaboration.

WORKING GROUP 1

Aligning the twin green and digital transition with the Euro-Mediterranean and neighbouring region's socio-economic development goals

Moderator

Oumayma Bourhriba

Research Assistant in Economics,
Policy Center for the New South (PCNS)

Discussant

Manuel Langendorf

Researcher on digital transformation
in the MENA region

During the COVID-19 outbreak, countries all over the world have recognised the persistence of the socio-economic sequels of this crisis and the eventual opportunity to change the narrative and recover on a solid basis. Rebuilding back better the Euro-Mediterranean economies means that particular attention needs to be drawn to reforms around diversification, green-digital transitions, integration, and the social sphere. In line with this rationale, this Working Group Session gave young researchers the opportunity to develop and discuss strategies for a sustainable and inclusive future that is of particular concern to them. Young researchers' areas of focus were around the alignment of green and digital transitions with the socio-economic development goals of Euro-Mediterranean region.

There was a consensus among young researchers that some challenges undermine the green and digital transitions in the region: skills mismatches, chronic dependency on oil for some countries, lack of infrastructure and management capacities, lack of financial incentives and digital/environmental awareness. In addition, participants acknowledged that there is no silver bullet to ensure the perfect alignment of this transition with the socio-economic development goals of the region because each country has its own specificities in terms of resource endowments and economic and social structures. In this regard, they tackled some fundamental areas that every economy needs to work on, especially in the post COVID-19 era.

The first area of focus was gender and youth in the context of this twin transition. The latter would require some changes in the labour market, particularly for youth and women who suffer from structural high unemployment in

the southern Mediterranean. This large segment of the population is not ready yet for this shift and adjustments in terms of promoting green and digital skills (such as skills for resource efficiency, skills to manage and protect natural assets) and green entrepreneurship are fundamentally needed.

The second segment of the session aimed to analyse the role of cities in fostering this twin transition. In this session, participants explored the role of smart cities as an engine for greening the economy, creating new job opportunities, accelerating innovation and R&D process, and thus enhancing the welfare of citizens. Furthermore, moving towards a hybrid multilateralism was discussed, considering the strategic role of cities as vibrant actors in global environmental governance.

Discussions in the third segment particularly focused on developing a vibrant private sector, especially micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). Countries need to support the transformation of the private sector towards renewable energy sources through digitalisation and innovative solutions. In this regard, participants insisted on promoting knowledge and know-how transfer from large enterprises to MSMEs, raising environmental awareness, strengthening innovation ecosystems, improving MSMEs' market access and their financial inclusion. Furthermore, there was a focus on empowering refugee-led enterprises in the region through increasing their internet accessibility and affordability.

Lastly, the fourth segment focused on the macro dimension. Participants and discussants emphasised the urgent need for the region's countries to focus on structural reforms around economic diversification that could ensure a

Some challenges undermine the green and digital transitions in the region: skills mismatches, chronic dependency on oil for some countries, lack of infrastructure and management capacities, lack of financial incentives and digital/environmental awareness



smooth shift toward a low-carbon transition. The COVID-19 outbreak has highlighted the vulnerability to shocks of economies dependent on natural resources and many countries around the world have, thus, aligned their recovery packages with environmental policies. This process needs to be strongly accompanied with reforms that would help build modern knowledge-based economies that value human capital and harness the potential of digitalisation and connectivity, innovation, and new technologies. Other specific reforms we discussed such as a gradual Environmental Fiscal Reform (EFR) that could be an efficient response for many reasons, including environmental benefits and additional

fiscal revenues that could be eventually reallocated to prioritised sectors (for example, building the necessary infrastructure).

During the final discussion, everyone agreed that social reforms are crucial and transversal to all the above-mentioned areas. In fact, they need to go hand in hand with the green-digital transition in order not to eventually widen inequalities in the region, particularly in education, social protection, and health systems. In addition, international and regional cooperation between the two shores of the Mediterranean is essential because some countries cannot afford the green and the digital transitions.

Social reforms are crucial and transversal to all the above-mentioned areas. In fact, they need to go hand in hand with the green-digital transition

WORKING GROUP 2

Foresights for migration in the Euro-Mediterranean and its neighbour regions: implications of the green and digital transition

Moderators

Alia Fakhry

Associate Researcher,
German Council on Foreign Relations

Žilvinas Švedkauskas

PhD candidate, University of Tübingen

Discussant

Federica Zardo

Assistant Professor, University of Vienna

Since 2020, pandemic-related border closures have severely impacted migration across the Mediterranean. Regular migration routes were suddenly shut for many seasonal workers, student mobility was brought to a halt, and economic difficulties renewed migratory pressure on the Southern shore of the Mediterranean with a spike in arrivals to Spain and Italy. The situation calls for policymakers to urgently rethink the ways mobility within and across the region is organised. Participants to this working group discussed new avenues for migration policy in the context of the twin transition – green and digital transitions – in the EU and its Southern Neighbourhood.

First, participants agreed that the twin transition has the potential to boost migration partnerships and create new avenues for cooperation on migration in the Mediterranean. Labour migration schemes, such as the EU Talent Partnerships (TPs), are one example. Considering labour needs in the green and digital sectors in the EU as well as in the Southern Mediterranean, TPs could provide opportunities to train students, upskill workers, and better equip job markets for the twin transition. Similar schemes

could be developed between Northern African and sub-Saharan countries with the support of the EU and its member states. Such triangular schemes could be of interest to Morocco, eager to capitalise on its progress on migration policy, and revive the stalled EU-Morocco Mobility Partnership.

Second, presentations analysed the impacts of climate policies on migration and displacement. Green investments are essential to support the transition in the Southern Mediterranean. Policymakers, private actors, and donors need however to carefully consider the repercussions these investments can have on local communities (such as renewable power plants forcing population displacement). Local actors need to join this conversation: the Islamic Development Bank for example could be considered as a relay for green investments and collaborate with cities to bridge the gaps in migration governance and lower the risks for local communities. States on their end need to mainstream climate-induced displacement in their migration and asylum policies and create categories of protection for people who may otherwise be considered irregular migrants.



Third, participants discussed new tools and innovations emerging from the twin transition. Open data technologies and citizen science offer ways for civil society organisations, citizens, and migrants to monitor and report risks and abuses along migration routes, building on successful experiments (such as the platform Mosquito Alert). New technologies that allow for a smarter use of natural resources could also be introduced in the design of eco-camps. As temporary housing solutions for refugees often turn into long-lasting habitats and merge with the rest of the urban fabric, it is paramount to identify ways to improve living conditions while rationalising the use of natural resources.

Fourth, participants reviewed the potential of private data for migration management. States could rely on artificial intelligence and big data to advance migration and integration policies, refine migrant selection (as part of labour migration scheme for instance) and predict their integration outcomes. But ethical concerns abound, algorithms have proved to produce skewed data on immigrants, the role of private operators in this context remains largely unregulated, and

the use of migrants' private data can lead to rights infringements. Humanitarian actors face similar challenges when it comes to the collection and processing of private and sensitive data from vulnerable groups such as refugees and children. Participants mentioned several safeguards including increasing digital access and literacy, transparency on the use of the data collected, and ensuring participants' informed consent.

Lastly, participants discussed ways state and non-state actors could rely on digital technologies to regulate, organise, or force regional migration flows. As data collection and data exchange on migration in the Mediterranean increases, so do the risks for the EU and migrants themselves of misuses by (authoritarian) states and non-state actors. At the same time, EU border management tends to rely on securitised and increasingly digital approaches. In the long run, this trend is likely to increase uncertainty with regards to the role of non-state actors in migration flows (such as migrant smuggling). EU policymakers need to carefully weigh the trade-offs of digital migration management for themselves and their Mediterranean partners.

Participants discussed ways state and non-state actors could rely on digital technologies to regulate, organise, or force regional migration flows

WORKING GROUP 3

A closer look at the complex link between green and digital transition and security in the Euro-Mediterranean and its neighbouring regions

Moderator

Zied Bousen

Research Fellow, Arab Reform Initiative

Discussant

Katarzyna Sidlo

Director of the Middle East and North Africa

Department, Center for Social and Economic Research (CASE)

These times need researchers, especially young researchers with innovative views, to help understand new dynamics and trends and open the path for adequate solutions

At least since 2011, the Euro-Mediterranean and other neighbouring regions have gone through tremendous political, socio-economic, cultural, technological, and environmental changes. The impact of the last decade was critically amplified in 2020 by the COVID-19 crisis. All participants of the working group agreed through their papers and through the discussions around them, that, more than ever, these times need researchers, especially young researchers with innovative views, to help understand new dynamics and trends and open the path for adequate solutions.

The working group session was split in four sub-sessions, with two of them tackling the digital transition and security nexus and two more tackling the green transition and security nexus. The very first sub-session allowed for a study of the best ways to advance holistic cyber resilience strategies in the region. Three concept notes detailed the importance for Southern Mediterranean states to fasten the pace of

cyber resilience and to better protect digital interests and strategic facilities. Some examples of strategies from Morocco and Egypt were analysed and the role the EU could play in supporting these initiatives as well as in improving its own strategies was studied. The urge was expressed repeatedly for a North-South holistic cooperation to combat cyber threats and several bilateral initiatives and multilateral platforms were identified as capable of serving such a purpose.

The second sub-session followed with an in-depth examination of the risks and opportunities lying behind digital transition. Examples from the Balkans and the Sahel regions were examined to point-out the risks for digital means, tools, channels of communication and overall technologies to feed extremism, conspiracy theories, fake news, and transnational criminality (terrorism, money laundering, illegal trafficking, etc.). The discussion continued focusing on the complexity of combatting such diverse panoply of threats and risks, in particular times of autarchy during the COVID-19 pandemic and considering the low level of investment (both financial and political) several states of the region put in both digital transition and in designing suitable policies to tackle its inherent threats.

The following sub-sessions tackled the nexus between green transition and security in the region. The third sub-session addressed the environmental dimension of security threats. Researchers highlighted the importance of saving biodiversity as the Mediterranean is already one of the regions of the world most affected by climate change effects, which are worsening over time. The role of renewable energies was also discussed as a means



to lower tensions related to the exploitation of oil and gas in the region. Finally, the level of awareness and preparedness of decision makers was also discussed, with Tunisia as a case study.

The last sub-session took a closer look at the Euro-Mediterranean green transition cooperation. Both bilateral and multilateral platforms of dialogue and cooperation were analysed in order to assess the opportunities available for the region to develop a comprehensive green transition. The role of the EU and its Green Deal were discussed and further focus was put on how the latter could impact the southern and eastern

neighbourhood. The group also discussed the role of NGOs and INGOs in fostering transnational cooperation.

After each sub-session presentations, Ms Katarzyna Sidlo, acting as expert in political economy and highly experienced researcher in these topics and on the region, formulated valuable comments to participants in order to help them improve their research methodologies, collect additional data and information, and better encircle the issues related to each topic. A special focus was put by Ms Sidlo on supporting young researchers in formulating the most relevant recommendations for decision makers of the region.

Practitioners' Perspective

Moderators

Zied Boussen

Research Fellow, Arab Reform Initiative

Žilvinas Švedkauskas

PhD candidate, University of Tübingen

Speakers

Amel Saidane

President of Tunisian Startups,
Co-Founder of Betacube

Carmen Casteras

Intellectual Property and Tech Transfer
Officer, Fusion for Energy

Enrique Doblas Miranda

Research Coordinator, Center for
Ecological Research and Forestry
Applications (CREAF)

Mercè Boy Roura

EU Project Manager, BETA
Technological Centre

Governments should be the driving force of the digital transition and invest in digital infrastructure just as they invest in roads

This panel brought young researchers together with experts who work in the areas of green and digital transition. It encouraged participants to reflect on how knowledge transfer between social and natural sciences, on the one hand, and academic and business communities, on the other, could accelerate the realisation of the goals set out in the New Agenda for the Mediterranean. By providing practical examples, panellists encouraged young researchers to actively seek out intersectoral cooperation opportunities, which would boost greener and more inclusive development across the Mediterranean.

The first panellist, Ms. Saidane gave a broad overview of her main areas of work: representing the Tunisian innovation ecosystem, steering the Digital Arabia Network, and developing a start-up aimed at digitalising small and medium size enterprises (SMEs). Turning to the southern Mediterranean, she discussed how fast-paced business and technological changes can be accommodated in the region and illustrated her ideas with examples of lights-out factories and tech corporations like Amazon entering North African digital markets.

Ms. Saidane insisted that though the deployment of digital solutions is commonly viewed as an end-goal by regional governments, it should rather be seen as a means for addressing pressing socio-economic challenges. This is also at the heart of Betacube, a tech venture builder that invests, builds, and grows B2B-based startups in fintech and mobility.

In an open discussion with young researchers, Ms. Saidane was asked to elaborate on the disruptive potential of new technologies in south-south co-

operation, focusing on pan-African start-ups targeting both North and Sub-Saharan African markets. The speaker expressed cautious optimism. From her point of view, despite the buzz and recent growth of the African start-up scene, many bottlenecks remain: the continent is still very much fragmented in terms of innovation regulation, entry barriers are still higher than elsewhere because of the high cost of intra-continental travel and cross-border payments. Summarising her thoughts, Ms. Saidane reiterated that governments should be the driving force of the digital transition and invest in digital infrastructure just as they invest in roads.

The second panellist, Mr. Doblás Miranda presented the first Mediterranean Assessment Report prepared by the independent network of Mediterranean Experts on Climate and environmental Change (MedECC), founded in 2015. The report discusses various consequences of climate change in the Mediterranean, including rising sea levels, higher risks of fires and natural disasters, lack of rain and floods resulting from intense and concentrated rains. In his intervention, Mr. Doblás stressed that it is crucial to look beyond the averages while assessing the impact of climate change in the region. According to the MedECC report, an average rise of the temperature of 2 degrees by 2050 can mean a rise of 5 degrees in the summer period in some specific places, which unavoidably will lead to dramatic environmental, social, and economic consequences.

While exchanging with young researchers, the speaker called for re-assessing individual behaviours and consumption habits, arguing that individual choices can make a difference in combatting climate change. However, he



Individual level initiatives need to be complemented by large scale national and international projects aimed at creating green infrastructure, for example, deploying public transport systems running on clean energy

also highlighted that individual level initiatives need to be complemented by large scale national and international projects aimed at creating green infrastructure, for example, deploying public transport systems running on clean energy. Building on his personal advocacy experience, Mr. Doblás encouraged all participants to reach out to their political counterparts at local, national, and regional level and stressed that they are more interested in hearing from researchers than it is commonly assumed.

The third panellist, Ms. Carmen Castera introduced the role of Fusion for Energy, the European Agency involved in the ITER project, bringing under its partnership umbrella half of the world's population. She focused in particular on the business (and employment) potential of this new source of energy under development, while highlighting its green nature. She also stressed that this project could potentially reduce geopolitical tensions related to energy. She explained the three main objec-

tives of her work, i.e., creating high-skilled jobs, broadening the industrial base for future the fusion market, and fostering innovation and competitiveness in key emerging technologies. The match between the technological offer and the market is done through a team of brokers that Fusion for Energy works with across Europe. Fusion for Energy also offers funding opportunities for companies developing the new components needed in the framework of the ITER project. Referring to how this new technology would be used; it was explained that the responsibility of the project was to acquire technology in order to build the machines but that they do not determine how these machines would be used.

The last panellist, Mr. Mercè Boy Roura presented the Interreg Med Green Growth, a network of 17 projects with the objective to promote sustainable development by enhancing cross sectoral innovation and to mainstream circular economy into strategies and policies. The example of a specific project

was given. PEFMED is about supporting agri-food companies in transitioning to sustainable productive models. It involves over 200 companies in 9 Mediterranean regions and should lead to decreasing the environmental footprint of specific food products (such as olive oil or water bottles for instance).

The importance of the transfer of knowledge from research to policy was stressed. In this regard, the fact that Med Green Growth is labelled as a UfM project and its representation in the Circular Economy stakeholders forum are assets. Ms. Boy Roura also men-

tioned a new policy framework called the 2030 Greener Med Agenda, which should become the reference towards which all initiatives converge.

The discussion focused on three main issues. Firstly, the need to articulate specific interests and constraints of UfM member states with global needs. Secondly, the proliferation of projects related to the green transition with the risks of overlap if donor coordination is not handled properly. Finally, the need to relate all initiatives and projects to existing policy frameworks (e.g., the circular economy action plan of the EU for instance).

Policy Talks

Moderator

Ambassador Senén Florensa

Executive President, European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed)

Speakers

Aawatif Hayar

Minister of Solidarity, Social Integration and Family, Kingdom of Morocco

Marc Sánchez

Deputy Head of Cabinet at the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM)

Michael Donaldson, Commissioner for Digital Innovation, eGovernance and Good Governance, Barcelona City Council

Ilias Iakovidis

Adviser for Digital Aspects of Green Transformation, Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology, European Commission

Mohammed Khalil

Associate Professor, AI and Digital Transformation, Hassan II University, Casablanca

Ambassador Florensa presented the IEMed and the project "EuroMeSCo: Connecting the Dots", enhancing its goal to provide high-quality research for policy making purposes in a spirit of advocacy related to the values of the Barcelona Process and the UfM. He stressed the importance to include young researchers in this endeavour.

Minister Hayar gave a special opening address, in which she praised the initiative of the Forum and stressed the need for innovative ideas to ensure a sustainable future. She also praised the choice of the thematic focus of the forum on the twin transition, as she believes that digitalisation is critical for the development of the region and that the green transition is a key issue facing this and future generations. In addition to that, she recalled the importance of inclusiveness to guarantee equity among all. With regards to Morocco, she recalled that with the support of King Mohammed VI, the country is currently working on an ambitious energy transition aiming to reach 52% of clean renewable energy in its energy mix by 2030. The 35% threshold has already been reached. She also highlighted the efforts of Morocco with regards to digitalisation in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially with the swift implementation of distance learning solutions and the launch of efficient digital platforms for universities as well as platform for soft skills development. Going back to the idea of inclusiveness, she stressed the importance to make these digital tools accessible and affordable, an issue which her Ministry is addressing.

Building up on the Minister's address, Professor Khalil said that digital technologies were critical in ensuring the continuity of education and training. Although, he stressed that technology

itself is not the end of the story, it is one of many components to be considered to make the digital transformation a success. He highlighted the need for a clear strategy with basic values and goals that can be evaluated over time. He also added that digital infrastructure is key, and so is training and skills upgrade in alignment to the transition.

The representatives of the Young Researchers Lab, who moderated each of the three abovementioned working group sessions, presented the conclusions of the discussions triggered by the working groups among young researchers. They mentioned the overlaps and cross-cutting issues among the topics of migration, security, and economic development in a context of the twin green and digital transition. Some clear opportunities of the transition and the related EU programming were identified. Among them, the opportunity to revive the partnership and to bring in new actors, be it for south-south, intra-EU and north-south dialogue. Also, the transition would enable to fill the gaps of development in the region. On the other hand, several risks were highlighted by the young researchers, who warned about the need to make initiatives concrete so that they do not remain mere buzzwords. They stressed the need to have an ex-ante perspective before launching any initiative in the region and the role of young researchers in producing more grounded knowledge in that direction. It was then mentioned that no one-size-fits-all approach can ensure the alignment of the transition with the sustainable social and economic goals given the disparities of many countries in the region in terms of resource endowment, social and economic structures, and skills.

The young researchers stressed the need to have an ex-ante perspective before launching any initiative in the region and their role in producing more grounded knowledge



In his intervention, Mr. Sanchez bridged the conclusions of the Young Researchers Forum with the focus areas of UfM, an organisation with 42 member states and a mandate to work towards the SDGs and foster peace and security in the region through soft policy areas, dealing mainly with politically non-sensitive issues which tackle root causes of instability. He joined the call of the participants to reinvigorate Mediterranean cooperation with previously untapped south-south and south-north partnerships, especially engaging with countries of the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Mr. Sanchez expressed personal optimism because of a shift in the European Commission's rhetoric, especially the growing interest in questions of the Southern Neighbourhood by Commissioners from CEE countries. Migration management is taking centre stage at the moment, but from the point of view of Mr. Sanchez, the momentum can be seized for streamlining the goals of the New Agenda for the Mediterranean, as well.

The UfM representative also stressed that the new Agenda fosters a regional approach rather than promoting bilateral cooperation in specifically defined sectors. Therefore, much more can be done in the fields of gender equality, rule of law, digitalisation, and green transition. According to Mr. Sanchez, to reach progress in all these areas, not only more research is needed but also pooling of political will is crucial. For the latter purpose, in 2021 the UfM is contributing through meetings involving Ministers of Foreign Affairs. The panellist also expressed excitement about the planned participation of ministers from CEE countries.

Summing up his points, Mr. Sanchez reiterated the goals of the Barcelona Declaration, which aim to create a peaceful and stable region through socio-economic development. In his view, the empowerment of women and youth, increased digital connectivity and shift to cleaner energy and economy - all part of the new Agenda - contribute to and revitalise the same policy trajectory set forth by the Barcelona process 25 years ago.

Digitalisation has a footprint, one of the main challenges is making it green and clean

During his intervention, Mr. Iakovidis stressed the need to really consider the green and digital transitions together and to focus on their synergies and interactions. He said that digitalisation has a footprint, one of the main challenges is making it green and clean. The other challenge is to use digital to help other sectors reach their sustainability goals. Therefore, he emphasised the need to not pursue digitalisation as an end, and to consider it in interaction with sustainable goals, as not all digitalisation models contribute positively. In a nutshell, he advanced the idea that digital needs "sustainability by design".

Finally, Mr. Donaldson took the floor and represented Barcelona City Council. Cities are key actors, endowed with competencies in the field of inclusive and sustainable development. Mr. Donaldson's portfolio mainly covers digitalisation and its interaction with governance, he drew attention to the various initiatives put in place by the city of Barcelona which aim to enhance the access and digital literacy of youths and other targeted segments of the population. Since many public services now operate via digital channels, digital literacy and access are a matter of inclusiveness toward which the city is committed to act.

eur@mesco

IV Euromed Young Researchers Forum

IEMed.
European Institute of the Mediterranean



Co-funded by
the European Union

This publication has been produced with the assistance of the European Union. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the authors and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union or the European Institute of the Mediterranean.