

**EURO-MEDITERRANEAN TRANSPORT MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE (14/11/2013)**

**OPENING SESSION**

**SPEECH BY VP S. KALLAS**

Ministers, ladies and gentlemen

It is a pleasure to see you all here today. Eight years work was launched in Marrakech to become better connected and integrated through transport.

A reason why today's conference is important: it is the first sectorial conference of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) - renewing the political impulse for the Barcelona Process that began in 1995.

We have come a long way since Marrakech and the dynamic regional cooperation has led to tangible results using our Regional Action Plan. But there is still some way to go to achieve our common objective of bringing the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean closer together.

As you know, our Mediterranean Union has two co-Presidencies, Jordan for the south and the European Union for the north.

I would firstly like to thank Jordan's co-Presidency for the solid work it has done to help us prepare this event – and of course, the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean for their valuable input.

But it is all of you whom I thank for the dedicated work you have put in since Marrakech, particularly within the Euro-Mediterranean Transport Forum.

In the European Union, we are now beginning a new era of transport policy. We can finally start to build the connections that are missing in the EU's transport network – joining North and South and all corners of our 28 Member States.

The European Union and its Mediterranean neighbours have a mutual interest: to build actual connections between two transport networks, the Trans-European and the future Trans-Mediterranean.

Regional cooperation on transport brings development and stability. It leads to an increase in trade, which in turn leads to economic and social benefits for all.

I believe it is essential for the entire Mediterranean region to connect these two transport networks. If we are to demonstrate our common commitment to this principle, then it is one that should receive political endorsement from this Ministerial Conference.

Our next conference in 2016 would then be a good chance to give political validation to a mutually agreed indicative map of the Trans-Mediterranean Transport Network and the list of priority projects located in this network, which will connect the Mediterranean partners with each other and with the EU. And here, maritime and air connections are particularly important.

We will also have to look at the issue of how to fund this network.

The EU will continue to offer its support through its various funding instruments and through the European Investment Bank, without forgetting the role of other European and international financial institutions. However, it is of crucial importance to focus and coordinate all the tools available and to diversify the methods of funding. This crucial issue will be discussed in the afternoon session.

It is crucial to reduce significant differences in our regulatory environments. By that, I point to laws that have an impact on safety and security, simplification and modernisation of procedures, reduction of operation times, ratification of international conventions. The evaluation report we have in front of us is evidence of the results that have been achieved by the Mediterranean Partners eight years after the Marrakech Conference. It shows their continuous commitment to make their transport policies work so that regional integration becomes a reality.

The EU has signed aviation agreements with several Mediterranean Partners – and we are ready to do the same with others. These agreements will progressively build a Common Aviation Area between the EU and its southern neighbours by opening up air services markets and ensuring that same standards apply.

Existing and future Mediterranean Motorways of the Sea shows the importance of operational maritime connections between the two shores of the Mediterranean.

Ports, as strategic trade gateways – the start and end points of the supply chain – play an essential role in providing seamless transport operations. The operations of ports need to be made as smooth as possible.

Further work is needed to establish an integrated multimodal transport network in the Mediterranean.

This is where we could draw more on the expertise of European transport agencies as regards regulatory matters, as well as build closer ties between the Mediterranean Partners and EUROCONTROL in view of contributing to establish the Euro-Mediterranean Common Aviation Area.

In view of the work and the challenges ahead of us, I am sure that today's meeting will give Ministers the opportunity to exchange about problems and challenges they face in carrying out regulatory reforms and implementing relevant infrastructure projects.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me finish by stressing what I consider perhaps to be the most important deliverable of the Euro-Med partnership during our years of working together. It is the continuing dialogue and cooperation between all the Mediterranean Partners - North-South as well as South-South. This dialogue allows us to share expertise and best practices.

It is by identifying common solutions to common problems that we can maintain and reinforce the achievements of our regional transport cooperation.

Given the Mediterranean region's political development and evolution, this cooperation can be considered as one of Europe's most relevant responses and supports.

After all, transport is one of the essential factors for contributing to the development of our economies and our societies.

Thank you for your attention.