27th Meeting of the Union for the Mediterranean Regional Platform in Research and Innovation

7th of July 2021 from 09h00 to 12h15 (CEST)

Introductory remarks

Dr Dia Eddin-Arafah, Secretary-General of Jordan’s Higher Council for S&T and co-chair of the UfM Regional Platform in R&I (hereafter referred to as “the Platform”), opened the meeting by emphasising that the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue in R&I is important for promoting sustainable development and entrepreneurship in the region and that achievements of the Platform in this past year of intensive work are remarkable.

His Excellency, Mr Nasser Kamel, Secretary-General of the UfM, stressed that Research and Innovation are one of the beacons of Euro-Mediterranean collaboration in the context of the UfM. R&I are central to the Mediterranean region and are one of the top political priorities. He also commended the many efforts in creating a new agenda for regional R&I cooperation in the Mediterranean. The UfM Secretariat promises to redouble efforts in relations with the UfM Member States in the specific field of R&I.

Ms Maria Cristina Russo, Director for the Global Approach to R&I in DG RTD, mentioned that the Commission adopted Europe’s new Global Approach to cooperation in Research and Innovation on the 18th of May 2021. This is a new and updated strategy for collaboration in R&I on a global level, proposing a more targeted approach to international scientific cooperation and keeping the spirit of openness. Cooperation with countries of the Southern Mediterranean has a particular place in the Global Approach, in the context of the EU renewed partnership with the South Mediterranean

Joint presentation on state-of-play and results of PRIMA by the Co-Chairs, Prof Angelo Riccaboni and Prof Mohamed El-Shinawi

- The presentation highlighted that PRIMA is governed and managed on principles of equal footing. PRIMA’s strategy is coherent with the priorities of the green deal, the farm-to-fork strategy, and the European Commission’s global approach to R&I. PRIMA has a half a billion euros budget over seven years, implemented across all 19 participating states, so far it funded 129 projects with over 1000 beneficiaries (164 million euros).
- Additionally, PRIMA has facilitated capacity-building activities to improve the quality of research proposals. It is also contributing to align R&I national systems, to harmonise legislation related to R&I systems. Italy, Spain, Egypt introduced changes in their national legislation to facilitate cooperation. Finally, PRIMA fully supports the new R&I Roadmaps/Theories of Change & Impact Pathways (TCIPs) developed by the UfM’s Regional Platform in R&I. PRIMA contributed to the consultation and stands ready to collaborate with the UfM.

After the presentation, Ms Maria Cristina Russo presented three questions for discussion:
Question 1 - How do you think that the PRIMA initiative has contributed to the strengthening of R&I collaboration in the Mediterranean region as set in the PRIMA act?

Question 2 - What does your country perceive to be successful contributions of PRIMA in terms of policy alignment of national R&I systems and regional cooperation since its inception?

Question 3 - Which of these were the factors that finally determined your countries’ decision to participate, or not, in PRIMA?

All countries acknowledged the role of PRIMA as an R&I platform in the region allowing both coordination and collaboration on common interests. A summary of responses provided by participating countries is presented below.

- **LEBANON.** PRIMA is an operational tool and platform and Lebanon encourages to further explore, enhance and build on its experience, the instrument, the platform and its network. Lebanon has high expectations for PRIMA and believes that the collaboration with the UfM is a great opportunity that we should build on.

- **FRANCE.** PRIMA’s addresses the region’s key challenges with an integrated approach: water resources, agriculture, food systems, and the nexus water-energy-food ecosystems. Building on PRIMA would allow us to harmonise our national R&I policies. Therefore, France sees PRIMA as a relevant instrument for the implementation of at least part of the roadmaps. Enlarging PRIMA’s scope to all of the topics covered by the roadmaps is a realistic opportunity, which France supports as well.

- **PORTUGAL.** PRIMA is a very important multi-stakeholder instrument to strengthen real integration of the Mediterranean area, the cooperation of countries in the region and for policy alignment. The future assessment of PRIMA projects’ impact will be key for further decisions.

- **MOROCCO.** PRIMA is an important tool for the coordination of researchers in the North and South shores of the Mediterranean, but calls are needed in the area of health.

- **ITALY.** PRIMA is the first Mediterranean and regional programme of equal footing and contributes so far to addressing the interlinkages among key priority areas. More financial leverage could be explored in the context of PRIMA. Italy is positive with the achievements of PRIMA, and supports its maintenance.

- **TURKEY.** There is a strong interest of Turkish researchers in Sections PRIMA. PRIMA has also strengthened Turkey’s collaboration with other countries and R&I regional platforms and therefore supports the maintenance of the Programme.

- **MALTA.** PRIMA has successfully brought on board the Mediterranean countries to collaborate on principles of equal footing, co-ownership and mutual benefit and it implements activities contributing to capacity building in R&I. Malta has and will continue to consider PRIMA as an important tool in consolidating R&I efforts in the region and addressing overarching challenges such as climate change, sustainability and circular economy.

- **ALGERIA.** For Algeria, PRIMA is one of the most important R&I cooperation programmes that has enabled the country to position itself on several research topics. Algeria defined its national research programme for the period 2017-2025 in alignment with the priorities of PRIMA and the UfM on food security, energy security and health.

- **SPAIN.** PRIMA is promising its potential to support transdisciplinary R&I and integrate different stakeholders from both shores of the Mediterranean. Spain would support reinforcement of
PRIMA to be a landmark for R&I in the area and a reference in the key issues of climate change, renewable energies and health.

- **ISRAEL.** PRIMA is an important platform and started a process including key principles such as equal footing and has the ability to have a significant impact in the region. Results should be fully evaluated after a longer time. The vertical and horizontal expansion of PRIMA is needed. These processes require time to have full impacts and should not be disrupted after these first few years. Israel will expand its support to PRIMA.

- **GERMANY.** PRIMA is a key instrument to support R&I collaboration in the Mediterranean by providing a common funding platform. Germany is satisfied with the results of PRIMA so far and it should be at the core of the implementation of the UfM Roadmaps/TCIPs. Nevertheless, PRIMA is still a young funding platform and can be developed further.

- **JORDAN.** PRIMA is building mutual trust and networking to create the much-needed enabling environment for R&I cooperation in the Mediterranean. PRIMA supported a coordinating framework of funding agencies strongly interacting and sharing best practices to streamline national processes and procedures.

**Presentation on the overview of the roadmaps/TCIPs and horizontal crisis management approach on future priorities**

Mr Mahmoud Abu Hussein and Ms Nienke Buisman presented and overview of the Roadmaps / Theories of Change & Impact Pathways pertaining to the adopted R&I priorities in the region, namely renewable energy, health and climate change. The Roadmaps create a common reference framework or agendas for future R&I efforts and collaboration to tackle common challenges, while adopting a holistic crisis management approach. A comprehensive consultation was performed through: two workshops gathering a total of 120 participants, and over 106 contributions received through an online survey. The Roadmaps/TCIPS were adjusted based on the feedback received during the public consultation.

**Presentation of the concept note on implementation modalities and next steps**

Ms Armela Dino then presented the concept note for the implementation of the UfM Priorities and Roadmaps. The basic structure follows first, an analysis of lessons learnt from PRIMA in implementation of SRIA, then an overview of key existing implementation modalities (e.g. programmes and instruments). A preliminary timeline is also presented from the adoption of the Roadmaps/TCIPs towards the final milestone of the development of a full-fledged implementation plan in view of the Ministerial meeting to be scheduled in 2022.

After the presentations, Dr Arafah Dia-Eddin opened a discussion around the following questions:

**Question 1** - Do you agree with the implementation modalities in the proposal for implementing the UfM Roadmaps and are there any other which need to be flagged up?

**Question 2** - How would you define success and what combination of the proposed modalities, programs, and instruments would in your view be needed to achieve this success in the short term (2-4 years) and long term (6-10 years)?
Question 3 - Is there a need for creating coordination and collaboration platforms, for example, a funders’ alliance (e.g. for data sharing)?

Question 4 - Do you agree to mandate the Bureau of the UfM Regional Platform for R&I to develop, based on the concept note, a more elaborated implementation plan for 2022?

All participants acknowledged the roadmaps/TCIPs, and expressed willingness to move ahead to the implementation phase and further developing the implementation plan while accounting for defining short-term and long-term impacts. Also, some countries highlighted the importance of ensuring accounting for cross-cutting issues such as open science and mobility. Interventions from the floor are summarised hereafter.

- **ALGERIA** underlined the need to consider the disaster risk reduction components in the R&I agendas proposed under the Roadmaps/TCIPs (e.g. for infrastructure in the development of renewable energies). Algeria also mentioned the need to promote Artificial Intelligence in the new agenda proposed.

- **FRANCE** acknowledged that the Roadmaps/TCIPs demonstrate the efforts to have a concerted and sustainable approach in relevant priority areas. The cross-cutting topics of open science, social sciences and higher education should be the driving force for future regional R&I cooperation. France agrees to the need of an implementation plan, to be developed by the Bureau, in view of the Ministerial meeting in 2022. UfM member states should be engaged in elaborating this implementation plan. France would like to see a greater place for Mediterranean targeted calls in Horizon Europe – i.e. following the model of the Africa Initiative in the 1st WP of Horizon Europe.

- **MALTA.** The implementation plan should be in line with comments received from Senior Officials today it should aim to strengthen existing programmes and to use Horizon Europe to address the identified priority areas.

- **PORTUGAL.** Portugal fully agreed with the concept note and good guidelines for implementation. Portugal agrees on the implementation modalities for the UfM, the interaction between the political forum through ministerial meetings and regional platforms is a framework, which should be further developed and implemented. To be successful, the process of knowledge dissemination and exchange is important, especially in the domains of earth observation both for land and seas, biodiversity and monitoring of climate change, air and water quality. We need to separate short term and long-term objectives. The impact should be on knowledge transfer and economic and societal development. Open science was stated and is very important. Citizen Science is important. It is also important to think about scientific careers in public and private organisations to stimulate the engagement of scientists in these processes.

- **MOROCCO** acknowledged the good work done by the experts on the Roadmaps/TCIPs and underlined that the main question now is how to involve better the Mediterranean partner countries in the implementation plan, the future calls that would potentially result from the Roadmaps/TCIPs and the new agenda in R&I under the UfM. Morocco made two suggestions. First to involve the southern Mediterranean partner countries in the COST programme. Second to include researchers from the South in programmes that are only open to researchers from the EU.

- **ITALY** An implementation plan needs to consider the synergies and coordination between programmes and instruments, monitoring and evaluation, and learning on policies, programmes and instruments. It is important to monitor impact of programmes and boost learning component for regional programmes such as PRIMA. The leverage of funding is needed in view of the new
priorities and Roadmaps/TCIPs. The long-term objectives are the impact on society. In the short term we can consider what already exists and use instruments such as PRIMA for launching integrated calls covering the priority areas of the identified R&I agenda. Italy suggested differentiating instruments from the European Commission that exist, that are open to Southern partners’ participation, and programmes that are coming in the future.

- **ISRAEL** agreed with and supported the development of a implementation plan. Israel underscored the need to focus on reinforcing existing programmes and not creating new ones. For this, a secured mechanism to affect the work programmes is needed, which already exists in PRIMA, where countries can vote and scientific committee is active. However, COST is a bottom-up process so how can we encourage COST actions in the topics that we want to invest in? Also, in Horizon Europe, the impact of the roadmaps/TCIPs on the work programme.

- **SPAIN** suggests strengthening the existing instruments, to see more implication in the implementation plan of the Horizon Europe calls and the other European programmes that are in place. The implementation group will work towards bringing more details to the concept note. PRIMA has a strong opportunity/potential to strengthen R&I collaboration in these fields in the future. There are also opportunities to work with programmes such as COST programme, Marie Curie and Erasmus Plus programmes to foster mobility with the ending goal of creating foreseeable research careers for researchers in the region.

**Intervention by Mr John Bell, Director for Healthy Planet – DG RTD**

Mr Bell mentioned that the Mediterranean is a strategic R&I partner of Europe’ s transition towards a sustainable green and economically fair future. The current challenges require shared global solutions based on multilateral and open cooperation. Principles of reciprocity and equal footing, as emphasised in the new global approach for R&I, should guide deliberations and initiatives of the UfM Platform, and of course, this should be done in alignment with delivering SDGs. The elaborated roadmaps/TCIPs are an excellent example of multilateral R&I collaboration. They are well placed to deliver effective, sustainable development for the region and deliver a significant socio-economic impact whilst fostering cooperation between relevant initiatives and stakeholders of both shores of the Mediterranean. To put these desired impacts into practice, we need an effective implementation plan.

Today PRIMA is recognised as a real player in the region, performing well and ready to lend its considerable expertise in support to the UfM Roadmaps/TCIPs. Thus, PRIMA could be explored in terms of supporting the implementation of these Roadmaps/TCIPs.

**Wrap-up & Conclusions**

- Senior Officials of the UfM Regional Platform in R&I agreed on adopting the Roadmaps/TCIPs and mandating the Bureau of further developing the implementation plan.
- Senior officials agreed with the proposal of the co-chairs to look into organising a Ministerial meeting to be held in 2022.