



## **EURO-MEDITERRANEAN REGIONAL AND LOCAL ASSEMBLY**

### **Recommendations for 2020**

*Adopted at the 11th ARLEM plenary session in Barcelona, Spain, on 23 January 2020*

2020 marks the beginning of a new European Union cycle, after the elections for the European Parliament in May 2019 and the entry into office of the new European Commission, European Council President and High Representative. By February 2020, both the European Committee of the Regions and ARLEM will start a new mandate. The relations between the three shores of the Mediterranean will be an essential dimension and the spotlight will be cast on them in the context of the celebrations for the 25th anniversary of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership launched in Barcelona in 1995, which has borne less fruit than was promised: building a common area of peace and stability, constructing a zone of shared prosperity and promoting a real social, cultural and human partnership.

Political and economic stabilisation in the Mediterranean region remains a key priority for the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), the European Union and the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM). To achieve it, a strong and united European Union is critical, in particular in a period of global unpredictability and unilateralism. Priorities like climate action, the fight against social inequalities and the empowerment of youth and women will become more central, while key political challenges like ensuring effective democratic governance, developing the rule of law and respecting human rights remain essential.

In the context of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals, the active commitment, concrete contributions and solidarity of regions and cities are needed to end poverty, protect the planet from degradation, ensure prosperous and fulfilling lives and foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies.

Bringing together local and regional authorities (LRAs) from the three shores of the Mediterranean in a joint assembly, ARLEM's role is to promote a multilevel approach in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the territorialisation of the Euro-Mediterranean sectoral policies, bringing them closer to the people, and providing support for decentralisation and its link with territorial development.

Representing the territorial dimension of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), the secretariat of which will celebrate, just like ARLEM, its 10th anniversary in 2020, ARLEM can support the cooperation between the EU and its southern neighbouring partners on a local and regional level.

## **ARLEM RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2020**

### Sustainable economic development

1. The digital revolution has transformed society with unprecedented speed and scale. The rapid spread of digital technologies is transforming many economic and social activities. The expansion of the digital economy creates many new economic opportunities, but positive outcomes are far from being automatic.
2. ARLEM calls on all levels of government of the Mediterranean to promote the digitalisation of their societies, and, in particular, to design support schemes for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in order to allow them to become competitive in the global e-commerce arena. This support should start for some basic IT skills, website management and logistics. The exchange of experience with other Local and Regional Authorities of the region with similar schemes should be sought.
3. ARLEM calls on the Mediterranean region's central governments to involve local authorities more in development of business friendly strategies and to develop smart specialisation strategies to help create synergies in key areas for local and regional development.
4. ARLEM calls for the creation of an EU initiative to facilitate growth and job creation by improving the local business environment, stimulating entrepreneurship and attracting investment for sustainable economic development in the South Neighbourhood, like the one existing for the Eastern Partnership (Mayors for Economic Growth).
5. ARLEM welcomes the recently launched Med4Jobs initiative which has proved, through the support of 13 different projects, to be an effective instrument in the improvement of Mediterranean citizens' socio-economic perspectives.
6. ARLEM calls on intergovernmental organisations, in particular the EU, the UfM and the UN, to recognise youth entrepreneurship as a key factor in economic development in the Mediterranean region. In this field, ARLEM will continue the cooperation with the European Commission and the UfM.
7. As a concrete contribution, with the *ARLEM Award: Young local entrepreneurship in the Mediterranean*, the assembly contributes to showcasing successful examples of young entrepreneurship in the Mediterranean region as an inspiration to others. It furthermore aims at demonstrating the positive impact that local and regional authorities in Mediterranean partner countries can have on the entrepreneurial ecosystem and highlighting how young entrepreneurs in Mediterranean partner countries actively take the future in their hands and create jobs for local economic development. The UfM might consider creating an entrepreneurial community

of the Mediterranean among the winning and shortlisted candidates, stemming from different sectors and levels of innovation.

8. ARLEM calls for LRAs to be involved in the formulation of the Strategy on Youth being drafted by the UfM.

#### Climate action in the Mediterranean

9. The Mediterranean region has been identified as one of the main climate change hotspots in the world due to water scarcity, desertification, concentration of economic activities and population in coastal areas, and the reliance on climate-sensitive agriculture.
10. ARLEM recommends that cities and regions in the Mediterranean region further commit to enhanced action on climate, notably through the Global Covenant of Mayors, for which ARLEM expresses its full support. ARLEM looks forward to building a strong partnership of local and regional authorities towards the 26th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 26) to the UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) in Glasgow in 2020, in order to support cities and regions' role in contributing to the UN's SDGs and with a view to enhancing its global governance to improve its inclusiveness.
11. Following the adoption of its report on *Blue economy for local authorities in the Mediterranean* (rapporteur Vincenzo Bianco, member of Catania City Council and President of the National Council of ANCI, IT/PES), ARLEM will continue to work for a smart and resilient blue economy in terms of the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods and jobs, and ocean ecosystem health.
12. ARLEM will also continue and further develop the very fruitful cooperation with the UfM secretariat and its efforts to support and facilitate regional dialogue on the blue economy, converging towards a second potential UfM ministerial meeting and declaration in 2020.
13. ARLEM calls for the full involvement of the LRAs in the implementation of the Euro-Mediterranean Water Agenda, which establishes an essential framework for the collective management of water and should make it possible to advance on the protection of the environment in this region so affected by the damaging effects of climate change.

#### Women's empowerment

14. ARLEM strives to promote women's empowerment and gender equality, in terms of rights and opportunities, as an essential asset to foster regional stability and socio-economic development. The obstacles to women's active participation in politics should be addressed and any legal and other barriers to women's political participation in election processes and representation in election results, including in leadership positions, should be eliminated in order to encourage more stable, prosperous and inclusive societies.
15. ARLEM argues that the adoption of gender responsive policies is also strictly needed to allow women's economic empowerment in the region.

16. ARLEM calls for its full involvement in regional forums addressing the topic of women's empowerment, like the 5th Women4Med Conference, to be organised in 2020 by the UfM secretariat, one of the major regional platforms for exchanging experiences on gender equality which has been pushing for the full inclusion of young women in all political, social and economic spheres.

#### Other recommendations

17. ARLEM stresses the importance of territorial development and capacity building of local authorities, with the "Nicosia Initiative" for Libyan municipalities as an example of decentralised cooperation building up partnership with a bottom-up approach, and calls on the EU institutions to support similar initiatives of cooperation between peers in all partner countries.
18. Concerning the envisaged merger of several EU external action instruments into the proposed Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) in the EU's next long-term budget period (MFF 2021-2027), ARLEM welcomes the fact that the proposed budget for the European Union's external action is to be increased (up to EUR 123 billion, compared to EUR 94.5 billion in the 2014-2020 period), which equals approximately 10% of the total MFF, and hopes that the final agreement would not reduce these allocations.
19. In this context, ARLEM underlines that a long-term perspective and predictability have to be maintained in the EU cooperation with its Mediterranean partner countries, including at the sub-national level. In particular, EU assistance to and cooperation with LRAs from Mediterranean partner countries must not suffer in financial or organisational ways as a result of increased flexibility in allocation of financial and other resources between the various geographic and thematic programmes. To ensure this, ARLEM requests that a specific programme with an adequate budget directly allocated to projects for regional and local authorities be included under the thematic pillar of the instrument.