

MED9

Croatia 2026

Leaders' Summit



JOINT DECLARATION



Split, 7 October 2026

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SPLIT DECLARATION

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We, the Heads of State and Government of Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal and Slovenia, and the State Secretary for the European Union of Spain — Prime Minister of Croatia Andrej Plenković; President of Cyprus Nikos Christodoulides; President of France Emmanuel Macron; Prime Minister of Greece Kyriakos Mitsotakis; Prime Minister of Italy Giorgia Meloni; Prime Minister of Malta Robert Abela; Prime Minister of Portugal Luís Montenegro; Prime Minister of Slovenia Janez Janša; and Spain's State Secretary for the European Union Fernando Sampedro Marcos, representing the Prime Minister of Spain, Pedro Sánchez — met on 7 October 2026 in Split, Croatia, for the **13th Summit of the Southern Countries of the European Union (MED9)**.

The Summit was also attended by the following guests: His Serene Highness Prince Albert II, Sovereign Prince of Monaco; His Royal Highness Crown Prince Al Hussein bin Abdullah II of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan; President of the European Council António Costa; President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen; and European Commissioner for the Mediterranean Dubravka Šuica.

Held under the motto “**For a safer, more sustainable and more resilient Mediterranean**”, this summit takes place in Croatia, the Mediterranean gateway to Central Europe, at a moment of heightened strategic uncertainty for the European Union and the Mediterranean. Russia's continued war of aggression against Ukraine and hostile and hybrid activities affecting EU Member States and NATO Allies pose a serious and enduring challenge to EU security and stability, with far-reaching consequences for energy and food security, economic resilience and regional stability. They have reinforced the need for vigilance, preparedness and resilience. At the same time, the wide-ranging consequences of conflict and instability in the Middle East and our neighbourhood, terrorism, increasing threats to freedom of navigation and maritime safety in the Strait of Hormuz and the Red Sea, renewed irregular migration pressures, challenges related to energy security and affordability, economic tensions and growing climate and resource strains underline the close link between the EU's security and resilience and the stability of its neighbourhood.

The Mediterranean is central to the European Union's security, resilience and prosperity. Developments across the region directly affect the EU's security and economic interests, its internal cohesion and economic resilience, and its capacity to act effectively in its wider neighbourhood and beyond.

In this environment, ensuring **a strong Mediterranean dimension** in the Union's strategic choices is essential. MED9 has a particular role to play in ensuring that the perspectives and priorities of its members are reflected in wider EU debates on resilience, security and sustainability. We will also deepen cooperation with partners and neighbours across the Mediterranean to strengthen economic ties, connectivity and security, in particular through the Union's Pact for the Mediterranean.

I. A SAFER MEDITERRANEAN

Geopolitical Security and Stability

We express profound concern over the deteriorating security environment in and around the Mediterranean, including prolonged instability and conflict in the Middle East and Africa, as well as Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

We reaffirm our commitment to the principles of **the United Nations Charter and international law**, including respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states, as well as to the rules-based international order.

We remain committed to strengthening the EU's and its Member States' capacity to deter and respond to security threats, reinforcing their **defence readiness, preparedness and resilience**, and protecting critical infrastructure against conventional, hybrid and cyber threats. In this regard, we highlight the importance of protecting critical undersea infrastructure, including submarine cables, given its vital role in Europe's security, connectivity and energy resilience.

We strongly condemn Russia's war of aggression against **Ukraine**, Russia's recent serious escalation of that war, including large-scale missile and drone attacks against civilians in Ukraine, and its increasingly aggressive and irresponsible behaviour towards EU Member States. We reaffirm our unwavering support for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders, and for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace based on the principles of the UN Charter and international law. It is vital to end human suffering, facilitate the exchange of prisoners and ensure the return of Ukrainian children who have been unlawfully deported or forcibly transferred. We will continue to support Ukraine, as well as diplomatic efforts to bring Russia's war of aggression to an end, while increasing pressure on Russia, including through additional sanctions, to engage meaningfully in efforts to achieve peace.

In the **Middle East**, the deteriorating situation in Gaza and the West Bank, renewed conflict in Yemen, continued tensions and instability across the wider region, including developments concerning Iran and Lebanon, and continuing fragility in Syria underline the risks to regional stability and their wider consequences for the European Union. The second EU–GCC Summit, to be held in Saudi Arabia on 24 October, will provide an opportunity to deepen the EU–GCC strategic partnership in the current geopolitical environment and strengthen engagement with Gulf partners on regional peace, security and prosperity. The EU should continue to work closely with Gulf partners and other partners in the region, using its diplomatic, economic, humanitarian and security instruments to support regional cooperation and peacebuilding.

Meeting on the third anniversary of the terrorist attacks by Hamas against Israel on 7 October 2023, we reiterate our condemnation of those attacks. We reaffirm the European Union's commitment to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace based on the two-state solution, in accordance with relevant UN Security Council resolutions and the New York Declaration, with **Israel and Palestine** living side by side in peace within secure and recognised borders. We underline the need for sustained diplomatic efforts, including by the United States and regional partners, to prevent further escalation and advance negotiated and lasting political solutions. We reaffirm the importance of full respect for international law, including international humanitarian law, and condemn all actions that undermine the viability of the two-state solution. We call for an immediate halt to all settlement activity in the West Bank. We stress the need for the protection of civilians, immediate and unimpeded humanitarian access, and the sustained delivery of humanitarian assistance at scale. We remain deeply concerned by the catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza and underscore the urgent need to restore the provision of essential services. We support continued EU engagement, including through EU missions and cooperation with

regional partners, to promote de-escalation, stability and reconstruction. We call for the ceasefire and UN Security Council Resolution 2803 to be fully implemented by all parties. We also underline the importance of the Palestinian legislative elections in November 2026. The timely holding of these elections, with appropriate EU support, would represent a major step forward for Palestinian citizens and institutions.

We also welcome continued diplomatic efforts towards a negotiated and lasting resolution of outstanding issues with **Iran** and underline the importance of Iran's full compliance with its nuclear safeguards obligations, de-escalation and respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states in the region. We call for respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of the Iranian people, including their right to choose their own future.

We demand the full disarmament of Hezbollah and the restoration of Lebanon's full sovereignty, with the Lebanese State exercising exclusive authority over arms throughout its territory, in accordance with relevant UN Security Council resolutions.

We recognise **maritime security** as a vital component of EU security and economic resilience. We therefore underline the importance of safeguarding freedom of navigation and safe and unimpeded passage along critical global maritime routes, in full compliance with international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Particular attention should be paid to strategic waterways, notably the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab al-Mandeb Strait, and to the protection of ports, energy corridors and other critical infrastructure. We will strengthen cooperation and maritime domain awareness to counter threats ranging from illicit trafficking and organised crime to sabotage and other hostile or illicit activities, including those associated with the shadow fleet. We also underline the importance of enhancing maritime safety, strengthening search and rescue capabilities and ensuring the resilience of maritime safety communication systems.

We reiterate our commitment to a comprehensive settlement of the **Cyprus question** within the UN framework, as defined by relevant UN Security Council resolutions, and in line with the EU acquis, values and principles. The Cyprus issue is a European one. We express appreciation for the efforts of the UN Secretary-General, including his recent visit to Cyprus, and welcome his intention to convene an enlarged meeting with all parties aimed at resuming negotiations within the agreed framework, building on the existing body of convergences. We welcome the appointment by the European Commission of Executive Vice-President Raffaele Fitto as Special Representative for Cyprus, as well as the March 2025 joint letter by the Presidents of the European Council and the European Commission to the UN Secretary-General, reiterating the EU's position and its readiness to actively support the UN-led process. Türkiye's concrete contribution to the swift resumption and successful conduct of negotiations remains crucial and is a key element in advancing EU–Türkiye relations in line with the April 2024 European Council conclusions. We also maintain that avoiding unilateral actions – including those in Varosha and along the ceasefire line – is essential to creating an environment conducive to the resumption of talks.

We underline the EU's strategic interest in ensuring a stable and secure environment in the **Eastern Mediterranean** and in developing a cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship with Türkiye in line with established conditionalities. Türkiye's constructive engagement remains important in advancing the various areas of cooperation. In this context, refraining from unilateral actions in breach of international law and respecting the sovereignty and sovereign rights of EU Member States are essential. Issues must be resolved by peaceful means and in full respect for international law, including the UNCLOS. The sovereignty and territorial integrity of all EU Member States must be upheld and their sovereign rights fully respected. De-escalation of tensions, full respect for international law and the promotion of good-neighbourly relations are essential for regional stability and cooperation in areas of common interest.

Beyond our immediate eastern and Mediterranean neighbourhoods, we reaffirm our commitment to working with African partners, including through CSDP missions and the European Peace Facility, to support them in addressing peace and security challenges across the continent and, in doing so, to move towards a renewed partnership, building on the discussions at the seventh EU–AU Summit, held in Luanda on 24–25 November 2025. We underline that Africa’s stability is key to the security of our Union.

Migration and Protection of the EU’s External Borders

Effective **protection of the EU’s external borders** is both a shared responsibility and essential to maintaining a credible and sustainable migration and asylum policy.

This summer’s events in Ceuta have underlined the need for a united, solidarity-based EU response to sudden **large-scale pressure on any of the Union’s external borders**. In this context, we recall that protecting the Union’s external borders is a shared European responsibility and that European solidarity must apply equally across all sections of those borders. We reaffirm our solidarity with Member States under pressure and underline the importance of strong preparedness, early warning, timely political, operational and financial support from the EU, and effective border management, in full compliance with EU and international law. These efforts should include measures to counter migration-related disinformation, trafficking in human beings and migrant smuggling.

We welcome the entry into application of the **Pact on Migration and Asylum** and underline the importance of its full implementation, including effective border procedures, solidarity and responsibility-sharing, as well as swifter and more effective returns, and we will consider new ways to prevent and counter irregular migration.

A sustainable approach also requires stronger strategic and comprehensive **partnerships** with countries of origin and transit to address irregular migration along the entire route through prevention, readmission and sustainable reintegration, as well as action to address the underlying drivers of irregular migration, including through training, education and employment opportunities for young people and safe and legal pathways for skills and labour mobility.

The **fight against migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings** must remain a priority for the European Union and its international partners, supported by effective cooperation among Member States, EU agencies and services, and countries of origin and transit, including the timely exchange of information.

The same determination is required to combat **maritime drug trafficking and organised crime** through stronger maritime and port security and closer cooperation with international partners. In this regard, MED9 countries note the ongoing work on the adoption of the organised crime sanctions regime.

While reiterating the importance of further strengthening the Schengen area, with a view to Cyprus’ accession, we welcome the positive outcome of the Commission’s 2025/2026 Schengen Country Report of Cyprus and the start of the relevant discussions in the Council of the European Union. We look forward to the timely completion of the remaining steps, recognising that Cyprus’ full participation will strengthen the Schengen area’s collective capacity and security.

Mediterranean Neighbourhood, Enlargement and Strategic Partnerships

We reaffirm that the stability and prosperity of the **Southern Neighbourhood** and the **Western Balkans** are directly linked to those of the European Union.

We welcome the **Pact for the Mediterranean** as an opportunity to give the EU's relationship with its southern partners greater strategic weight. The Pact aims to strengthen regional partnerships, establish a practical framework for cooperation and deliver tangible benefits for citizens on all shores. We welcome the Pact's first iteration of the Action Plan and early deliverables, and call on partners and Member States to sustain the level of ambition through its regular updating, including by identifying and incorporating new flagship projects supported by adequate funding. We are committed to further develop trade relations, based on fair and mutually beneficial conditions.

The **Union for the Mediterranean** remains a key platform for regional dialogue and cooperation, including giving regional coherence to the Pact for the Mediterranean, and should play an important role in translating this ambition into practice. The MED9 countries should actively participate in the Action Plan of the Pact. In this regard, we welcome the Union for the Mediterranean ministerial meeting on water held in Rome on 28 September, the first Euro-Mediterranean forum on water and the launch of the 'Rome Initiative on Water' as a concrete contribution to the 2026 UN Water Conference, to be held in the United Arab Emirates on 8–10 December 2026.

Strategic cooperation with partners across the Mediterranean, the wider Middle East and the Gulf is increasingly important for regional stability and for the EU's security, connectivity, energy security and economic resilience.

We reaffirm that **EU enlargement** is a geostrategic investment in peace, security and prosperity, and that the future of the Western Balkans, Ukraine and Moldova lies within the European Union. We welcome the progress in the enlargement process. We support a merit-based accession process grounded in fundamental reforms, the rule of law, good-neighbourly relations and full alignment with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy. We underline the particular importance of sustained progress by partners in the enlargement process, with headway in reforms and fulfilment of conditions matched by timely advances in accession negotiations, where applicable. Credible progress towards membership requires every candidate country to demonstrate sustained adherence to the Union's fundamental values, including a genuine commitment to reconciliation and the unequivocal rejection of glorification of war crimes and genocide. Ahead of the forthcoming European Council discussion on enlargement and reforms, we remain committed to advancing gradual integration, while preserving the objective of full membership, as well as transitional measures and safeguard clauses in future accession treaties to ensure sustained implementation of the acquis the integrity of the internal market, the protection of Rule of law and of the Union's financial interests. We underline that the Union's internal reforms and the enlargement process should advance in parallel, in line with the Granada Declaration of 6 October 2023. Reforms should ensure that the protection of our values, the Union's policy priorities, the associated budget and its governance match the ambition of making an enlarged Union stronger and safer, more competitive and sovereign.

II. A MORE SUSTAINABLE MEDITERRANEAN

Climate Resilience and Adaptation

The Mediterranean is a **climate hotspot**, increasingly exposed to extreme heat, drought, water scarcity, wildfires, floods, desertification and growing pressure on terrestrial, marine and coastal ecosystems. Strengthening climate resilience and accelerating adaptation are therefore essential for the sustainability, security and prosperity of our region. Cross-border cooperation with our partners in the Southern Neighbourhood should be enhanced to address this shared challenge.

This summer's **devastating wildfires** have again shown that no country can face climate-related disasters alone. The EU needs a stronger common approach to climate resilience, combining prevention, preparedness, mutual assistance and rapid response with long-term adaptation across our societies, economies, infrastructure and landscapes. We welcome the new EU framework for climate resilience and the European Heatwave Plan as well as the EU approach on integrated wildfire risk management. Climate resilience should be reflected across relevant EU policies and investment, in line with the principle of "resilience by design". This approach should include strengthening healthcare systems' preparedness to respond effectively to climate-related health risks. We call for preparedness under the Union Civil Protection Mechanism to be strengthened through annual joint risk assessments and exercises, the timely pre-positioning of capacities available through the European Civil Protection Pool (ECP), alongside national capacities, and arrangements for rapid mutual assistance when national capacities are overwhelmed, while excluding civilo-military cooperation, which falls under Member States' competences.

We welcome the establishment of the Cyprus Regional Aerial Firefighting Station (CRAFS) as an important first contribution at regional level to strengthening preparedness for and response to increasingly severe wildfires in the Mediterranean, alongside the continued strengthening of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism, including rescEU capacities. We encourage the use of existing Union instruments to support joint training, exercises and exchanges of expertise, including with Southern Neighbourhood partners where appropriate. Building on this model, we call for a second regional station in the Western Mediterranean, within the Union Civil Protection Mechanism, with adequate funding under the next Multiannual Financial Framework.

Water scarcity is among the most acute climate challenges facing the Mediterranean and should be treated as a strategic priority, requiring sustained political commitment and investment. We support greater water resilience through integrated and sustainable water management, cross-border cooperation, modernisation of irrigation infrastructure, the use of non-conventional water resources, greater water-use efficiency, innovation and investment. We call for Mediterranean vulnerabilities to be adequately reflected in EU policies and financing. We call for the full and timely implementation of the European Water Resilience Strategy. To translate these priorities into investment, the European Commission, in cooperation with the European Investment Bank, should support the preparation of mature projects in the abovementioned areas. In this context, sustainable desalination may also play a role where it provides an environmentally sound and cost-effective response to local water scarcity. These priorities were also reflected in the work of MED9 Environment Ministers this year.

Protecting and restoring **Mediterranean ecosystems**, halting and reversing biodiversity loss, preventing and reducing marine pollution, including plastic pollution, and sustainably managing terrestrial and marine resources are essential for climate resilience, food security, tourism, local livelihoods and social and economic sustainability. We emphasise the importance of promoting an innovative and sustainable blue economy, while highlighting the climate-ocean nexus as a key dimension of effective climate action and resilience.

We reiterate our firm commitment to advancing negotiations towards an ambitious, international legally binding instrument to end **plastic pollution**, in accordance with UNEA Resolution 5/14.

Energy Security

Energy security, affordability, competitiveness and decarbonisation are mutually reinforcing, as reflected in the work of the MED9 Energy Ministers this year. The war in Ukraine and developments in the Middle East and the Gulf have underscored the EU's exposure to disruptions in global energy flows, logistical chokepoints and critical maritime routes, as well as to sharp increases in energy prices, with

direct consequences for households, businesses and the EU's competitiveness. In response, the EU should adopt additional targeted and temporary measures to provide rapid relief to European industry. The EU should also reduce critical dependencies on imported fossil fuels through clean energy sources' deployment and electrification, diversify energy sources and supply routes, promote the development of domestic energy resources, reinforce energy infrastructure and improve preparedness for supply and price shocks. It should pursue concrete measures to achieve sustainably lower energy prices, including by accelerating electrification and the deployment of low-carbon energy generation, encompassing both nuclear and renewable energy, and storage capacity. The energy transition provides a structural means of reducing energy dependencies and limiting the impact of both domestic political crises and international geopolitical crises on energy prices. In this context, we take note of the Trans-Mediterranean clean tech initiative (T-MED) under the Pact for the Mediterranean and its implementation for the benefit of businesses and renewable energy sectors in the EU and partner countries.

Stronger grids and **cross-border interconnections**, domestic clean energy generation, and more resilient **critical energy infrastructure** are central to the EU's energy security, alongside clean energy sources, such as renewable and low carbon energy, energy efficiency and storage. To strengthen resilience to major supply shocks, we call for regular cross-border stress tests and coordinated contingency planning within existing EU frameworks, especially in regions with limited connectivity. These should cover alternative supply routes, backup capacity, rapid information-sharing and mutual assistance, with particular attention to grids and interconnectors, energy ports and terminals, and subsea energy infrastructure. Increased renewable energy generation should also contribute to greater resilience. These efforts should respect the principle of technological neutrality and Member States' competence to determine their energy mix.

Mediterranean energy corridors and inclusive interconnections across the broader region, including the Gulf, are strategic assets for the EU's energy security and economic resilience. Such connectivity should be viewed not only as a regional priority, but as an investment in the Union's overall competitiveness, security of supply and strategic resilience. Stronger cross-border and trans-Mediterranean links, together with mutually beneficial energy partnerships with partners in the Southern Neighbourhood and the Gulf, should also support the energy dimension of the Pact for the Mediterranean. Priority areas for investment include electricity and gas networks, renewable and low-carbon energy and hydrogen infrastructure, as well as diversified energy supply routes.

Tourism

We are determined to actively support a more sustainable, resilient and year-round model that sustains growth while easing pressure on coastal communities and the environment, protecting vulnerable ecosystems and infrastructure, and improving the quality of life.

III. A MORE RESILIENT MEDITERRANEAN

An Ambitious and Balanced Multiannual Financial Framework that Delivers

As negotiations on the European Union's **Multiannual Financial Framework 2028–2034** enter a decisive phase, we call for an ambitious and balanced budget that matches the Union's priorities with adequate resources while supporting long-term sovereignty, competitiveness, economic resilience, convergence and balanced development.

We fully recognise that the European Union is facing a changing strategic environment, bringing new challenges, as well as new opportunities for common European action. The next MFF must enable the EU to seize these opportunities while responding to growing challenges, including security and defence, competitiveness, migration challenges and pressures, investing in innovation and strategic sectors for European industrial and technological sovereignty, connectivity, energy security, clean and energy transitions, and resilience. At the same time, this must not come at the expense of Treaty-based policies, which remain the backbone of European integration and themselves contribute to addressing these new challenges.

In this regard, we stress the continued importance of **the Common Agricultural Policy, the Common Fisheries Policy and the Cohesion Policy**. We also support a strong EU Facility, able to respond rapidly to crises and unforeseen needs without systematically requiring the reprogramming of national and regional allocations. We underline the need to support a strong European Defence Technological and Industrial Base, reducing dependencies, to ensure the Union's ability to respond to emerging security challenges. We stress the need to build on the experience of the European Defence Fund and the European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP).

We welcome new EU strategies for islands and coastal communities, and for the outermost regions. The specific needs of rural, coastal and island communities, as well as the outermost regions, should be reflected in future Union policies and financing. Adequate funding for the **European Competitiveness Fund**, along with a targeted and proportionate European preference, enabling full harnessing of EU's collective potential, will be critical for the EU's investment in key strategic technologies - also with its clean transition and decarbonisation window to support decarbonisation in the Mediterranean basin and contribute to climate change mitigation. We call as well to maximize the leverage effect of EU funds to trigger public and private investments.

The external dimension of the Multiannual Financial Framework is equally important. In an increasingly complex geopolitical environment, the EU must be able to act strategically in more than one direction at the same time. We therefore need an adequately funded Global Europe instrument.

The MFF should provide adequate support for the EU's partnerships with its neighbours and for the implementation of the Pact for the Mediterranean, notably through the **Global Europe** instrument, complemented by the Global Gateway strategy and a Team Europe approach. Together, these should help mobilise investment in shared strategic priorities, adequately support European influence and interests, as well as enable the Union's internal policy objectives to be pursued also through cooperation with its partners, in full compliance with EU and international law. Particular attention should be given to mature projects of common interest that strengthen energy, transport and digital connectivity, water resilience and other strategic links across the Mediterranean, generating benefits for both the Union and its southern partners.

We call for an overall level of funding that enables the Union to deliver on both its long-standing and new priorities. In this regard, building on the Commission's proposal and level, we stand ready to accelerate the constructive work on the revenue side, including on proposals for new own resources that would ease direct pressure on national budgets, including national contributions to the EU budget. Such resources should be genuine, fair, simple and non-regressive. This is key to better calibrating the overall level of expenditure to match our ambitions.

We should also examine options for a more gradual repayment profile for NextGenerationEU, which could create additional fiscal space in the next MFF, subject to an assessment of the impact on overall repayment costs. Limited and targeted European debt instruments for loans should be considered as options for financing clearly identified strategic priorities.

Finally, given that the circumstances that originally justified budgetary corrections have fundamentally changed, we believe the current system of rebates must be abolished in the modernised next MFF.

Food Security and Agriculture

Food security is integral to the EU's strategic autonomy and resilience. The war in Ukraine and instability in the Middle East have reinforced the importance of **secure access to fertilisers** and diversified, reliable and affordable agricultural and food supply chains. We welcome the launch of the Rome Coalition for Food Security and Access to Fertilisers, bringing together MED9 countries and partners from the Balkans and the Middle East within the MED9++ framework.

The EU should work through its **partnerships** across the Mediterranean, the Gulf, the Western Balkans, Ukraine and Moldova, and with international organisations, to strengthen food security, preserve agricultural production and competitiveness, and reduce shared vulnerabilities.

Alongside agriculture, **sustainable fisheries and healthy marine ecosystems** are indispensable pillars of our food systems. We underline their importance for food security, coastal communities and the resilience of the Mediterranean blue economy.

Mediterranean agriculture faces growing pressure from climate change, market volatility and demographic shifts. We therefore support a resilient, competitive and adequately funded **Common Agricultural Policy** that addresses these pressures and provides farmers with a stable and predictable framework.

Sustainable **water** management, greater water-use efficiency, efficient irrigation, innovation, digitalisation and improved risk management will be central to making Mediterranean agriculture more climate-resilient.

The future of Mediterranean agriculture also depends on viable rural areas and **generational renewal**, supported by infrastructure, connectivity and conditions that enable young people and women to farm and build a future in rural communities. The close link between generational renewal, agriculture and demographic resilience was also reflected in this year's joint MED9 meeting of agriculture ministers and ministers responsible for demography.

Competitiveness, Innovation and Digital Transformation

Building on the Letta and Draghi reports, we will work together to enhance the **competitiveness and sustainability** of our economies and strengthen economic security at both national and EU levels. This requires systematically ensuring effective level playing field with our trade competitors, reciprocity in market access, protection of critical assets, companies and infrastructure, de-risking in critical and strategic sectors, deterrence and reaction against all forms of coercion and stronger cooperation with trusted partners. A targeted and proportionate European preference in strategic sectors and technologies is an important tool to strengthen the Union's strategic autonomy and economic security, while preserving open and competitive supply chains and taking account of Member States' differing economic structures. The EU framework should also remain conducive to Foreign Direct investments while addressing issues related to economic security, technology transfers and local employment. Together with other EU partners, we are committed to advancing single market priorities, including the Savings and Investments Union. We will continue to advance simplification and remove barriers within the single market. The Union's **competitiveness and economic security** also depend on robust and efficient transport connectivity within the European Union, across the Mediterranean and with the wider neighbourhood. We underline the strategic importance of safe, secure, resilient and sustainable maritime

transport for the competitiveness and economic resilience of the EU and the Mediterranean region, and support efforts to strengthen the resilience of maritime supply chains and port infrastructure.

A credible and ambitious trade agenda, encompassing Mediterranean partner countries, within the flexible approach the EU has been following, is also essential to our strategic autonomy.

The **clean energy transition and decarbonisation** must reinforce the EU's competitiveness and resilience, support industrial renewal and innovation, contribute to structurally lower energy prices and facilitate the EU's shift away from fossil fuels. These objectives should be pursued in a technologically neutral manner, taking into account the specific situations of Member States and avoiding disproportionate burdens on households and businesses. The Mediterranean has the potential to become a centre for innovation, renewable and low-carbon energy, and sustainable maritime industry, as well as a strategic corridor linking the EU with its Mediterranean partners.

Digital innovation and transformation is central to the EU's competitiveness, resilience and capacity to modernise its economies and public services. Investment in artificial intelligence, digital infrastructure, cybersecurity and advanced digital skills is essential, alongside a predictable regulatory framework that supports innovation, ensures the effective implementation of the EU AI Act and upholds fundamental rights and European values and supports the development of safe, competitive and robust European AI technologies through a demand-oriented industrial policy. The digital transformation of justice systems is an important part of this wider agenda, with the potential to improve efficiency while safeguarding judicial independence, fundamental rights and human oversight. This balance has also been reflected in the work of MED9 on the digitalisation of justice this year.

Demographic Resilience and the Future of Mediterranean Communities

Demographic change is a defining long-term challenge for the Mediterranean and the European Union. We call for **demographic resilience** to be better reflected in EU and national policies, with particular attention to rural, mountainous, remote, island and coastal communities. Enabling young people, women and families to remain in their communities requires access to affordable housing, quality public services, connectivity and economic opportunities, including adequate employment prospects. Demographic policy must go hand in hand with rural and agricultural development to counter depopulation and sustain viable communities.

Demographic resilience also requires conditions that encourage return migration, successful integration and balanced territorial development, while recognising the contribution of well-managed legal migration.

People, Youth, Culture and Social Cohesion

The resilience of our societies also depends on social cohesion, education and opportunities for young people and rural women, including opportunities for mobility, skills development, entrepreneurship and civic participation.

We affirm our support for the Mediterranean University initiative and invite our southern partners to join us in creating a real space of academic collaboration and exchange through this initiative.

We recognise culture and cultural heritage as drivers of sustainable development and dialogue and commit to safeguarding Mediterranean heritage, artistic freedom and intercultural exchange.

Our policies must be socially fair and deliver tangible benefits across Mediterranean societies.

We affirm our commitment to creating a safe digital environment for minors and to taking action against any practices and business models that endanger children's safety and well-being. We will work together

at European level, building on the European Commission's proposal for EU Kids Act, towards a common European approach on the digital age of majority, while preserving the privacy of users and respecting national competences.

IV. THE WAY FORWARD

Our shared objective is a **safer, more sustainable and more resilient Mediterranean**, built on stronger strategic and comprehensive partnerships across the region and beyond. Achieving this objective requires a comprehensive approach addressing security and defence; migration and the protection of the EU's external borders; enlargement; connectivity, trade, competitiveness and economic security and resilience; the energy transition and energy security; climate adaptation and food security; and demographic resilience and social cohesion.

MED9 will continue to coordinate, where appropriate, to ensure that Mediterranean challenges and opportunities are reflected in EU policies, legislation and financing, notably in the implementation of the EU Strategic Agenda 2024–2029 and in negotiations on the next Multiannual Financial Framework, including the Global Europe instrument.

The **Pact for the Mediterranean** is already translating this ambition into stronger partnerships, connectivity, security, and shared prosperity, in cooperation with the Union for the Mediterranean and other regional and international partners.

MED9 gives its members a distinct opportunity to shape debates and decisions within the European Union from the perspective of the Mediterranean, where many of the Union's most pressing security, economic, demographic and climate challenges converge. In doing so, it will continue to respect the respective national positions and choices of its members.

We reaffirm our commitment to **a stronger, safer, more competitive, prosperous, cohesive and resilient European Union** and to a Mediterranean of peace, stability, prosperity and partnership.

Our next summit will take place in Portugal in 2027.