

EMUNI Annual Conference

Science Diplomacy: Re-thinking Euro-Mediterranean Cooperation

February 11-12, 2015

Portorož / Piran Slovenia

CONFERENCE Report & RECOMMENDATIONS

The Euro-Mediterranean University (EMUNI) organised its annual conference at its seat in Portorož, municipality of Piran, Slovenia in the period from 11-12 February, 2015. This year's conference was titled Science Diplomacy: Re-thinking Euro-Mediterranean Cooperation and was conducted back-to-back with the kick-off of project MERID (Middle East Research and Innovation Dialogue) funded by the EU's framework programme for Research and Innovation, H2020.

The conference was attended by 166 participants from 35 countries. 27 eminent Speakers and Panellists from 17 countries and international organisations participated in the two-days event. Along the conference, the meetings of the EMUNI Management Board, Senate and General Assembly were also held.

The high level opening ceremony took place on 11 February at Tartini theatre in Piran. Opening statements and welcome notes were delivered by:

Meira Hot, deputy Mayor, on behalf of Peter Bossman, Mayor of the Municipality of Piran.

Abdelhamid El-Zoheiry, President of EMUNI

HE Karl Erjavec, deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Slovenia

Omnia Taha, Director of department of Europe and Euro-Arabian cooperation, on behalf of HE Nabil EL-Araby, Secretary General of the League of Arab States

Elisabeth Lipiatou, Head of Unit, European Neighbourhood, Africa and Gulf, DG Research and Innovation, European Commission

Ilan Chet, Deputy Secretary General of the Union for the Mediterranean.

The speakers emphasized the important role EMUNI is playing in Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, as a dynamic platform for intercultural dialogue and a valuable channel for students and staff exchange across the Mediterranean. During his opening statements, the President of the University announced the **launch of EMUNI's centre for Arab, Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies**, which will enforce EMUNI's capacity and leverage its position to address intercultural dialogue and inter-religious tolerance across the Euro-Mediterranean region and beyond. The Minister of Foreign affairs of Slovenia and the deputy Mayor of Piran affirmed support to EMUNI by the Slovenian government and the municipality. Minister Erjavec also announced that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has **allocated premises for the centre at the castle of Jable near Ljubljana**. Meanwhile, the representatives of international organisations, the League of Arab States, the European Commission and the Union for the Mediterranean welcomed the initiative of establishing such centre, which serves as a valuable tool for Science Diplomacy in the Mediterranean region.

PANEL I: Future of Euro-Mediterranean Cooperation in view of Political Stability and Economic Uncertainty in the Region

12 February 2015 (09h00 – 11h00)

Moderator: **Ana Bojinović Fenko**, Associate Professor, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana

Panellists:

Rym Ayadi, Professor at HEC Montreal and Founding President of Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association (EMEA)

Hany Helal, Former Minister of Higher Education and Research, Egypt

Liegis Imants, Latvian Ambassador to Hungary, in charge of Slovenia

Salam Kawakibi, Deputy Director of the Arab Reform Initiative

Cosimo Lacirignola, Secretary General of Centre International de Hautes Etudes Agronomiques Méditerranéennes (CIHEAM)

Sergio Piazzi, Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean

The panel discussions focused on identifying the needs in the Mediterranean in view of the current political instability, socio-economic uncertainty and the challenges facing the region. The panellists and the audience engaged in a productive discussion addressing the different challenges in the region and the role of science diplomacy in addressing such challenges.

Among those needs that could be addressed through science diplomacy are conflict resolution, management of the extremely demanding situations posed by refugees and displaced factions, providing quality education tailored to job market requirements, creating more employment opportunities addressing sustainable, urban and rural development especially in the fields of food security and agriculture. Other issues related to sound governance and leadership, knowledge sharing and better communication of needs and solutions to politicians and policy makers were also exhaustively discussed.

PANEL II: Science Diplomacy: a tool for intercultural dialogue and effective partnership

12 February 2015 (12h00 – 14h00)

Moderator: **Abdelhamid El-Zoheiry**, President, Euro-Mediterranean University

Panellists:

Nabil Ayad, Director of the Academy of Diplomacy and International Governance Loughborough University in London, UK

Hanan Dowidar, Vice President of Forum for Euro-Mediterranean Innovation in Action, Paris

Rouhollah Ghadiri, Executive Director of the Iranian Association for Management of Technology (IRAMOT) and Research Fellow at the Presidential Technology Studies Institute (TSI), Iran

Fouad Mrad, Director of ESCWA Technology Centre, Jordan

Eliezer Rabinovici, co-Vice-President of Synchrotron-light for Experimental Science and Applications in the Middle East (SESAME), Israel

Angelo Riccaboni, Rector of the University of Siena, Italy

Salman M. Salman, Professor of Physics, Al-Quds University, Palestine

The Panel explored best practices and experiences of panellists in science diplomacy initiatives in the Euro-Mediterranean region and their recommendations for future actions. A number of issues, including “science for diplomacy vs. diplomacy for science”, a bottom-up or top-down approach and role of individual scientists in implementing science diplomacy in practice were discussed. A presentation of scientific and technological potential of Iran, a new partner in EU-Middle East research dialogue, was offered. Importance of engaging youth from all Euro-Mediterranean countries in scientific endeavours to address common challenges was underlined. Highlighted also were the principles of co-ownership and co-leadership and enhancing cooperation in areas of common interest and shared benefit. The Partnership in Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA) initiative was presented. Involvement of the private sector in working towards the Sustainable Development Goals was emphasized. The panellists pointed out the importance of building the capacity of politically minded scientists and scientifically minded politicians, as well as research and innovation managers. Fostering south-south cooperation was emphasized.

PANEL III: Middle East Research and Innovation Dialogue (MERID project)

12 February 2015 (16h00 – 18h00)

Moderator: **Dejan Hribar**, Euro-Mediterranean University

Panellists:

Tanya Dimitrova, Project Officer, European Commission

Mouin Hamzé, Secretary General, National Center for Scientific Research, Lebanon

Kyriaki Papageorgiou, Senior Researcher and Marie Curie Fellow, Institute for Innovation and Knowledge Management, ESADE, Spain

Claudio Bogliotti, Head of European Research Affairs Office of the International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies, CIHEAM-Bari, Italy

Irene Costantini, Researcher at Sustainable Communication, Belgium

Samir Badrawi, Director of Technology Transfer Office, Ministry of Science and Technology, Iraq

This panel portrayed the main outlines, strategic objectives and activities of the MERID project, which EMUNI is coordinating. The panellists presented the different work packages of the project with emphasis on the opportunities the project provides and its links to other science diplomacy initiatives and actions. The research and innovation landscape in Iraq was presented, as well as opportunities for cooperation within the MERID project. The Panellists and audience also addressed synergies with other EU initiatives under the framework programme, as well as other EU and non-EU programmes. The European Commission presented possibilities for funding under the Horizon 2020 programme, highlighting initiatives supported by the EU in the field of science diplomacy.

Conference Recommendations

- Strengthen existing channels of dialogue among the Euro-Mediterranean scientific communities and support cooperation channels between scientists and politicians in the Euro-Mediterranean countries.
- Establish **EMUNI scholarships** with the support of Euro-Mediterranean countries to provide for continuing education of refugees and displaced people.
- Develop a programme for **“brain circulation”** capitalizing on the south Mediterranean Diasporas in Europe, including joint research activities, academic and student exchange and fellowships across the Mediterranean.
- Establish **exchange programmes involving other stakeholders**, eg. practitioners (public officials, MPs, youth and civil society).
- Seek **complementarities and synergies between programmes and initiatives** of various regional actors (EU, UfM, CIHEAM, FAO, MIO-ECSE, PAM, EMUNI).
- Establish closer synergies between EMUNI and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM). In this regard, EMUNI could play an active role in the PAM academic platform. A **meeting between Euro-Med Parliamentarians and academicians** hosted by EMUNI during 2015 is being explored.
- Develop new tailor-made programmes for concrete needs of Southern Mediterranean countries, including in synergy with the European Neighbourhood Policy.
- Develop a **database of best practices and success stories** in science-diplomacy under the coordination of EMUNI. This could well serve in sharing experiences to address common challenges.
- Develop initiatives for closer **South-South cooperation**. A joint programme could be developed under ESCWA or the EU with the support of EMUNI.
- Develop a Euro-Mediterranean **competition for young scientists** modelled after the EUCYS (European Union Contest for Young Scientists) to engage youth of the south Mediterranean countries with their counterparts from the north.
- Introduce a **shared production value programme**, engaging the private sector in the Euro-Mediterranean region.
- Employ science diplomacy to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), among other, to develop **water diplomacy** initiatives.
- Capitalise on the high innovation potential in the southern Mediterranean region, particularly among creative youth. This could be achieved through a programme to **develop and support the innovation ecosystem in the region**, including funds for innovation actions and structural measures in complementarity with the Euro-Mediterranean Innovation Agenda.
- Utilizing the full potential of the EU-funded Middle East Research and Innovation Dialogue (MERID) project and linking it with other science diplomacy actions in the region, including SESAME.