

NEXTMED Conference

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Transcription of speech by Mr. Johannes Hahn

Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and
Enlargement Negotiations

Thank you very much Minister.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Cross-border cooperation aims at avoiding the creation of new dividing lines and contributes to integrated and sustainable regional development between neighbouring border regions and harmonious, which is very important, territorial cooperation over the EU external borders. The Med Sea Cross-Border Cooperation Programme is an important tool to stimulate projects that can provide common solutions to countries on both sides of the Mediterranean Sea. The strength of the Programme is the fact that all countries, Member States and Partner Countries, participate on equal terms taking their own decisions on specific objectives and orienting activities corresponding to their real needs.

This has taken the high level of ownership and commitment in the participating countries both at Programme and project level despite the political unrest in the region with the uprisings and frozen conflicts, which is kind of a strange word if you have the Southern Mediterranean in mind to talk about frozen conflicts but this is international diplomatic language.

Let me point out two examples of successful projects among the exhibited projects:

- The NET KITE project supports innovation exchanges between enterprises and research centres in seven countries across the Mediterranean Sea basin.

- The second example is the Medolico project which tackles the recycling of waste generated by olive oil processing between Israel, Jordan, Cyprus, Italy and Portugal

I have mentioned these examples because I know, from my previous capacity as Commissioner for Regional Policy - and I have, if you like, changed the side of the table now - that waste treatment is a very urgent issue in the Mediterranean and so far all the solutions provided are not really satisfying. I think there is a lot of potential in this area and I think we have to look together to improve the quality of waste treatment but before that, it's important to create an understanding amongst people that waste collection/waste treatment is something which is important for hygienic and other reasons and that's why it is also necessary to pay for it and I think sometimes the problem is that there is not yet an understanding that waste is a business, and if waste is a business, one has to pay but also it could be a profitable job but the more important is that there is an awareness amongst our citizens to have an adequate treatment of waste and this is so important and therefore I am very eager to see, in particular, cross-border projects but also may I say beyond today's topic, projects in countries dealing with waste treatment.

Coming back to cross-border cooperation, cross-border cooperation also promotes the involvement of civil society organisations, and local and regional authorities when identifying the priorities laying down in the calls for proposals. In order to ensure the even greater success of the next Programme, the European Commission calls for an increased empowerment of local and regional authorities and of the civil society, which are the core of the Programme beneficiaries. A new Med Sea cross-border cooperation Programme under the 2014-2020 European Neighbourhood Instrument, which is the next generation and the follow up for the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, is being prepared and should be submitted to the European commission for adoption already in June

With € 209 million we will continue to support projects between Partner Countries and Member States in the areas of business and small and medium

size enterprises support. It is about education and research, social inclusion and environment.

The design of the new cross-border cooperation Programme in general and the Med Sea Programme in particular takes place at a moment when we have launched the review of the Neighbourhood Policy. Both exercises should lead to a closer partnership between Member states and Neighbours to further strengthen our economic and political ties. In this context, the cross-border cooperation programmes could be used as a source of inspiration to strengthen the ownership of our Partner Countries' involvement in cooperation.

It is also important to know that regional organisations have an important role to play. The Union for the Mediterranean can help to foster the context within which this cooperation is carried out.

Moreover we need to encourage sub-regional organisations like for instance the Arab Maghreb Union to deepen the cooperation and to offer increased opportunities for interconnection. And I am saying this and this was also the reason why I have decided myself to come here to talk to you to discuss, - unfortunately there will be no time to for discussion, sorry but today seems to be dedicated to Southern Neighbourhood activities. I don't know why but I think there are five or six events on Southern Neighbourhood in Brussels, so there is a certain concentration but it also shows the strong interest.

Once again regional cooperation, cross-border cooperation is also extremely important in particular in the Southern Neighbourhood to stabilise the region, to create a peaceful environment. I mean having in mind the founding idea of the European Union: it was strengthened economic ties across political borders in order to create a network, a situation, an environment, which hinders crazy people to produce armed conflicts and looking into the level of economic interrelationship within the regions in the south or the countries in the south, this is probably by far the poorest economic relationship anywhere in the world and therefore another proof for the reason why the situation of the Southern Neighbours is so unstable. In order to overcome this, we have to address and I

think it is a very useful opportunity to look into very concrete projects connecting people, indeed, from one region with the other region.

I mean maybe this bottom up approach is more successful than looking for a macro-political solution which we have never managed so far. So maybe another approach, another opportunity indeed is to try to create pressure bottom up by creating valuable, important, necessary projects from people for people in order to serve people and to give them a sense why cross-border cooperation is so important. And if we implement a lot of small scale projects, at the end of the day it's like a puzzle: if you put all the puzzles together, you get the picture and you can see the picture and the great picture is peace, stability, prosperity and to arrive there apparently it is necessary to have many small puzzles but by the end of the day they will fit together and become great peace.

Maybe not in the next couples of months and years but we have to start, it's an obligation for our next generations to start this and that's why I'm here trying to convince you, trying to stimulate you and to motivate you, exactly to follow up this way. I mean in politics we need a certain ability to achieve goals, because if you make only the assessment about the current situation and the situation how it was in the past, you never will end up by knowing why it doesn't work out. So it is always important to test something out, to try it again and again and maybe there might be once the open door, which is the open door, maybe it's too much, like a staircase to heaven, at least a staircase to peace and this is our aim.

And that's why in particular in the Mediterranean cross-border cooperation is so important, it's not only an economic issue, it's much more: it's about peace stability and prosperity.

Thank you very much and excuse if I am running further to pass my messages.