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**Candidacy of the Head of the Region of Western Greece,
Mr. Apostolos Katsifaras,
for the presidency of the Intermediterranean Commission (IMC)
of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR)**

STATEMENT OF INTENTS FOR THE 2018-2020 MANDATE

The Mediterranean is not a boundary, but a natural bridge joining the peoples on all sides of the Sea. The Intermediterranean Commission (IMC) of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR) plays an active, substantial and leading role in the wider region, promoting focus and convergence to the Med area, through active political dialogue, concrete actions, programmes and synergies in all sectors.

This was widely recognized by the awarding to the IMC of the prestigious "[Mediterranean Award for Institutions 2017](#)" for its work supporting cohesion and regional development in the Mediterranean.

During the two last years I had the opportunity to have the Presidency of the IMC and to continue the brilliant work done by all previous presidencies of IMC.

In this framework, I am expressing my will to continue and I am presenting my candidacy for the Presidency of the IMC for 2018-2020, in my capacity as Head of the Region of Western Greece and in close cooperation with my Deputy for European and International Affairs of the Region of Western Greece and my Experts, and with the support of the staff and the services of the Region.

Following, I am presenting to the main pillars of my candidacy:

- **Promoting Blue Growth and emerging strategies, while protecting the Med Sea**

The Mediterranean Sea is a huge resource and a precious asset, binding all countries in this region together. So, there is a strong need for cooperation for socioeconomic sustainable development, resource analysis and assessment, observation, monitoring and control, as well as for the management of the goods and services and concrete joint flagship projects. Despite the very fragile and still indeterminate situation prevailing in the Mediterranean, the conditions are in place, at least for a significant part of the Sea basin, to move ahead.

The IMC gave a key contribution to the setting up (in 2017) of the maritime initiative for the Western Mediterranean that involves also non-EU countries of the Southern Neighborhood and is active in the implementation of the EUSAIR and other initiatives focused on Blue Growth, Research and Innovation such as BLUEMED.

Moreover, it has developed strong relations with the UfM Secretariat, especially contributing to the works on Blue Economy (BE), becoming observer the UfM Working



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Group on BE, partner in a specific agreement (DG EASME) to support the implementation of the UfM ministerial declaration on BE and consequently directly involved in the organization of the 1st UfM Stakeholder Conference on BE held in Campania, last November 2017. It has also got the important label of the 43 UfM States to a strategic project dealing with integrated coastal zone management and maritime and coastal tourism: “Med Coast for Blue Growth”.

In addition to this, the IMC is involved in many projects in different sectors linked to the Blue Growth (e.g. InnoBlueGrowth, Co-Evolve or Mitomed+), some of which are strategic for the future of Mediterranean governance and multilevel dialogue (e.g. PANORAMED) or for the support to decentralization and the capacity building of local and regional authorities in the frame of Integrated Territorial Development (ITD): CPMR-PLATFORMA training on public services with an ITD approach, that focused on Morocco and Tunisia and also addressed several policies and capitalized many experiences dealing with Blue Growth (BG).

Starting from the issues that are more connected to BG, a coherent and multilevel framework for cooperation across all the Mediterranean is now emerging and can further strengthen the ties between the two rims of the Mediterranean, promoting sustainable economic and social development throughout the region (going even beyond maritime issues).

In this sense, in the Mediterranean there are enough assets and promising opportunities that can be boosted, valorized and capitalized. The Blue economy is one of them, with at its core the tourism sector (especially maritime, coastal and cruise tourism), the blue energy sector. The natural beauty of the region and its rich cultural, historic and archaeological heritage, or the local food and products are also important assets. The potential for improved connectivity and intermodal transportation needs to be unleashed. The large Mediterranean biodiversity is an asset that must be protected, and the environmental challenges must be faced understanding and preventing specially the anthropogenic pressures, improving the integrated coastal zone management and the maritime spatial planning etc.

The IMC should thus continue its political and practical activities for the promotion and improvement at the same time of the Blue Growth and the multilevel governance at Mediterranean scale, through the emerging initiatives and strategies. We should keep working with an integrated vision of the Mediterranean in our horizon, without forgetting the social wellbeing of Mediterranean Citizens, the sustainable prosperity and the environmental status of the sea basin. Finally, we could join efforts to support innovation and research in new emerging and transversal fields like Big Data that should become solid instruments at the services of policy makers and citizens.

- **Migration & Asylum: enhancing the role of the Mediterranean regions**



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The migration crisis is one of the top issues faced by the Med regions as by Europe as a whole, that poses a serious challenge, to the welfare both of the refugees and of our societies.

During the very first phases of the crisis, the IMC has been very active on the issue (i.e. specific points in the political declarations of GAs and PBs, promotion of the creation of the inter-commission CPMR Task Force on Migration management, specific sessions on migration during GAs and PBs, initiatives, campaigns, workshops, contributing to Issue Papers on migration, etc.). And although some key administrative and political aspects of this crisis are far from the reach of the Local and Regional Authorities (border control, asylum process etc.), IMC has been consistently asking for an integrated global approach, with a long-term perspective in mind, not only addressing security matters on the coast lines, but also tackling reception and integration of migrants and refugees, the root causes of human movements, the cooperation with countries of origin, the fight against poverty and human trafficking, and the improvement of socio-economic development.

Unfortunately, so far, the situation has not improved enough despite the new mechanisms and the several initiatives launched by the EU from 2015 onwards (and the high number of allocated funds). It is under the eyes of everybody, migration it is now a structural matter of interest of everybody that needs the involvement of all layers of government and the civil society to be dealt properly.

Thus, and in the new mandate, IMC should continue working on the issue accordingly, mainly through its contribution to the work of the CPMR Migration Task Force and creating political pressure for the proper involvement of Mediterranean LRAs in EU dialogues and decision making on migration, with adequate assistance and resources, as a part of a wider strategy based on a multilevel governance approach and addressing common socio-economic and political challenges in the Mediterranean.

A special focus should be given to the improvement of the key role of the regions in the promotion of a better management of migration flows and the building of inclusive societies (reception and integration).

In this sense, policies promoting effectively the management of diversity and the intercultural model, should be supported and capitalized. The IMC should continue boosting the dialogue in the Mediterranean, the dialogue between refugees and the host societies in our regions, as well as, the cooperation in the area, and, thus, building trust, sound bridges for mutual understanding and generating interaction and solidarity. This should be operationalized conveying the efforts of the IMC Regions through the actions, studies, exchanges of experiences, initiatives and projects that will be set up in the framework of the CPMR Task force on Migration which is promoted by the IMC.

- **Mediterranean project based cooperation: consolidate the high involvement of the organization and promotion of concrete strategic, pilot projects and solid partnerships**



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The aim of cooperation through projects, actions and initiatives is, to provide a catalyst that will enable people on both sides of the *Mare Nostrum* to work together for addressing common challenges, exploiting common opportunities, contributing also to the Mediterranean governance in the long run.

So far, the IMC with its thematic working groups led by its regions, has achieved great results by implementing and supporting projects, that build capacity in the Med area, reduce disparities and promote synergies.

The IMC participates as full or associated partner only in projects that are of strategic relevance with regard to its biannual global action plan and the action plans of its working groups, also in accordance with the CPMR global priorities. These projects normally contribute also to the advocacy activity of the organization, having a positive impact on the membership as a whole. In addition to this, the IMC provides support to its members (i.e. info notes, partners search, etc.) to build partnerships in fields of interest.

Thus, the IMC and its four thematic working groups, should continue and develop more its actions pursuing and working on concrete projects that lead to the strengthening of economic, social and territorial cohesion in the Mediterranean region. At the same time we need to keep working to defend the role and the added value of Territorial Cooperation at EU and basin scale as well as the enlargement of the instruments and programs where the regions of all Mediterranean shores (and our organization) can be directly eligible for partnership and co-funding.

Another important aspect of Med cooperation is the community building and the strengthening of relations with other European, Mediterranean, national and territorial key players (e.g. organizations, universities, centres of research, institutes, NGOs, local authorities, thematic networks, national authorities, etc.). This is facilitated by project based cooperation and by the establishment of Memorandum of Understandings or Partnership agreements.

So far, IMC has established structured relations with a great variety of key actors in the Med area (such as the UfMS, MedCities, ArcoLatino, UniMed, Euro-Regions etc.), and will continue to pursue the expansion of its network and the establishment of synergies and of political and practical cooperation, while special focus must receive the attraction and active involvement of more partners, stakeholders and potential new members from the non-EU shores of the Mediterranean, and especially from the South. In this sense the IMC project strategy should go hand in hand with the CPMR overall project and new membership strategy.

- **Valorizing Mediterranean Youth as an asset for the present and the future of the basin**

The present and the future of our Med Region is the Mediterranean Youth. Therefore, it is of great importance to reestablish the hope to the young Mediterranean people, against the main challenges they are facing (e.g. unemployment and lack of opportunities, quality



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of education at all levels, participatory and democratic governance, conflicts, violence or radicalization etc.).

During the previous mandates, the IMC through some actions, initiatives (e.g. on youth policies, Social and Solidarity Economy, training and education in the maritime sector, exchanges with civil society organizations, networks of universities etc.) and political messages (e.g. in favor of a Med Erasmus Generation etc.) started to support and encourage the active participation of young Mediterraneans in the action of all levels of the society.

Especially, through its Working Group on Economic Social Cohesion started to focus, among other priorities, on the importance of Social and Solidarity Economy at EU and Mediterranean levels, as a system capable of valorising the youth, entrepreneurship, and the Mediterranean identity, and on the possibility to create laboratories for the promotion of the Euro-Mediterranean citizenship.

For the new mandate, building the skills and capacities of young people, boosting employability, mobilizing and raising awareness to them, promoting intercultural understanding, providing them opportunities and platforms to engage, promoting citizenship and the common values, will be crucial for supporting the creation of a generation of Mediterranean youth that will lead the way to build a Mediterranean area of peace, justice, solidarity, cohesion, sustainability and prosperity. The IMC should promote this process in partnership with the most active institutions, organizations and networks in this field at Euro-Mediterranean level (e.g. the UfM, Unimed, Anna Lindh Foundation among others), focusing on few but significative actions.

Of course, I am fully aware that we are in a crucial moment for the future of the EU and the Mediterranean, at the crossroad of two programming periods, with the mandates of the EU Parliament and Commission entering their last phase, and EU debating for the post-2020 period with the forthcoming Multiannual Financial Framework, in a difficult global political context, highly influenced by Brexit, migration issues and other important challenges. Thus, apart from the above-mentioned pillars, an horizontal priority for the new mandate will be taking stock of and considering the needs and expressing and promoting the interests of the IMC and its Regions, towards the post-2020 period.

All these pillars and priorities are meant to be coherently integrated with the help of the IMC members and Secretariat in the forthcoming IMC biannual Action Plan 2019-2020 that will be discussed by the new Political Bureau, and streamlined in the work plans of IMC WGs.

Our Intermediterranean Commission will also have to conceive its specific activities in a coherent way with the CPMR action and actively contribute to the global CPMR Strategic Plan. This will enhance the power and the consistency of our big CPMR family, as well as the impact of its work on the ground, granting that the needs and potential of the Mediterranean regions are well represented.