

PORTOROŽ DECLARATION

MED9 LEADERS' SUMMIT 2025

PORTOROŽ, 20 OCTOBER 2025

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We, the Heads of State and Government of Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain, and the Deputy Prime Minister of Italy met on 20 October 2025 in Portorož, for the 12th Summit of the Southern Countries of the European Union (MED9).

In light of the aggravated global situation – from Russia's ruthless aggression against Ukraine and the man-made catastrophe we are witnessing in Gaza, to the various challenges affecting the African continent and profound geopolitical shifts impacting our economies and the daily lives of our citizens – closer cooperation and partnership in forging a more sovereign, secure, competitive and democratic Europe which will strengthen the EU and the Southern Neighbourhood is more important than ever.

Against this backdrop, the MED9 group continues to serve as a unique platform for greater cooperation on enhancing the region's resilience by strengthening economic security, performance and competitiveness, adapting to climate change, promoting empowerment and capacity-building, as well as ensuring close coordination on pressing foreign policy challenges. Together with regional Mediterranean fora, notably the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and the Anna Lindh Foundation, the MED9 group and its partner countries share responsibility for safeguarding the region's future stability, security, and prosperity.

In 2025, we will celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Barcelona Process, a unique opportunity to renew the EU policy with the Mediterranean region, addressing common priorities and deliver tangible benefits for the people of the region. The adoption of the New Pact for the Mediterranean, together with Southern Neighbourhood Ministerial Meeting held alongside the UfM Regional Forum, will mark a historic moment of our relations with the region. The reform of the UfM, reflected in its New Strategy, will provide the organization with an enhanced capacity to play a key role in the coordination and the implementation of some of the flagship projects of the Pact.

Boosting Competitiveness...

Strengthening resilience, open strategic autonomy, economic security, and competitiveness of the Union remains a shared priority. Without these foundations, Europe will be unable to deliver long-term prosperity and a sustainable social model. The reports by Mario Draghi and Enrico Letta have accelerated our efforts in this regard, which must now be further intensified.

We firmly believe that deeper integration of **the single market**, through the full implementation and effective enforcement of the EU Single Market Strategy, is imperative. The remaining barriers must be removed. We will support rapid delivery on simplification, reducing administrative and regulatory burdens at EU level, without compromising regulatory predictability. This is particularly important for microenterprises, SMEs, and small mid-cap companies.



Establishing a 28th regime, in line with the respective competences under the Treaties, for all companies would be a concrete step for the deepening of the single market. We also recall the importance of advancing decisively on the Savings and Investment Union.

We reaffirm that the EU cannot afford to lag behind its main competitors. It must urgently reduce its dependencies in critical industrial sectors, as stated in the Versailles and Granada agendas. At the same time, it must maintain its competitive edge in the global competition in domains that will be decisive for its future, such as space, AI, quantum computing, biotech and innovative energy technologies.

A comprehensive approach to improving the conditions for European start-ups and scale-ups is also essential. Only coordinated action at the EU level can foster a globally competitive, inclusive, and sustainable innovation ecosystem. Closer collaboration is also the most effective means to bridge the innovation gap. We must step up efforts to realise the "Fifth freedom" – the free circulation of research, knowledge, and technology. The ERA Act and other forthcoming initiatives should be used to establish a specialised legal framework for researchers.

We see **digital transformation** as the cornerstone of the EU's competitiveness and strategic sovereignty. In order for Europe to be a global player, it must consistently advance and promote innovation, research, development, investment and skills especially in modern technologies. Building trust among businesses and consumers in the digital transition is essential. Cybersecurity – encompassing the security of devices, processes, data and fight against disinformation – must be at the heart of this transformation. In this context, the MED9 digital ministers have prepared an initiative to map AI and digital technology projects in the region and agreed to promote their exchange through existing EU platforms, with the aim of establishing an overview of best practices and accelerating cooperation and policy coordination. The adoption of a digital Euro would also contribute to the European Union's strategic sovereignty. We also call for stronger protection for young people online through effective and privacy-preserving tools, taking note of the initiatives on European digital majority age.

We strongly support initiatives to decarbonise and modernise the **European industry** to the benefit of all Member States and regions. This is essential for our future, and the most effective way to secure energy independence, ensure competitive prices, and foster a leading position in clean technologies. The transition brings huge opportunities for industry, provided it is gradual and flexible, particularly in sectors where decarbonisation is particularly challenging. Emphasis should be put on the specific needs of the sectors such as the automotive and energy-intensive industries. To achieve these goals, we must prioritise efforts to improve enabling conditions by boosting innovation, maximising flexibility, simplifying legislation, strengthening infrastructure investment, ensuring access to competitive electricity prices, taking into account technological neutrality and European preference in strategic sectors. Ensuring a level playing field remains key for our industry against unfair trade practices and global overcapacities. We therefore support a rapid adoption of the Commission's new long-term safeguard on steel, as well as moving swiftly to a revised CBAM.

We emphasise the importance of enhanced **connectivity**, interoperability and secure infrastructures across the Mediterranean region. Strengthening cross-Mediterranean digital links, expanding digital services and promoting common standards will foster innovation, facilitate trade



and empower citizens and enterprises on both sides of the Mediterranean. We emphasise the importance of completing the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T). A highly functioning and resilient transport network is a precondition for ensuring access of our citizens to jobs and services as well as for trade and economic growth of the EU and the Mediterranean region.

Strengthening Europe's strategic autonomy, energy security and competitiveness by ensuring competitive electricity prices requires greater and accelerated investment in renewable and low carbon energy sources, smart grids, energy storage and energy system flexibility, as well as robust, well-integrated and **inter-connected energy networks**. We therefore look forward to the forthcoming Grid Package and the Energy Highways initiative, announced by the European Commission, and reiterate the importance of the timely and effective investments in resilient national and cross-border energy grids and infrastructure projects in this regard. We support more efficient use of the region's existing energy infrastructure in our quest to reduce strategic dependencies. We reiterate the importance of achieving a genuine Energy Union before 2030.

We are convinced that the Mediterranean region's vast renewable and low carbon energy potential must be placed at the centre of our strategic agenda with our Southern Neighbourhood partners. Only diversified and resilient energy networks, including cross-border interconnections, can guarantee lasting energy security, reduce strategic dependencies, while boosting economic competitiveness. In June 2025, our Ministers for energy reaffirmed the MED9 vision, born in Valletta in 2023, to transform the Mediterranean region into a green energy hub. This will enhance energy security, sustainability, and economic resilience by reinforcing cooperation and accelerating concrete actions such as cross-border and cross-Mediterranean energy interconnections, joint renewable energy projects, and measures to ensure competitiveness, affordability, and social fairness through renewable and low carbon energy.

Strengthening our **trade relations** with strategic partners is now more important than ever. In an increasingly challenging environment for the global trading system, we reaffirm our commitment to advancing meaningful, reforms of the World Trade Organization (WTO) that will ensure fair, rules-based, sustainable, and open global trade. We will pursue an ambitious, robust, open and sustainable trade policy that allows fair trade agreements, opens third-country markets to EU companies, defends EU interests, reduces EU's critical dependencies, and guarantees a true level playing field. Our competitiveness depends on building stable, balanced and predictable relations with partners worldwide. The consolidation and expansion of the network of EU free trade agreements and economic partnerships is of the essence. To achieve the best possible outcomes for the EU as a whole, we must act in unity.

We remain determined to advance a common and comprehensive EU approach to **migration**, including in its external dimension, in order to counter irregular migration and migrant smuggling, increase returns, address the root causes of migration and ensure orderly, safe and regular migration. We will ensure full and timely implementation of the Pact on Migration and Asylum, promoting efficient solutions that can work on a practical level and in full compliance with international and European law.

Particular attention should be devoted to legal pathways promoting comprehensive partnerships focused on attracting skilled labour, as well as promoting talent circulation and academic mobility. In this respect, we welcome the Pact for the Mediterranean initiative on laying the foundations for



a Mediterranean university, drawing on existing structures such as the Euro-Mediterranean universities (EMUNI and Fes) and regional academic networks. Furthermore, at their April 2025 meeting, Ministers for Higher Education laid the groundwork for the establishment the Mediterranean Mobility Mechanism (MMM), which will complement existing schemes.

As our societies face similar demographic challenges, pressures from ageing populations, skills shortages, and labour market mismatches, we need to strengthen human capital – investing in people through education, training, upskilling, and youth empowerment, central to fostering innovation and social inclusion. In this context, the EU Pact for Skills provides an important contribution in our efforts to upskill and reskill our workforce, ensuring that the Mediterranean region remains competitive, innovative, and socially cohesive in the years ahead.

...and Resilience

The Mediterranean region is among the areas most exposed to the effects of **climate change**. In recent years, MED9 member countries have endured catastrophic forest fires, droughts, floods, heatwaves, and violent storms. We underscore that climate change adaptation is no longer a choice but a necessity. It is vital to enhance early warning systems for natural disasters, such as storms and floods, introduce adaptation measures for droughts, and invest in climate-resilient infrastructure including smart water management. Such measures will not only improve the safety of our citizens but also enhance our food security and reduce the vulnerabilities of our economies. Since climate change knows no borders, cross-border cooperation is essential for successful adaptation and swift response to disasters. In this regard, the particularly effective coordination provided by the EU Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) must be preserved and strengthened on the basis of common needs and priorities identified by member states. We also welcome the announcement of the President of the European Commission on the creation of a new European firefighting hub based in Cyprus.

In June 2025, MED9 environment ministers agreed on joint efforts to strengthen regional climate resilience through better alignment of national adaptation plans, the development of shared early-warning systems, and closer collaboration with regional platforms to address climate change. Furthermore, in October 2025, the MED9 agriculture ministers agreed to intensify joint efforts to establish a resilient, sustainable and climate-adapted agriculture in the Mediterranean region, stressing the importance of embedding these objectives within the future Common Agricultural Policy.

We also stress the notion of our shared responsibility for the protection of the Mediterranean Sea, in line with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). We underline the importance of cooperation in sustainably managing living resources, conserving marine biodiversity, combating pollution, and protecting and preserving the marine and coastal environment.

Striving for peace, security and stability

We reaffirm that **EU enlargement** is a geostrategic investment in democracy, peace, security, stability and prosperity. It serves as a catalyst for improving economic and social conditions, reducing disparities between countries and regions based on shared EU values. We therefore



encourage candidate countries to pursue their reform effort, particularly in the area of the rule of law, to fully align on CFSP, to strengthen regional cooperation and dialogue, and to pursue good neighbourly relations. At the same time, we reaffirm the importance for the EU to deliver on its commitments whenever progress is made, in order to advance the accession process of each candidate country. We will continue to support our partners in these efforts and reiterate that the future of the Western Balkans, Moldova and Ukraine lies within the European Union. Recalling the Granada declaration, we support advancing on EU internal reforms in parallel.

We reaffirm our unwavering support for a comprehensive, just, and lasting peace in **Ukraine**, grounded in the UN Charter and international law, and respecting Ukraine's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders. We are determined to limit Russia's ability to continue waging its war of aggression and call for a full, unconditional and immediate ceasefire as a prerequisite for creating the conditions for dialogue, and urge Russia to engage in meaningful negotiations. We will increase the pressure on the shadow fleet used by Russia to circumvent sanctions and to develop its destabilizing activities. As long as it is not the case, we will maintain and increase pressure on Russia's economy and its proxies through sanctions. A ceasefire is vital to ending human suffering, enabling the exchange of prisoners and ensuring the return of children. To this end it is important to reinforce EU's global outreach in order to further engage partners around the globe. We reiterate our steadfast commitment to providing continued multifaceted support to Ukraine and its people for as long as necessary and without prejudice to the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States. This also includes making the best possible use of Russian frozen assets. The latter should be done in compliance with the EU and international law, while ensuring a fair risk sharing with our G7 partners, with conditionalities for Ukraine fit for purpose to strengthen reforms on its European path. We also stress the importance of ensuring accountability under international law for the most serious crimes committed in Ukraine.

We condemn, in the strongest possible terms, the reckless **Russian violations** of EU Member States' airspace. Such actions pose a direct threat to European security and international peace. In this regard the EU should enhance its autonomous defence capacity in order to effectively contain and deter strategic threats, wherever they come from.

We reiterate that Europe must become more sovereign, more responsible for its own **security and defence**, and better equipped to act and deal autonomously with immediate and future challenges and threats. In this context we stress the importance of ensuring the defence of all EU land, air and maritime borders, with a 360° approach. We also emphasise the need to reinforce EU's preparedness against foreign hybrid threats, including disinformation, cyberattacks, and attempts to disrupt critical infrastructure.

We underline the EU's strategic interest in ensuring a stable and secure environment in the **Eastern Mediterranean** and in the development of a cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship with Türkiye in line with established conditionalities. Issues must be resolved by peaceful means and in full respect of international law, including UNCLOS. The sovereignty and territorial integrity of all EU Member States must be upheld, and their sovereign rights fully respected.



We reiterate our commitment to a comprehensive settlement of the **Cyprus question**, within the UN framework, as defined by relevant UNSCRs, and in line with EU law, values, and principles. We express appreciation for the efforts of the UN Secretary-General, which have led to continuation of dialogue between all parties, and which must pave the way for official resumption of negotiations within the agreed framework. We welcome the appointment by the European Commission of Johannes Hahn as Special envoy for Cyprus, as well as the March 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. We stress that Türkiye's concrete contribution to the swift resumption and successful conduct of negotiations remains crucial, and a key element in advancing EU-Türkiye relations in line with April 2024 European Council Conclusions. We also maintain that the avoidance of unilateral actions – including those in Varosha and along the ceasefire line – is essential to creating an environment conducive to the resumption of talks.

MED9 Leaders, together with His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan, adopted a separate statement on the **Middle East**.

For an EU budget fit for the future

Negotiations on the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) are taking place amid increasingly challenging and unpredictable global circumstances, demanding a robust response from the EU. The complex security situation in the world and the need to bolster competitiveness of the European economy, as stressed in the Draghi report, demand an ambitious MFF that is up to the task of providing sufficient common funding for the major investments required. New priorities, such as competitiveness, defence and security, including border protection and migration management, as well as traditional treaty-based policies, like the Cohesion policy and the Common Agricultural Policy, all have a clear European added value and should be adequately funded, with an active involvement of Member States and their regions. We underlined the importance of the work on proposals for new own resources of the EU Budget and emphasized that any new revenues should follow the principle of fairness. We welcome the Commission's proposal not to renew national rebates.

Given the urgent challenges facing the EU and the need for the Union to respond to them swiftly and decisively, we emphasise the importance of reaching an agreement on the next MFF as soon as possible, to ensure a smooth transition and its effective implementation.

We welcome Cyprus' intention to place particular emphasis on the Mediterranean region during its upcoming EU Council Presidency, including on the implementation of the Pact for the Mediterranean and on strengthening relations with countries in the region.

Our next summits will take place in Croatia in 2026 and Portugal in 2027.

