

**Meeting of the European Affairs Ministers of the Southern European (MED7) countries**  
**Athens, June 11, 2021**  
**Joint Statement**

We, the Ministers in charge of European Affairs of Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal and Spain, met in Athens on 11 June to reaffirm our commitment to our common European project and to coordinate our efforts to address the challenges that we are facing. Working together to fight the current Covid19 pandemic and deliver a sustainable recovery for our citizens, we are building the solid foundations for a stronger and more united Europe.

1. The Mediterranean is one of the richest environments in the world in terms of biodiversity, but also one of the most vulnerable ones. The degradation of marine and coastal ecosystems and the environmental challenges of the Mediterranean require common responses and the advancement of further cooperation on Mediterranean common goods. We reiterate our commitment to the protection of this shared environment and the sustainable management of its resources. Sustainable Blue Economy in the Mediterranean provides a comprehensive approach for the transformation of the blue economy sectors in line with the objectives of the European Green Deal. Both the new strategy for a sustainable blue economy presented last May by the Commission and the Council Conclusions on Sustainable Blue Economy of 26<sup>th</sup> May can contribute to meeting the challenges facing all sectors of the blue economy. June 5<sup>th</sup> marked the International Day for the fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, which poses a threat to coastal communities in the Mediterranean Sea. We call for increased action to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and ensure compliance with fisheries rules in the Mediterranean Sea, the EU acquis and international law. More broadly, we call for a stronger European maritime ambition, which by taking into account the maritime aspects in each policy, will allow the EU to answer to a number of contemporary challenges.

2. A European approach has proved essential in tackling the Covid19 pandemic. The EU manifested resilience by acting in a spirit of solidarity and cooperation. The EU vaccination strategy has been the tangible proof of a Europe that protects. More steps should continue to be taken to increase the resilience of our healthcare systems in view of future crisis situations and to safeguard our citizens' right to a healthy life. It is necessary to reinforce existing EU health agencies (ECDC and EMA) and promote the creation of an EU agency for medical research and innovation (HERA). Restoring free movement within the EU and international travelling is key for the day after. The European decision on the EU Digital Covid Certificate will significantly facilitate the movement of citizens and will help boost tourism and our economies, at the same time protecting public health.

3. Next Generation EU is the EU's emblematic response to address the economic effects of the pandemic crisis. Its major component, the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RFF) will help our economies to recover, make them greener and more digital and lead them to a higher level of growth and overall socio-economic development. It is of vital importance that the Recovery and Resilience Facility starts bearing fruit for our citizens and businesses, without delay. We urge all Member States and the European Commission to make every effort so that the Recovery and Resilience Plans are approved quickly and funding starts flowing into the economies as soon as possible. Under these exceptional circumstances we welcome the continued application of the general escape clause in 2022. We need to open the discussion at EU level for further European efforts to support growth and investment and guarantee an effective EU economic governance also after the Covid 19 pandemic.

4. Complementing the Next Generation EU mechanism, the Updated New Industrial Strategy of Europe and the Digital Compass constitute an integrated policy framework for EU's economic recovery, aimed at the green and digital transformations. "Building back, better and greener" is both an opportunity and a cross-sectoral challenge. In this respect, we look forward to the Commission proposal on climate neutrality, including on the carbon border adjustment mechanism

among other measures of the “fit for fifty five” package. Sustainable recovery will depend on economic, social and territorial cohesion. Implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, in line with the Commission’s relevant Action Plan, as endorsed at the Porto Social Summit of 7-8 May 2021, is the best way to ensure that this historical transformation is conducted in fair terms, leaving no one behind, including platform workers. There won’t be a successful European recovery without a strong social dimension, which takes into account the new realities we live in, in respect of the relevant competences.

5. Migration remains an international strategic challenge for our Union and requires a comprehensive approach. We condemn all attempts to instrumentalise migratory flows for political purposes and we highlight the need to continue the fight against smuggling of migrants and trafficking of human beings. It is crucial that the EU addresses the root causes of migration and develops further our cooperation in a Team Europe spirit with countries of origin and transit of migratory flows in all migration routes, which must effectively act in preventing irregular migratory flows towards all member states in a non-discriminatory manner through the use of necessary leverage. This cooperation should take place through comprehensive, balanced and tailored-made partnerships, making coordinated use of all available EU and Member States’ instruments and policies, including through a specialized dialogue on issues of common interest on Justice and Home Affairs. In order to contribute to the orderly management of migration flows, we underline the need to develop sustainable legal pathways, including for those in need of protection and to attract talent to the EU. At the same time, we need a European coordinated approach to ensure returns, in a dignified manner, of persons that do not have the right to remain in EU territory. The EU should also work on legal channels of migration, such as humanitarian corridors, and step up cooperation with the United Nations, in particular with UNHCR and IOM, in the implementation of the European Commission’s proposal for an EU Strategy on voluntary returns, and evacuations from the reception centres. The new Pact on Migration and Asylum needs to strike the necessary balance between fair sharing of responsibility and solidarity. We reiterate our full commitment to reach this goal and welcome the progress made by the Portuguese Presidency on the discussions of the Pact.

6. The Schengen Area has been confronted with various challenges during the Covid19 pandemic and over the past years. We reiterate our wish to restore a normal functioning of the Schengen area. A reform is therefore needed to ensure a resilient and functional Schengen area. As emphasized by the Communication of the European Commission “Towards a fully functional and efficient Schengen area”, this reform should focus on strengthening external borders, through enhanced surveillance and prevention of unauthorized border crossings, deepening police and judicial cooperation and reinforcing the governance and political steering of Schengen. The implementation of a new IT-architecture and the growing role of FRONTEX at our external borders, the development and use of innovative technologies and continued coordination on measures taken within the Schengen area can further boost its resilience to be better prepared for future crises.

7. Recalling the European Union’s strategic interest in a stable and secure environment in the Eastern Mediterranean we, the Southern European countries, act as a pillar of stability in this region by sharing the same approach with regard to these challenges and the same vision about the region’s future. We wish to extend our cooperation to all neighbouring countries. We call on all countries in the region to respect the sovereignty and sovereign rights of all EU Member States, as well as international law, including the law of the sea. As set out in relevant European Council Conclusions, as well as the Statement of the Members of the European Council of 25<sup>th</sup> March 2021, it is fundamental that Turkey unequivocally abides by the above stated principles as well as that of good neighbourly relations and that it permanently abstains from renewed provocations or unilateral actions in breach of international law. We underline that the delimitation of the Continental Shelf and the Exclusive Economic Zone should be addressed through dialogue and negotiation in good faith, in full respect of international law, including UNCLOS. We call on Turkey

to accept the invitation by Cyprus to engage in dialogue on the delimitation of the maritime zones between their relevant coasts, including by submitting the issue to the International Court of Justice.

We reiterate our strong commitment to a viable comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus issue on the basis of a bicomunal, bizonal federation with political equality, as set out in the relevant UNSC Resolutions, which are binding for all, and in line with the EU acquis, values and principles. Efforts to resume negotiations should not be further undermined by illegal and provocative behavior in the Maritime Zones and on the territory of Cyprus. In case of such actions we reaffirm the determination of the European Union to use the instruments and options at its disposal to defend its interests and those of its Member States as well as to uphold regional stability. We deplore the position expressed during the meeting on Cyprus held in Geneva on 27-29 April calling for a "two state solution" and recall that it remains crucial that Turkey commits to the agreed basis in line with UN Resolutions, in particular Resolution 1251. We express grave concern regarding violations in Varosha and recall the importance of the status of Varosha as set out in United Nations Security Council resolutions, in particular resolution 550 (1984) and resolution 789 (1992). We stress the importance of implementing these resolutions and call for the immediate reversal of all violations.

8. The stability and prosperity of North Africa is also a strategic priority, including to ensure the stability of the whole Mediterranean region. We, the Southern European countries, support EU engagement and reiterate our efforts to resolve the ongoing crisis in Libya, in the framework of the UN-led Berlin Process. We reaffirm the importance of holding elections on 24 December, as set out in the Roadmap agreed upon by the Libyans to allow free and democratic elections. In parallel, we call on all involved to fully implement the 23 October ceasefire agreement, including through the timely withdrawal of all foreign forces and mercenaries from Libya.

9. Based on the Council Conclusions of 16 April 2021 on a Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood - A new Agenda for the Mediterranean, we reaffirm our commitment to cooperate for the implementation of the new Agenda, including through the reinforcement of the political dialogue at all levels and by exploring the most proper use of funding mechanisms, with NDICI – Global Europe as the key tool through an active role in the current programming exercise. In this light, we look forward to the next Regional Forum of the Union for the Mediterranean as well as to a new Ministerial meeting with our Southern partners during the second semester of 2021. We recall our continued support to the promotion of the role of women in society and economy, sustainable opportunities for Youth as well as green transition and the fight against climate change which is critical in the Mediterranean region. In this respect, our contribution to the negotiation of new instruments such as the carbon border adjustment mechanism, could contribute to promote a consistent and ambitious EU climate policy addressing the issue of climate change. We will continue to explore possibilities to commonly address blue economy sustainability issues and step up our cooperation with Southern Neighbours.

By working together, we build on our vision for a stronger and more united Europe that upholds our fundamental principles and values. As Southern EU Member States, we call for EU's continued engagement in the Mediterranean, a region of strategic importance to our Union's prosperity, security and stability. We will continue our coordination, in particular in view of the upcoming European Councils and the Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Southern EU Member States.