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MedCities is a regional network of 57 cities and metropolitan areas from 15 Mediterranean countries that works in the field of urban sustainable development. Since its creation in 1991 the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona (AMB) – where MedCities has its headquarters – and Barcelona City Council have been important supporters. After many years of working under the umbrella of the administrative system of the AMB, in 2017 MedCities began to operate as an independent association.

At the international level, no common legislation exists to cover the operation of international networks. For this reason, many networks act under national legislations that govern associations. This is a complicated and bureaucratic process with many obstacles. However, at the same time offers greater flexibility in terms of procedures, visibility and the capacity to act in relation to third parties.

MedCities acts as a platform for both projects and capacity building in Mediterranean local governments. The areas in which MedCities has been a significant actor in the region include the preparation of city development strategies, waste management in urban areas, the use of public space, economic development, tourism and the protection and promotion of cultural and natural assets. At the same time, MedCities promotes city-to-city initiatives, international conferences, training and capitalisation activities among its members.

The population of cities and metropolitan areas in the Mediterranean will increase to 22.5 million inhabitants by 2025. Despite recent changes to the decentralisation process in many southern Mediterranean countries – as illustrated by the first Tunisian local elections since the revolution held in May 2018 – local governments in the region remain very weak. To address this problem, MedCities aims to reinforce the role of mayors, elected representatives and technical staff.

MedCities finances its activities through the support of a number of Catalan Institutions (AMB, Barcelona City Council and the Catalan Agency for Cooperation), membership fees, and projects financed by

international institutions such as the European Commission, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ). It also mediates between its member cities and donors that are interested in financing local projects.

The cosmos of international networks is extensive and in recent years new actors, such as philanthropic institutions, have emerged, backed by significant means and a clear will to work on urban and metropolitan projects. MedCities does not aim to compete with these actors. Instead, its closeness to the territory of the Mediterranean and its longstanding working relationship with cities and mayors in the region make it a relevant ally. MedCities is also open to and active in establishing specific partnerships with powerful organisations such as the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM)¹, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), Cities Alliance and the CPMR-Intermediterranean Commission². Further, the association works with regional organisations, including the Association of the Mediterranean Chambers of Commerce and Industry (ASCAME) the Mediterranean Universities Union (UNIMED), the Mediterranean Water Institute (IME)³, and The Mediterranean World Economic Foresight Institute (L'Institut de Prospective Economique du Monde Méditerranéen - IPEMED), and pairs its efforts with other territorial city networks, such as the Forum of Adriatic and Ionian Cities, the Conference of Atlantic Arc Cities and the Eixo Atlántico.

The Mediterranean region is currently suffering many problems and conflicts. In the global arena mayors and local leaders are increasingly involved in the drafting processes of the large international agreements such as the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, the Paris Agreement and the New Urban Agenda (Habitat III). Unfortunately, what is still lacking is shared political action and leadership by mayors that have shown their commitment to addressing the challenges that our planet and the Mediterranean region in particular are facing.

In the last few years, local governments have received support from big donors and they have also been able to rely on international financial institutions that have increased their lending operations for large urban projects. The problem is that when these institutions act in developing countries, they often do not consider local governments to be reliable partners and prefer to collaborate with national governments and their agencies. This is the case with the Urban Project Finance Initiative (UPFI) of UfM, which aims to identify and finance urban infrastructure initiatives. Among the projects that this initiative has identified the Sfax Taparura project or the Oued Martil in Tetouan stand out, both of which are large projects of urban transformation in which the local governments do not have leading roles.

As indicated above, the question of financing is key for the sustainability of city networks. For many years the European Union (EU) has played a crucial role in the creation and maintenance of city networks through its policies and financial instruments. Unfortunately, the EU financial instruments currently available do not respond to the Mediterranean reality and the work of MedCities. For example, the Med Programme that is financed under the framework of the EU Cohesion Policy only covers the Mediterranean countries within the EU. Similarly, the cross-border

1. The official full Spanish name is *La Asamblea Regional y Local Euromediterránea*.

2. The official full Spanish name is *Comisión Intermediterránea de la Conferencia de Regiones Periféricas Marítimas de Europa*.

3. The official full Spanish name is *Instituto Mediterraneo del Agua*.

programmes of the European Neighbourhood Policy – such as ENI CBCMED-Cooperating across borders in the Mediterranean – do not allow for the participation of countries like Morocco, Algeria and Turkey. Cooperation in the Mediterranean requires more specific financial instruments to promote partnerships and support local governments in addressing their needs.

The city of Barcelona hosts the headquarters of an important number of city and regional networks (including, UCLG, Metropolis, MedCities, the CPMR-Intermediterranean Commission, Educating Cities, the Ibero-American Centre for Urban Strategic Development (CIDEU),⁴ Euroregion Pyrenees Mediterranean ⁵) as well as thematic networks. However, we don't make the most of this hub of networks. There is a lack of regular coordination and insufficient appropriation by relevant stakeholders in the city.

City networks are changing the way they work by paying attention to new platforms and players without sacrificing their original aims and principles. However, within this new context city networks will have to evolve, offering added-value services and products and partnering with other networks in order to be competitive and effective.

4. The official full Spanish name is *Centro Iberoamericano de Desarrollo Estratégico Urbano*.

5. The official full Spanish name is *Euroregion Pyrenees Mediterranean*.

