Innovations in Public Administration in the Mediterranean Region:
Lessons Learnt and Future Prospects

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Your Excellencies, distinguished experts, Mr. Chairperson,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is an honour and pleasure to be here today at the Dubai School of Government in this wonderful city of Dubai, which is vibrant, dynamic and encourages new ideas and welcomes innovation in governance as attested by its renowned Dubai Government Excellence program. Allow me also to underline that this meeting is innovative per se not only because of the themes that are very relevant to innovation, but also because it has used one of the key ingredients of innovation in governance that is partnerships between different organizations and people working together in the same direction. We are all here today because we believe in the crucial value of knowledge sharing for better governance and a better life for all citizens.

Innovation in public administration is not a passing trend, but an imperative for all governments around the world

All countries around the world face complex domestic and global challenges and need to find innovative ways to respond efficiently and effectively to a variety of economic and social issues, which are constantly evolving and require continuous fine-tuning as the global and domestic environment change. Since improving good governance is not a one-time exercise, but an open-ended process, innovation in governance is a must for all countries. Public administration needs to be transformed into a responsive instrument to meet the needs of all citizens, including the poor, and to be accountable to the most vulnerable populations. It must innovate its organizational structure, its practices, its capacities, and how it mobilizes, deploys and utilizes the human, material, information, technological and financial resources for service delivery and become a learning organization that is able to explore and find new and better ways of achieving its mission. There is a need to change working methods in the public sector—work is no longer predictable and repetitive and authority structures must change since the power of the office needs to be combined with the power of ideas. Failure to transform bureaucratic organizations into learning organizations can result in a loss of relevance and significance of the mission of the State. Public sector
reform and innovation is thus one of the most important ingredients in reinvigorating the economy and in allowing countries to integrate into the global economy, as well as providing some degree of social justice in society. As such, innovation in governance and public administration should not be regarded as a fashion or trend of the moment.

It is equally important to bear in mind that innovation is not an end in itself. It is a means to improve public administration in order to enhance the quality of life for all citizens. It is a way to solve a problem of public concern in a new and effective way. In his renowned book on “Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy”, Schumpeter states that: “Innovation is mankind’s effort to endlessly pursue change for a better world”. As it is well-known, he was applying this concept to the economic field, but it can also be applied “mutatis mutandis” to governance and public administration, which however differs from the economic space in one major way, i.e. that it needs to strike a balance between universal principles of neutrality, public interest and fairness with change and adaptation to evolving circumstances.

**Critical role of sharing knowledge on innovations in governance and the purpose of InnovMed in the region**

Sharing knowledge on innovations and successful practices in governance and public administration can provide governments with a set of concrete and workable options on how to achieve internationally agreed goals and to promote growing economic and social prosperity. Focusing on innovations affords the opportunity to shift attention from what governments should do to respond to increasingly complex challenges to how they can do it.

While there is wide consensus at the international level on what should be done to accelerate development and prosperity, there seems to be less shared knowledge and capacity on how to do so. Knowledge on how to achieve the Millennium Development Goals exists, but it is often fragmented and spread among several countries. It is, in fact, not unusual that a government has been able to address challenges in one development area but not in others.
It is within this framework that the Programme for Innovation in Public Administration in the Euro-Mediterranean Region – InnovMed has been established. Allow me to mention that the InnovMed programme is implemented by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, through its Division for Public Administration and Development Management (DPADM), in collaboration with Formez, and with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Government of Italy. Key activities are undertaken jointly by UNDESA and Formez through the Centre for Administrative Innovation in the Euro-Mediterranean Region – C.A.I.Med, which is based in Naples, Italy. The aim of the InnovMed Programme, which encompasses Northern Africa, parts of the Middle East and of Western Asia -including the Balkans- is to support innovation in governance and public administration in the countries of the Mediterranean region with a view to enhancing social and economic prosperity. By sharing knowledge and through a number of activities and tools, including transferring and adapting innovations across countries, the Governments of the region are inspired by the success stories of other countries.

**Innovation in governance and public administration in the Mediterranean Region**

Innovation in governance is high on the agenda of most countries in the region which are seeking to improve how their governments operate and the type and quality of services they offer to their citizens. As a result of several meetings, studies and reports conducted within the framework of the InnovMed programme, we were able to provide an overview of the experience and knowledge coming from the region in terms of innovations in governance and to share it with a wider audience through a publication entitled: “Innovations in Governance and Public Administration in the Mediterranean Region” which is being printed as we speak.

I would like to take this opportunity to share with you some of the key lessons that have emerged from the many innovations that have taken place across the region and to discuss some future perspectives on how to encourage even more innovation in the region. I believe that some of these lessons learned or key ideas could also serve as a platform for further discussion.
Before summing them up, I wish to mention that the innovations that we will refer to have either won or been short-listed for the United Nations Public Service Awards or have been selected as exemplary by national experts who worked together with national government officials to provide an overview of the problems addressed, the process and results achieved by the innovation. Therefore by no means are the innovations mentioned in this presentation or book exhaustive. But whether it is turning around an underperforming state-owned enterprise in Egypt, professionalizing systems managing human resources in Jordan, changing to functional differentiation in organizational setups in Lebanon or downsizing the public sector through an attractive retirement package scheme in Morocco, the common denominator is that they all had one thing in common: they were coming up with solutions to enhance public sector performance and ultimately benefit their citizens, their businesses and their future stability and prosperity. These innovations include the following:

- **An Exemplary Case of Innovation in Public Administration in Dubai**: The Government Excellence Awards;
- **Boosting business by decentralizing the quality control of fruits and vegetables for export**, Morocco;
- **Improving quality of public service delivery through the “citizen supervisor” and one-stop shops**, Tunisia;
- **Improving employment by decentralizing public employment services** in Spain;
- **Improving business by re-engineering customs operations** in Jordan;
- **Increasing school enrollment and reducing disease by providing clean water to the rural populations** in Morocco;
- **Providing faster service by automating service request procedures** in Egypt;
- **Obtaining official documents made easy by integrating services into a “one-call shop”** in Greece;
- **Bundling information, transaction and citizens’ attention** in Italy;
- **Computerizing the civil records system**, Ministry of Interior, Syria
- **Turning-around a state-owned enterprise**, Telecom Egypt, Egypt;
- **Professionalizing HRM**, Jordan Institution for Standards and Metrology and Drivers and Vehicles Licensing Department, Jordan;
• *Introducing new tax-policies and organizational change*, Ministry of Finance, Lebanon; Implementing a voluntary retirement scheme, Ministry of Public Sector Modernization, Morocco;

• *Rating maintenance of education facilities*, Municipality of Pogradec in Albania;

• *Bringing global concerns to the local level through participatory processes*, Agenda 21, United Cities and Local Governments, Middle East and West Asia, Turkey

• *Computerizing the civil records system*, Ministry of Interior, Syria

• *Establishing a civil service agency*, Ministry of Civil Affairs and Communications, Bosnia and Herzegovina

• *Achieving equal representation of ethnic minorities in public administration*, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; and

• *Teaching students a valuable lesson: Requiring community service before graduation* in Jordan;

**Lessons Learned**

**Positive Effects of Innovation in Governance and Public Administration**

Experience from across the region has shown that introducing innovations in governance can have a number of positive results.

- First, it can help maximize the utilization of resources and capacities to create public value as well as encourage a more service oriented culture in government, therefore improving good governance in general.

- Second, by improving the services and therefore image of the public sector it can help governments improve their legitimacy and perform even better.

- Third, innovation in governance can boost the pride of civil servants working in the public sector, as well as encourage a culture of excellence and continuous improvement. Innovations can have an inspirational capacity which builds a sense of the possible among public officials.

- Fourth, although innovations are limited governance interventions or micro-level initiatives, they can produce a domino effect in that a successful innovation in one sector can open the door to innovations in other areas. Each innovation can create the opportunity for a series of innovations leading to a favorable environment for
positive change. Innovations can lead to building a new block of an institution, and change the relationship between levels of government and within government departments.

Types of innovation in governance and public administration
In terms of types of innovations across the region, it is interesting to note that some involved organizational innovation (including the introduction of new working procedures or management techniques in public administration); others involved process innovation and focused on the improvement of the quality of public services; yet others implied institutional innovations as in the case of Bosnia where a new institution was introduced to deal in a more innovative way with human resources management. In other cases there were more conceptual innovations which implied the introduction of new forms of governance as in the case of Turkey.

Emerging strategies for innovation for improving the quality and performance of the public sector
An important element which has emerged from analysing the successful practices in governance and public administration throughout the region is that there are at the moment five key strategies and trends in the effort to enhance public sector performance:

1. Integrating services
2. Decentralizing service delivery and monitoring
3. Utilizing partnerships
4. Taking advantage of information and communication technologies
5. Engaging citizens

**Integrating Services** - With public sectors offering an increased number of services, citizens have come to expect not simply that services are provided, but that they also meet their needs and expectations. This is, for example, the case of Tunisia that has recently established one-stop shops.
**Decentralizing Service Delivery and Monitoring** - Decentralizing service delivery and monitoring: Decentralizing services encourages economic development. For instance, on the supply side, Morocco’s PAGER project by bringing water to the rural population would not have been feasible if it had not been for the devolvement of the operation and maintenance of water facilities in the local communities. In the same line, it was the establishment of regional – instead of centralized – control facilities for inspecting fresh fruits and vegetables that Moroccan businesses stopped wasting time and money transporting their produce to far-away inspection facilities and were finally able to compete successfully in the international market.

**Utilizing Partnerships** - As governments innovate to meet the public’s increasing demand for more efficient delivery of services, there is more inter-agency collaboration as well as public-private partnerships. In Croatia, for instance, the collaboration between judges, law professors, lawyers and law students, working together in an NGO, has resulted in a web-based legal information infrastructure, called the Judges' web, in order improve the transparency, efficiency of and access to Croatia's judicial system. The Judges' web is considered one of the most innovative practices in the Croatian judicial administration, and its efforts have been recognized and praised by the Ministry of Justice to an extent where the project has been incorporated into the overall legal reform strategy.

**Taking advantage of Information and Communication Technologies** - As the United Nations World Public Sector Report 2003 points out the use of internet-based services to cut red tape is spreading rapidly throughout the public sector in so many countries. The internet can also be useful as a means of advancing and consolidating transparency in public administration. For example, the Customs Department in Jordan has embraced advanced technology to enhance the quality of the functions they perform. A program for modernization of customs administrations and procedures has been implemented as well as a V-SAT communications network that facilitates communication between Headquarters and the local centers, and among the centers.
Engaging citizens: Innovative government authorities have also come to realize that when they provide forums for the public to express what they want and engage them in all stages of the process, the resulting innovations are more likely to succeed and spread. In Jordan for example, the University of Amman by requiring that each undergraduate student spend 10 hours in community service each semester contributes not only to invaluable support to marginalized groups such as orphans, elderly, and disabled persons, but also to the development of educated citizens who are more likely to be concerned about improving their communities.

It is also interesting to note that innovation can be jump-started not only by governments, but also by citizens with the government playing only a supporting role, like in the case of Croatia or Albania. Moreover, innovations can occur at all levels of government, at central and local levels.

What Helps Innovation in Public Administration
The aforementioned trends inspired by the study of the innovations across the Mediterranean region lead us to extrapolate a number of lessons learned in terms of factors that made innovation possible, which can also serve as strategies for those pursuing innovation.

1) Effective leadership and committed staff. Every innovation comes about because of a change in attitude and belief among people working in the public sector who have a shared vision and the common goal to make a difference by enhancing the quality of life of citizens. All the innovations occurred in part because of the high priority and value given to human resources in the public sector or as the result of a change in human resources management. Looking at the different innovations, the key element of success is taking a holistic approach to human resources management where a mix of instruments is adopted to change the organizational culture and instil a culture of excellence (example of Morocco, Jordan).
2) **Organizational culture and policies supportive of innovation**, promotion of teamwork and partnerships; promotion of lifelong learning; and diversity in the public sector.

3) **Accurate assessment of the problem as well as strategic planning, monitoring, follow-up and evaluation**, and decentralized management. Experience from the region shows that careful assessment of the problem to be addressed is critical to the success of innovation, as well as continuous re-evaluation of planning and management and that decentralized management works better since a network of equal partners at the local level jointly working towards the same goal is in many cases the optimal recipe for success.

4) **Alignment of three key pillars in public administration: human resources, institutions, and policies.** It is critical for any administration to align these three factors in order to implement and ensure success of an innovation or reform. The public sector must be able to recruit and retain the best people that meet its organizational needs and to create a motivating environment for them. The structures are as vital as the two previously mentioned factors. Without efficient institutions reform efforts would have little chance for success, as would be the case if there was no adjustment in the policy sphere.

5) **Political support may be crucial.** It is important to go beyond the focus on legal frameworks to acknowledge a variety of other factors that influence reform initiatives and innovations. Political, institutional, social, cultural, and economic factors can contribute to the success of implementing innovations and successful practices or conversely undermine it.

6) **Building horizontal networks across government.** In other words, innovative service delivery demands organizational adaptation and a holistic approach to service delivery in order to address the complexity of social and economic issues. In the case of Jordan, different ministries and entities worked together to share information and cooperate through teams.

7) **Engaging citizens and local participation, as well as partnerships.** An innovation that has more chance to succeed is the one implemented in concert with all major actors. It is crucial to agree on the desirability of both the objectives and the means
for achieving them. Inclusiveness, empowerment and commitment of all stakeholders (building teams and partnerships) is key to innovation;

8) **Sharing information with the public and two-ways communication** are key to improving the quality of public administration since any changes should reflect and respond to the public concerns of citizens;

9) **Using, when possible, systems, techniques and information technology** are of paramount importance;

10) **Small, targeted projects spark commitment and further innovation.** They not only better address priority issues, but also increase the commitment of local stakeholders to the process, binding them together around concrete areas of joint action.

When tackling lessons learnt, one must not overlook the challenges and/or difficulties encountered while introducing any innovation and inherent to any reform process. The challenges also allow public institutions to perform better as particular attention, focus as well as time are allocated in order to avoid similar drawbacks in the future. While the challenges are many, so are the opportunities for public administration. It can stimulate more reform and transform into success once the undermining factors are identified and corrected. Success usually creates a reform momentum throughout the administration that can travel beyond a specific country’s borders and trigger more change in another administration.

**Future prospects for innovation in the region – the Network of Innovators in Governance and Public Administration in the Mediterranean Region**

As for the InnovMed programme, the way ahead is already paved and a number of activities have been planned. After having undertaken an assessment of the priorities and challenges in reforming public administration in all of the participating countries -exclusively through the countries themselves identifying their own needs- one of the next phases of the programme is the launch of pilot projects for spreading out innovations inspired by success stories from other countries within and beyond the Mediterranean region. UNDESA, within the framework of the Programme, and in collaboration with Formez, through CAIMED, will
facilitate the transfer and adaptation of successful practices throughout the region and many countries have already expressed great interest in this type of activity.

Another important event is the launch of the Network of Innovators in Governance in the Mediterranean Region. In less than two months from today, a technical meeting for the launch of the Network of Innovators will take place in Marseille, France. As previously noted, partnerships are crucial and sine qua non to any endeavor. The more partners are involved in a project the more chances it has to bring about success as the expertise as well as experience of the different stakeholders enhances the possibilities of success. The Marseille meeting, which constitutes one of the main activities of the InnovMed programme, is organized in collaboration with the World Bank Institute as well as the contribution of other international and regional organizations and other institutions from the academic world.

Those are just some of the future perspectives within the InnovMed programme. In a complementing way, I wish before ending to stress the very importance of the establishment of Awards programmes to reward innovation in the public sector at the national as well as regional and international levels since it provides an immense incentive to spur public sector reform. Several governments represented here today have established such mechanisms. I mentioned our host country earlier. Other countries in the Arab region include Jordan and Morocco.

At the international level, it is needless to mention the United Nations Public Service Awards. We cannot but over-emphasize the crucial role it plays in discovering, rewarding and sharing innovations in public administration and governance. Through rewarding excellence and innovation in Government made to the cause of enhancing the role, prestige and visibility of public service, the award ceremony on Public service day -23 June of each year- has proved a very effective tool for gathering experiences in revitalizing public administration through innovations that improve public administration results, the quality of its processes, radical departures from routine, applying information and communication.
The public service awards thus celebrate efficient, competent, professional, responsive and highly dedicated public service.

When innovation works – when a government can take a good idea through all the necessary and difficult steps that change in society requires, the results are always worth the effort. All the innovations across the Mediterranean region are significant -- whether the innovation is large or small, in one government institution or across the board, a large successful transformation or merely a small first step on the way to reform, they indicate each country’s willingness to change – to be tolerant of and open to new ways of thinking and acting and running the government. And it is that spirit of openness to change that is the key not only to survival but to future prosperity, for all of us, in the Mediterranean region and around the globe.

This is the spirit that guides the work of our Programme for Innovation in Public Administration in the Mediterranean Region and more in general that of our Division and the United Nations, namely “how to innovate to make a difference for better governance”. Your feedback on innovations in your respective countries is very important in order to share these experiences with others and further promote innovation in governance. I would like to end with two critical questions: How can the Network of Innovators become an important tool for innovation in the region? How can the UN better assist countries in the region to introduce innovation in the public sector?

I wish to all of the participants very fruitful and enriching deliberations, and a pleasant stay in this beautiful city of Dubai.

Thank you.