

## **Presentation of Aleix Villatoro i Oliver, new MedCities Secretary-General**

### **Introduction**

MedCities welcomes Aleix Villatoro i Oliver as its new Secretary General. Mr. Villatoro brings extensive experience in public administration and international relations, having previously served as the Secretary General of the European Union and Foreign Action Department of the Government of Catalonia, and as the Director of the Catalan Sports Council. His diverse professional background also includes management in the cultural sector, as well as academic experience as a university lecturer. In this interview, he shares his vision, upcoming strategic challenges, and his commitment to strengthening the Mediterranean network.

### **How do you approach this new professional chapter at MedCities?**

I am starting this chapter with great enthusiasm and a strong desire to deeply understand the realities and specific needs of the 91 member cities that make up our network. At the same time, we must analyze how these local needs connect with the rapidly evolving reality of the Mediterranean. We are operating in a complex, challenging context that requires us to rethink our mechanisms for cooperation, whether between different shores, cities, territories, or states.

Fortunately, MedCities starts from a privileged position. Over the years, the association has built a high-quality network of partnerships, successful projects, and mutual trust. This foundation is one of our greatest assets for tackling the shared challenges of the Mediterranean region.

Moving forward, this work will be developed in close coordination with the MedCities Presidency and the Board of Directors. My commitment is to ensure our approach remains proactive, ambitious, and pragmatic. Furthermore, it is essential to empower outstanding professionals within the General Secretariat. By leveraging their specialized knowledge and proven technical expertise, we will successfully build upon the excellent work accomplished so far.

### **What strategic direction should MedCities take during this new phase?**

MedCities and its Secretariat have demonstrated exceptional expertise and credibility in fields such as sustainable development, climate change mitigation, and environmental resilience within the specific context of the Mediterranean. We will continue to drive projects focused on the sustainability and resilience of cities, social inclusion, economic equity including gender equality, and environmental protection, with a focus on coastal and maritime areas. While we align our efforts with the global 2030 Agenda and its 17

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), our day-to-day focus remains on the practical, on-the-ground needs of our cities.

However, we must also acknowledge that the Mediterranean is currently impacted by overlapping crises, including climate emergencies, migration pressures, and ongoing armed conflicts in several member territories. We must remain highly attentive and offer close, steadfast support to those members experiencing the harsh realities of conflicts.

To navigate this landscape, we will strengthen our technical structure. I have found a highly committed, top-tier team whose expertise will remain a fundamental pillar of our growth. To translate this into action, our roadmap will on four priorities:

- Analyze the functioning of the General Secretariat to implement improvements.
- Review the relationship between the network and the Secretariat to maximize collaboration and participation mechanisms.
- Strengthen the visibility and active participation of our members in key Mediterranean and international forums.
- Conduct a rigorous assessment of MedCités' financial situation to navigate economic uncertainties and ensure long-term stability.

### **What is your primary message to the member cities of the network?**

My central message is clear: MedCités is, above all, at the service of its members. The needs of our cities have naturally evolved since the network was founded over three decades ago. Therefore, our immediate and mid-term priority is to actively listen to our members, identify their current challenges, and deploy our expertise to help turn their projects into realities.

We will achieve this through close, direct engagement, reinforcing our mechanisms for listening, learning, and sharing knowledge. To deliver on this commitment, we will focus on four strategic actions in the coming months:

- Establish systematic channels of communication to better assess member needs, local contexts, and potential cooperation gaps.
- Propose an update of the MedCités Strategic Plan to ensure our goals align with current Mediterranean challenges.
- Explore diverse funding mechanisms to build a realistic, ambitious, and multi-year financial strategy that guarantees the network's viability.
- Measure the local, regional and international influence of MedCités and upgrade our communication strategies to position our member cities as leading, influential actors in the Mediterranean arena.

It has been a month since I was elected Secretary General. This is an exciting challenge that I intend to approach with humility, commitment, and responsibility.

I look forward to meeting with you soon. I remain at your disposal.