

# ENVIRONMENTAL COOPERATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN: THE LONG DISTANCE FROM WORDS TO DEEDS

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## Introduction

There is no shortage of institutions and grand commitments to promote environmental cooperation in the Mediterranean. In 1975, sixteen riparian countries agreed under the aegis of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) on a Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP) that was later followed by the adoption of the Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea Against Pollution, and a number of protocols on dumping from ships and aircraft, emergencies, land-based sources of pollution (LBS), specially protected areas, offshore activities, movement of hazardous wastes and integrated coastal zone management (Haas, P.M., 1989). Under this same umbrella, and as a response to the momentum that the 1992 Rio Conference gave to environmental policies, a Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development was established in 1995 that ten years later produced a toothless Mediterranean Strategy on Sustainable Development.

In 1995, the launching of the Barcelona Process put environmental policies on the agenda of Euro-Mediterranean relations. Thus, on the bilateral track the Association Agreements with Mediterranean partners contain a (vague) article on environmental cooperation, and on the regional track a programme was set up to deal with “short and medium-term priorities” (SMAP). In 2005 the latter programme was substituted by a more ambitious target. With the aim of providing momentum for the environment in the EMP, and under the idea that the Barcelona Process had to deliver more visible results, the 2005 Summit agreed on the objective of de-polluting the Mediterranean Sea by 2020 (the so-called Horizon 2020 process).<sup>1</sup> Besides, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) has its own environmental provisions too. Finally, the more recent Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) has added yet another layer of overarching commitments which, given the overcrowding of frameworks, focus on the enhancement of the H2020 process.

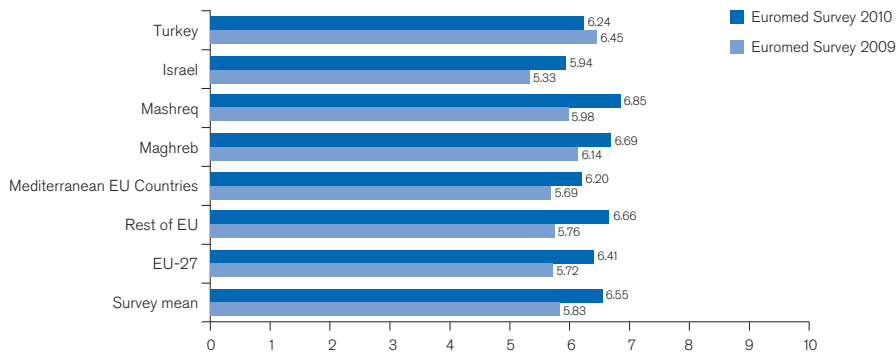
In short, states and EU institutions have been eager to talk about the protection of the Mediterranean Sea in every available forum. This resonates with the perception captured by the Survey that de-polluting the Mediterranean is an important objective for the Euro-Mediterranean region. It also resonates with the (ever more) wide-spread idea that “environmental deterioration in the Mediterranean will reach a level threatening the living conditions and economic activities of riparian States”. According to the survey, the probability attributed to such a hypothesis by experts and practitioners has grown from 5.83 to 6.55 in a year (where 0 stands for no probability, and 10 for a very high probability). Nevertheless, words and deeds are separated by a long distance: all the aforementioned schemes suffer from serious implementation problems.

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1. 10th Anniversary Euro-Mediterranean Summit-Five Year Work Programme, Barcelona, 27th and 28th November 2005.

**Graph 1: Degree of probability attributed to the potential mid- to long-term hypotheses: Environment deterioration in the Mediterranean will reach a level threatening the living conditions and economic activities of riparian States**

(average on a scale of 0-10, where 0 stands for no importance, and 10 for very high importance)

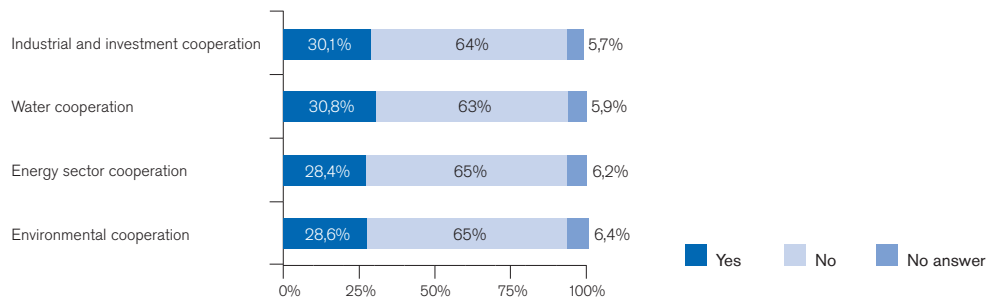


Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 2nd Euromed Survey

## I. Below the Radar

Although they make a rather dense web of institutions and norms, and show that Mediterranean countries and the EU have long pledged to jointly tackle environmental problems, cooperation schemes on this matter are little known and poorly understood. They usually remain below the radar, particularly within the general framework of Euro-Mediterranean relations. The environment is not a central component of the neighbourhood of Euro-Mediterranean policies. The Survey shows that only 28.6% of the surveyed experts claim knowledge or a clear perception of the environmental dimension of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation (and the percentage is particularly low among EU Member States). This is ironic: back in 2005, when the idea of de-polluting the Mediterranean by 2020 was first floated by the Commission, the focus was on announcing a “highly visible and ambitious initiative.”<sup>2</sup> It seems that the H2020 process has not even managed to become visible for the community of experts and practitioners involved in Euro-Mediterranean relations.

**Graph 2: Knowledge or a clear perception of the sectoral cooperation in the Mediterranean (%)**



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 2nd Euromed Survey

However, the peripheral character of the environment within Euro-Mediterranean policies matters well beyond the issue of visibility. EU policies towards the neighbourhood differentiate between central topics and non-central or “fringe” topics (Costa, O., 2010). Different strategies can

2. Dimas, Stavros, *Environmental Protection*, Barcelona Convention and Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, speech before the European Parliament, 20th June 2005.

be pursued in each of these categories. More to the point, the use of conditionality to promote the effective adoption and implementation of norms and rules is possible only in central issues. And, of course, Mediterranean Partner Countries can be considered Mediterranean star pupils (and receive the benefits associated with it) even when they are not proactive in environmental issues, and they can be branded as laggards even when they are outstanding in the area. In other words, the EU cannot be expected to be tough in the administration of carrots and sticks, in order to promote the effective implementation of environmental policies.

Therefore, the EU has had to resort to other strategies, which can be called functional cooperation and international legitimisation (Buzogány, A. and Costa, O., 2009). Under the strategy of functional cooperation, ties are established between sectoral bureaucracies from the EU and neighbouring countries, in order to exchange resources, know-how and policy approaches, in a way similar to that described in Anne-Marie Slaughter's work on transgovernmental networks (Slaughter, A.M., 2004: 124-9). Actors dealing with the environmental dimension of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation have established alliances among themselves by exchanging financial, technical and political resources, thus reinforcing their positions in neighbourhood policies. Several tactics are used under this strategy: (i) the use of combined influence to anchor the interests of these actors in EU reference documents and financial provisions; (ii) the transfer of technical know-how to partner country efforts to influence their policy paradigms, which frequently takes place through twinning projects; and (iii) the setting up of ad hoc, EU-led regional processes and institutionalised networks that provide the Euro-Mediterranean environmental policies with more autonomy.

The second available strategy is international legitimisation. When an international regime or, more generally, an international rule exists in an issue area, the EU can foster cooperation by way of international legitimisation (Costa, O., 2010). Here, the EU reinforces its case in favour of the adoption of environmental policies by partner countries by appealing to multilateral environmental agreements, starting with the MAP system (Keck, M. and Sikkink, K., 1998: 396). Rules issued by regional or international institutions help legitimate the policy aims of actors in neighbouring countries, thus empowering their standing when bargaining with their domestic constituencies. Additionally, international institutions provide financial means and capacity-building measures to foster environmental cooperation. In sum, they encourage the adoption and implementation of environmental rules by neighbouring countries. On these occasions, the EU often acts as a transmission belt of international or regional norms (Barbé, E. et al, 2009).

Nevertheless, the two strategies have clear limits. Most importantly, their effects do not go beyond the boundaries of narrow circles of key officers in partner countries, and seldom reach the key decision-makers that can make a difference when it comes to implementing more advanced environmental policies.

## II. Knitting Different Schemes Together

The different cooperation schemes on the Mediterranean environment have developed distinct capacities. While the Mediterranean Action Plan, the Barcelona Convention and the associated protocols operate with technically fine-tuned and legally-binding instruments, as well as a certain capacity to create mutual trust among key actors (Conrads, A. et.al., 2002: 32) and a "collective awareness" of the importance of protecting the Mediterranean Sea (Skjaerseth, J.B. 1996: 48; Massoudet, M. et al., 2003: 893), Euro-Mediterranean policies have the potential to exercise greater economic and political leverage. This has resulted in the emergence of a certain division of labour among them: on the one hand, the environmental dimension of the Barcelona Process sets the objectives and should provide political and economic resources; on the other hand, the MAP system provides the expertise and the necessary institutional and legal framework. Consequently, and in order to overcome their complementary weaknesses, these schemes have been knitted together.

The system built on the 1975 Mediterranean Action Plan was a rather successful regime until the beginning of the 1990s (Haas, P., 1989). However, it has been losing momentum since then. The new protocols and the amendments to old ones (normally with more teeth) have experienced difficulties in gathering enough ratifications to come into force (Belfiore, S., 1996: 247; Conrads, A. et al., 2002: 31; Frantzi, S., 2008; Kütting, G., 2000). Therefore, links have been established between the Land-Based Sources (LBS) Protocol and the H2020. Given that the H2020 processes focus, precisely, on pollution coming from land-based sources, the decision has been taken to use its resources to finance projects identified under the National Action Programmes developed under the Strategic Action Programme of the LBS Protocol.

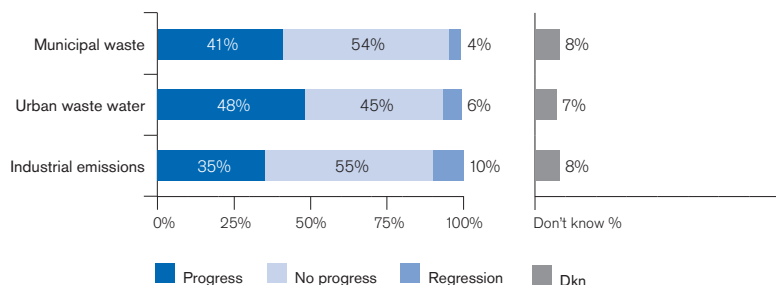
Nevertheless, an important weak point of the H2020 is that it is not really backed by a credible budget. Only €33m were earmarked in the Regional Indicative Programme 2007-2010, which equals 9% of the regional funds for the Mediterranean under the European Neighbourhood Policy Instrument.<sup>3</sup> This is a rather small amount of money (and the 2011-2013 documents provide no specific figure). However, according to the design outlined by the Commission, some more resources might arrive from other international donors. More particularly, the European Investment Bank and a partnership between the Mediterranean Action Plan and the World Bank are expected to contribute to the effort.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the Union for the Mediterranean has been expected to provide some additional momentum to the H2020, both in political and economic terms, if it finally gets its act together.

There are two arguments to be made in this regard. First, inter-linkages are strong enough to render any contrast between the UNEP-led MAP and Euro-Mediterranean environmental policies practically impossible for those familiar with the workings of both schemes. Second, the knitting of schemes together is, yet again, a low-key approach to reinforcing environmental cooperation, in that it has little impact on the decision-making processes in both neighbouring and EU Member States.

### III. Little Effectiveness

The reports issued by the Plan Bleu and the European Environment Agency have consistently pointed to the fact that the Mediterranean environment is not only not experiencing any general improvement, but even some drawbacks. The Mediterranean Sea continues to be threatened by major problems. From 600 or so cities with more than 10,000 inhabitants, only 69% operate a wastewater treatment plant, often in inadequate shape. Solid waste is frequently disposed of in dumping sites with minimal or no sanitary treatment (see Table D.9.1. on the perception of progress – or the lack thereof – on some of these issue areas).

**Graph 6: Environmental cooperation: Assessing the progress in the sectors identified in the Horizon 2020 strategy**



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 2nd Euromed Survey

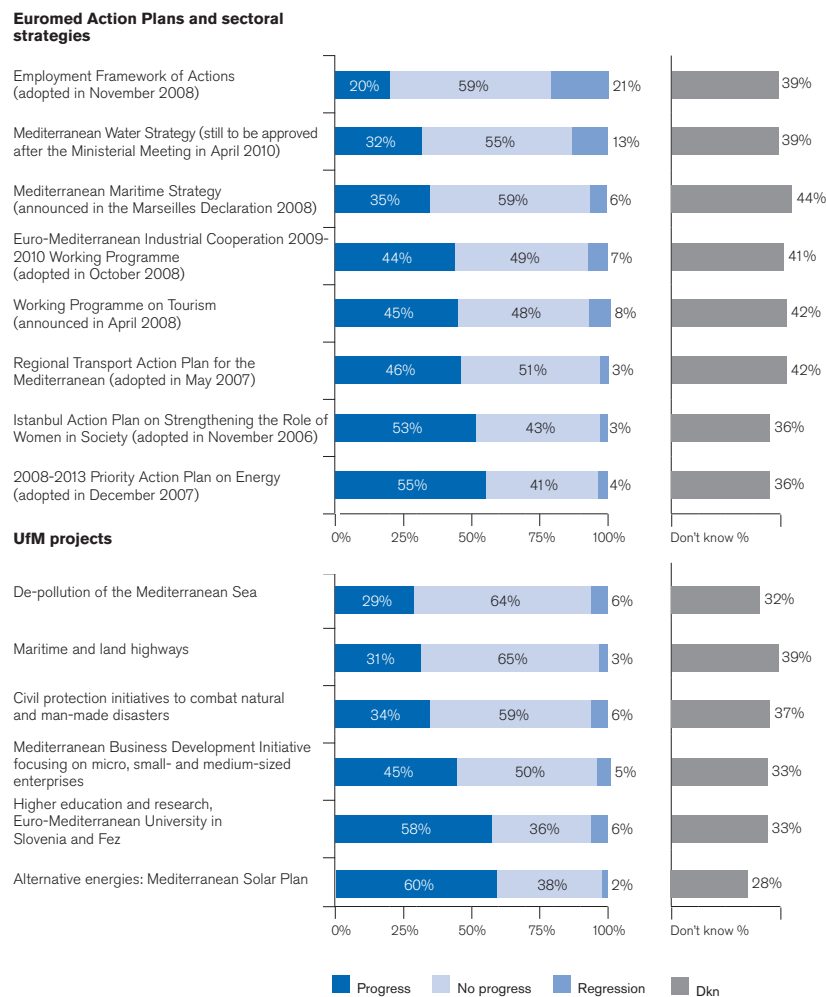
3. European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI): Regional Strategy Paper (2007-2010) and Regional Strategy Paper (2007-2013) and Regional Indicative Programme (2007-2010) for the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, [http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/country/enpi\\_euromed\\_rsp\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/country/enpi_euromed_rsp_en.pdf).

4. Final Report for Horizon 2020 – Elaboration of a Mediterranean Hot Spot Investment Programme (MeHSIP), Contract REG/2006/02, January 2008.

Approximately 200,000 vessels of more than 100 tonnes each cross the Mediterranean annually, and they discharge 250,000 tonnes of oil due to shipping operations. On top of that, discharges caused by incidents at oil terminals or routine procedures from land-based installations are estimated at 120,000 tonnes every year.

Bioinvasions are also a problem, with approximately 15 new species reported each year. Moreover, the overexploitation of marine resources has led to a significant loss of the predators at the top level of the marine food web. Naturally, there are a number of reasons that account for this situation. In particular, certain demographic and economic trends are increasingly putting Mediterranean ecosystems under pressure. In addition, one of the few truisms in political science is that there is a remarkable distance between the outputs of a policy and its final impacts. However, the most important problem here is that the rhetoric about protecting the Mediterranean environment is not supported by actual decisions or any degree of environmental integration in the priority sectors of Euro-Mediterranean relations. The Survey shows that the perception of progress regarding de-pollution is amongst the second lowest, only 29% of respondents, while the perception of lack of progress is the second highest, in a list that includes a total of 14 sectoral issues.

**Graph 7: Assessment of the progress achieved of the plans and projects of cooperation**



Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 2nd Euromed Survey

## IV. Conclusion

There are many overarching commitments, and there is not much more. Commitments are toothless, budgets small and there is a general lack of political will. To be fair, there is something else: small circles of practitioners trying to build up some momentum for environmental protection in the Mediterranean. The typical way in which they are doing so is by promoting functional cooperation and looking for legitimacy in international norms, as well as knitting together the different schemes so as to create synergies between them. Nevertheless, the big picture stays the same: no steady improvement of the environment has been identified, nor has it been perceived by experts and practitioners, as shown by the Survey. If anything, the nearly four-decade long history of environmental cooperation in the Mediterranean shows that there is a limit to the positive outcomes of grand commitments and no policies.

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