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The problems deriving from the phenomenon of climate change, which is slowly but surely besetting our planet, combined with the action of environmentalists and activist organisations, as well as green parties, have contributed to an awareness of the need to combat this phenomenon and have led to deeper discussion on sustainable development and the measures to be undertaken.

At the same time, technologies that exploit natural resources without endangering the environment have begun to be developed and marketed. These technologies, which consist of harnessing the power of the sun and the wind, obviously require significant investment and some of them, moreover, have disadvantages such as the problem of storage and at times, transmission.

Thus, in addition to the issue of the duration of fossil resources in the medium to long terms and the concern for controlling the supply sources and the transmission lines for geostrategic reasons, the struggle against climate change and the issues of environmental protection and sustainable development have also led governments to start to address the matter of developing renewable energy, on both the global and regional levels.

The Universal Framework

It is within the framework of the United Nations following the first UN Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm, 1972) that significant efforts have been undertaken. International conferences on climate change began taking place with major turnouts (Copenhagen, Cancun, Durban, Doha), the Rio+20 Conference (1992) being a point of reference, since the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) aiming to stabilise greenhouse gas emissions was adopted there, entering into effect in 1994. Nonetheless, the results have been very limited in relation to such generalised mobilisation, due to political difficulties and conflicts of interest of certain large countries.

The UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 65/151 declaring 2012 the International Year of Sustainable Energy for All. Global organisations such as the International Energy Agency (IEA) and the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) were designed to establish international collaboration in the sphere of energy, as well as, to a lesser extent, develop certain initiatives and instruments such as the Energy Charter Treaty.

The Regional Framework:
The European Union

The European Union has launched an ambitious policy to struggle against climate change and to this end, adopted significant directives (2009, 2012), which were also applied in the countries along the Adriatic. They establish obligatory national goals, known as the 20-20-20 Climate and Energy Package, with the following targets: reducing CO₂ emissions by 20-30% and, in this context, increasing the proportion of renewable energy, the target being set at 20% of the energy mix, along with decreasing energy consumption by 20%, all of this by the year 2020.

The EU Council of Energy Ministers, in its conclusions from 24 November 2011, proposed a Euro-
Mediterranean energy partnership focussing on electricity and renewable energy within the framework of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and the Mediterranean Solar Plan (MSP).

In its communications in 2012, the European Commission proposed the creation of an integrated energy market for the South and South-East Mediterranean area, with particular attention to the EU Neighbourhood.

The Euro-Mediterranean Framework

In the more complex Euro-Mediterranean framework, one can see that many States on the other side of the Mediterranean have likewise launched ambitious strategies for developing renewable energy, increasing energy efficiency and attenuating climate change, as for instance Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, among other countries.


Moreover, specific Euro-Mediterranean platforms have been created – associations of national regulators (MEDREG), Mediterranean electricity transmission system operators (MED-TSO) and national energy management agencies (MEDENER) – as well as major industrial initiatives designed to increase own energy production capacities in Southern and Eastern Mediterranean Countries (SEMCs) and the energy transmission systems, such as the Desertec Industrial Initiatives (Dii), the Medgrid project and Renewable Energy Solutions for the Mediterranean (RES4MED).

The New Mediterranean Context

What is the situation today in the Mediterranean Basin? Overwhelming developments and historic changes have modified the Mediterranean landscape. In the North, an unprecedented economic and financial crisis has struck southern Europe. The South is undergoing a complex period of transition: overthrow of regimes that had been in power for decades, institutional changes, elections and countries moving towards democracy, not to mention the civil war persisting in one country in the region. These events have created an institutional and political instability for an indefinite period of time.

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At the same time, the institutional framework has changed. Euro-Mediterranean co-operation (the Barcelona Process) has turned into the Union for the Mediterranean and a new organism has been created – the Secretariat General – with the specific mission of projects. It is from the perspective of this new institutional and political framework that we must consider renewable energy.


The Southern and Eastern Mediterranean Countries together with the Middle East countries have 57% of the world’s oil resources and 41% of the world’s natural gas resources, though unequally distributed. On the other hand, the Mediterranean Region, above all Southern and Eastern Mediterranean Countries (SEMCs), has considerable potential for developing renewable energy (high levels of solar radiation, often exceptional wind conditions, considerable terrain available...), a natural wealth that could allow these countries to both contribute to meeting their rapidly-growing domestic demand and export electricity to Europe.

The demand for electricity (80% of which is generated from fossil fuels and the remainder primarily from hydraulic power) grows by 6-7% per year due to population growth, higher standards of living, urbanisation, industrialisation and other factors. According to the Mediterranean Energy Observatory...
(OME) forecasts, this means that demand will triple within 20 years and there will be a need for an additional 200 GW of production capacity by 2030, as compared to our current 120 GW.

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The production of renewable energy constitutes both a challenge and an opportunity for these countries. In fact, the advantages are many. First of all, they can contribute to the struggle against climate change by creating their own energy sources, creating green energy and decreasing CO₂ emissions, thus protecting the environment, which is also important for MENA countries. Moreover, fostering renewable energy facilitates direct investment and contributes to industrial development, the transfer of know-how and the creation of jobs. Countries also decrease their dependence on fossil fuel by using the riches of nature. And finally, they decrease their dependence on energy imports and therefore reduce their budget expenses in this sphere.

Here we must emphasise the importance of exports. If renewable energy production is increased, not only could countries meet domestic demand, but by creating revenue in foreign currency, they could contribute to funding necessary infrastructure. And EU countries are potential if not certain purchasers.

Of course there are also difficulties. There are administrative, institutional and legislative barriers, political uncertainties and the perception of elevated cost. There is also the problem of infrastructure and interconnections, which are of strategic importance, though the interests of both governments and private operators often diverge. Yet the positive perspectives are considerable. The development of renewable energy and energy efficiency is a necessity for the Mediterranean Region. In fact, renewable energy, in particular wind and solar energy, can be quickly developed and the costs are decreasing and will probably continue to do so. In certain cases, wind energy is already competitive in relation to fossil fuel energy, and this will doubtless also be the case for photovoltaic solar energy in the next few years. The countries most actively involved are key actors for the development of renewable energy and energy efficiency in the Mediterranean Region (Germany should receive special mention here).

The Role of the Union for the Mediterranean

The UfM, which was founded at the Paris Summit on 13 July 2008, has 43 member countries: the EU Member States and Partner Countries along the Mediterranean shore. In the Paris Declaration, the Heads of State and Government entrusted it with the mission of promoting specific development projects likely to benefit the populations of the region.

More specifically, the Paris Declaration granted the UfM Secretariat the mandate of exploring the feasibility, creation and development of a Mediterranean Solar Plan (MSP). In this respect, the Secretariat has worked to develop a (strategic) regional framework, identify pilot projects that could serve as examples and create, together with other stakeholders, financial instruments to mitigate risks. It acts as a catalyst and coordinator, under the political control of member countries, with a view to implement the MSP.

The Secretariat has created work platforms and has brought together all the key actors in the region: the UfM member countries, the European Commission, the international financial institutions, in particular the European Investment Bank (EIB), private associations and industry in order to harmonise the various initiatives put forth by governments and enterprises and ensure their end effectiveness within a comprehensive regulatory framework.

The Mediterranean Solar Plan

The Mediterranean Solar Plan (MSP) is a highly comprehensive, ambitious project emblematic to the
The aim is to develop – on a large scale and under sustainable economic conditions – renewable energy and energy efficiency in the Mediterranean Region, and more specifically, in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean Countries (SEMCs).

The main goals of the MSP, which focuses primarily on MENA countries, are as follows:

- By 2020, achieve an installed electrical capacity of 20 GW from renewable sources, primarily wind and solar power, as well as attaining electrical transmission capacity;

  - Meet the needs of the local market and export part of the green energy to the EU;
  - Improve energy efficiency and promote the control of energy demand;
  - Create green jobs and industrial capacity;
  - Promote local electricity market integration.

The aim is thus to gain a consensus on the appropriate framework for developing renewable energy and energy efficiency on a large scale and identifying the major obstacles and the means of overcoming them.

**Roadmap for the Mediterranean Solar Plan**

It is the definition of this shared framework that the Secretariat, in collaboration with key actors, has developed a Master Plan, a politically strategic roadmap for renewable energy, orientated towards concrete action and covering the entire Mediterranean Region. It comprises the conditions for creating and consolidating integrated (sustainable) energy markets and interconnection systems around the Mediterranean. The MSP Master Plan identifies obstacles and proposes solutions. It is not, however, international legislation; its aim is to gain consensus on a general political orientation.

The Secretariat has focused on five pivotal issues, while keeping in mind energy efficiency as well:

- The political and regulatory framework
- Adequate means of financing to mitigate risks
- The physical transmission lines and storage infrastructure
- Industrial development and job creation
- Transfer of know-how and development capacity

It must be borne in mind that energy is the engine for economic activity and thus for development. The Secretariat presented the draft Master Plan to the UfM member countries so that the final version can be drawn up at a conference of the relevant senior officials under the responsibility of the UfM co-presidency (late May 2013, Jordan), with a view to its political endorsement at the ministerial meeting of UfM member countries on energy (December 2013, Brussels). This lies within the context of an ambitious vision: the creation of a Mediterranean Energy Community by 2020. The adoption of the Mediterranean Solar Plan by the ministers will create a strategic regional framework and a roadmap comprising the technical, financial and legal measures necessary to develop renewable energy and energy efficiency in the Mediterranean Region. This must be viewed not only from a technical-economic perspective, but also and above all from the standpoint of socio-economic repercussions in terms of economic growth, human development, sustainable development, job creation, the struggle against poverty and climate change, and the transfer of know-how and industrial capacity to grasp the importance of one of the most significant political enterprises of our times, as well as the scope of its significance.