

The Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development: A Framework for Regional Partnership

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Resulting from a three-year interactive preparatory process, the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD) was finalized in 2005, at a very appropriate period, when one considers the following corroborating events in the same year. The 10th session of the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development (MCSD) finalized and approved the MSSD in June in Athens, Greece. The 14th meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention together with the 30th anniversary of the Mediterranean Action Plan were celebrated in Portoroz, Slovenia in November. Moreover, the 10th anniversary of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership was held in November in Barcelona, Spain.

Responding to various expectations, the MSSD provides a vision with framework orientations for sustainable development, together with a solid basis for a long-term programme of work for all concerned partners. It paves the way for a much needed change and policy reforms with a coherent set of strategic guidelines for actions towards sustainable development in the region and in the respective countries. It is now hoped that the concerned partners and decision-makers will effectively use this tool to take adequate actions to progress towards stability, equity and shared prosperity.

Context and Process

Concerned by the increasing marine pollution, the countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea and the European Union have been cooperating since 1975 to improve their common Mediterranean environment, through the UNEP/Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP). Over the past 30 years, UNEP/MAP has evolved in response to the improved understanding of the close relationships between the environment, conservation and development. It has expanded its remit and no longer focuses solely on Mediterranean Sea pollution. It also concerns itself with pollution generated on land due to the development process with integrated coastal zone planning and natural resource management as the key tools through which solutions are being sought.

In the early 1990s and 2000s, global developments in environmental approaches confirmed and supported MAP's widening scope, in particular, Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. MAP responded in 1994 with the preparation of an Agenda MED 21, adapting Agenda 21 to the Mediterranean context, and the establishment of the MCSD in 1996, demonstrating the commitment of the Contracting Parties to working toward integrating environment and development in the entire region. MAP activities and achievements in relation to Sustainable Development, mainly through the MCSD, have raised high expectations among most of the MCSD members and other partners, despite the shortcomings regarding the follow up and implementation of its recommendations and proposals for action.

The Mediterranean is an eco-region with a unique heritage and very specific features and its future depends on ensuring that development patterns are sustainable throughout the region. Through its legal system for the protection of the environment and its Regional Commission for Sustainable Development, the Mediterranean is already a pioneer in environmental matters and sustainable development approaches. The Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development offers another chance for the region to make history through genuine partnership and co-development for a common Regional Vision. To that end, the EU has a determinant role to play as a key driving force but this requires a true sense of partnership, not just a free trade area.

Considering that the MCSD is a think-tank composed of experts representing governments and major groups from civil society, the MSSD was prepared through a large participatory process, associating as much as possible relevant experts at regional and national levels. Through its impact on awareness raising, capacity development and decision making towards a strategy for sustainable development, the preparatory process was at least as important as the end products.

Common Vision and Framework Orientations for a Regional Strategy

Increasingly active, co-operation in the Mediterranean is however affected by a lack of common vision and inadequate co-ordination between the main partners involved and also by a mismatch between resources available for develop-

ment and investments, given the scale of the tasks to be accomplished. Apart from a clear political impetus, any shift towards sustainable development also requires a shared vision, which takes account of the Mediterranean peculiarities, as well as a coherent and realistic strategy capable of guiding the various stages of its implementation.

If the Mediterranean as a Region in the global context is characterized by the wide asymmetry between its various parts and the weakness of the economic dynamism and innovation, important assets such as its culture, its history and its experience in terms of cooperation and partnership also distinguish it. Unable to use its resources adequately, a relative economic sluggishness endures in the Mediterranean Region with seri-

ous impact on the development of the countries and the evolution of the societies, as well as the quality of the environment, the political context and the stability in the region.

Translating to the Mediterranean context the global concerns as identified throughout the preparatory process for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) and its Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, six major challenges have been defined. These challenges are expected to lead to relevant and clear commitments by all concerned partners and to the establishment of specific "social contracts" that would provide the necessary political and moral conditions for their implementation.

These challenges concern: Development and Environment Protection, Pover-

ty and Inequality, Innovation and Economic Entrepreneurship, Preservation of Cultural Diversity, Governance, and finally Peace and Security. Facing up effectively to the challenge of peace and security is highly relevant for sustainable development in the Mediterranean, and progressing positively in coping with above major challenges will contribute to building up peace and security. In fact, all these challenges are very inter-related and mutually supportive.

Elaboration and Follow up of the MSSD

Considering,

- The need and strong political request

ENVIRONMENTAL PRIORITIES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

In 2005, the European Environment Agency (EEA) published a report on priority environmental topics in the Mediterranean in collaboration with the United Nations

Environment Programme/Mediterranean Action Plan (UNEP/MAP). Having the objective of identifying the main contaminated areas, the report seeks to provide a general view to complement that of previous reports.

Beginning with the observation that a large number of activities linked to the presence of humans are concentrated on the Mediterranean coast and the impact that these activities have on the marine ecosystem, and taking into account that the knowledge of many environmental topics is limited, the report highlights the following aspects as the greatest pressures that are exerted on the Mediterranean: **Sewage and urban run-off.** 31% of the 601 coastal towns with more than 10,000 inhabitants do not have any waste water treatment plants. The rapid growth of many villages and towns, in particular on the southern shore, and the increase in the tourist population, are exacerbating the problem.

Solid waste. Waste generated in the towns is often emptied into the sea without any kind of treatment, and covers the seabed.

Industrial effluents including oil processing. Chemical and mining industries that produce significant amounts of industrial wastes, such as heavy metals or hazardous substances that may reach the marine environment and adversely affect the ecosystem, are frequent-

ly encountered along the coast. Stockpiles of obsolete chemical products, such as certain pesticides and persistent organic pollutants (POPs), should also be included in these aspects.

Urbanisation. Urbanisation of the coastline is one of the major problems in the Mediterranean, since it very often leads to a loss of biodiversity as a consequence of the destruction and physical alteration of the area. This is usually due to uncontrolled development, especially tourist infrastructure. It should also be added that salt marshes and wetlands are destroyed to obtain sand and stone for building.

Eutrophication. Very common in sheltered areas such as harbours and semi-enclosed bays along the Mediterranean coast, mainly in the vicinity of coastal towns. Untreated (or partially treated) urban effluents contain nutrients that contribute to the accumulation of excessive deposits of organic material.

Sand erosion. Notwithstanding natural causes, human activities such as mining may increase its impact and produce a variety of adverse effects, in particular the destruction of the soil surface, a degradation of the dune system and a loss of biological diversity.

Marine transport. This is without doubt one of the major sources of contamination by hydrocarbons derived from petroleum. It is estimated that about 220,000 vessels of more than 100 tonnes each cross the Mediterranean annually, discharging approximately 250,000

tons of oil, in addition to the quantities spilt in accidents (80,000 between 1990-2005). Incidents at the terminals and during routine discharging account for another 120,000 annual tonnes.

Biological Invasions. Climatic changes in conjunction with deteriorated coastal ecosystems have resulted in changes to biodiversity due to the introduction and establishment of exotic species, 64 of them during the 21st century (23 in 2004).

Harmful Algal Blooms. This has led to significant public health problems caused by the consumption of seafood contaminated by toxic algae.

Exploitation of marine resources. Impact on the ecosystem caused by uncontrolled fishing that leads to changes in the structure of fish populations. High discard rates of targeted species is also contributing to a loss of biodiversity.

Expansion of aquaculture. Intensive aquaculture has become a matter of concern for the Mediterranean economy given that production has increased 17-fold over the last 30 years. The most adverse effects include a reduction in abundance and diversity, although many of these effects are very localised and reversible.

Natural hazards. There are also unforeseen natural impacts such as earthquakes and seaquakes which result in coastal degradation.

continues

The report concludes by indicating that inadequate treatment of urban waste and management of chemical products are the main problems in the Mediterranean, although a distinction needs to be made between the countries on the northern shore and those on the southern and eastern shores. In the former case, despite the existence of legal

framework, corrective technologies and preventive mechanisms, the political will to apply them is lacking. In the rest of the Mediterranean, economic growth is at the expense of the environment, since neither the economic conditions are adequate nor is the requisite technology available. The fundamental priority is thus the development and appli-

cation of environmental legislation and ratification of the main multilateral environmental agreements.

References:

"Priority issues in the Mediterranean environment" EEA Report No. 5/2005.

TABLE 8 Major environmental problems in the coastal zone of the Mediterranean countries

	Urban effluents	Urban solid wastes	Industrial effluents	Oily effluents	Stockpiles of toxic chemicals	Eutrophication	Urbanisation
Albania	+	+	-	-	+	+/-	+/-
Algeria	+	+	+	+	-	+/-	+
Bosnia-Herzegovina	+	+	-	-	+/-	-	+
Cyprus	+/-	-	+	-	-	-	+/-
Croatia	+	+	-	+ (anticipated)	-	+	+
Egypt	+	+	+	+/-	-	+	+
Slovenia	+	-	+	-	-	+/-	+
Spain	+	-	+	-	-	+/-	+
France	+	-	+	-	-	+/-	+
Gaza	+	+	+	-	-	+/-	+
Greece	+	+	+	-	-	+/-	+/-
Israel	+	-	+	+/-	-	+/-	+/-
Italy	+	-	+	+	-	+	+
Lebanon	+	+	+/-	-	-	-	+
Libya	+	+	+	+/-	-	-	-
Malta	+	+/-	+/-	+/-	-	-	+
Morocco	+	+	+	+	+/-	+/-	+
Monaco	-	-	-	-	-	-	+
Syria	+	+	+	+	-	+/-	+/-
Tunisia	+	+	+	-	-	+/-	+
Turkey	+	+	+	+/-	-	+	+

+ Important problem

+/- Medium problem

- Small problem

with the support of the civil society for a MSSD,

- The existing extensive and cumulated knowledge on the region's pressures, states and responses,
- The consolidated common grounds and the scope of the regional consensus, and
- The achievements throughout the preparatory process in terms of analysis, awareness, consultations and capacity building,

The MSSD report was finally elaborated during a period of 10 months between the two MCSD meetings of 2004 and 2005. Most Mediterranean stakehold-

ers and partners are expected to be interested in and concerned with the results and proposals of the MSSD. These concern also UNEP/MAP as the objectives of the Strategy and its derived policy actions are expected to exert a major impact on UNEP/MAP's programme of work, at least for the period of the next decade.

As for the Vision and Orientations, the Strategy was prepared in close cooperation and involvement of the governments, IGOs and NGOs experts, including some regional Business Associations and Local Authorities networks, as well as other partners such as the UN and European, Arab and Adriatic

institutions and programmes. Giving due consideration to the Mediterranean context and stakes, seven priority fields of action were identified; these concern: water resources, energy and climate change, transport mobility, tourism, agriculture and rural development, urban development, management of the sea, marine resources and coastal areas.

Throughout the MSSD preparatory process, it appeared that pursuing Sustainable Development in the Mediterranean Region is essentially a task of transforming governance, and preparing and implementing a Sustainable Development Strategy that could be considered as a test case for adequate

and efficient governance. Therefore, moving seriously towards and implementing efficiently Sustainable Development will require adequate structural changes in economic, social, environmental and political sectors. Consequently serious actions are urgently required in response to: reforming fiscal policies, inequity and inequality of access to assets and resources, integrating environment in development policies, decoupling environmental degradation and resource consumption from economic and social development, reorienting and increasing public and private investment towards Sustainable Development. Motivation and active participation of various countries as well as representatives of civil society have largely contributed, through information and lobbying campaigns, to the recognition of the value of the MSSD. Not only with-

in MAP but also vis-à-vis other major partners such as the EU, ending up by explicitly stressing its importance in the declaration of the Heads of States of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership at its ten-year anniversary in 2005.

The Mediterranean Region has now its Commission on Sustainable Development and its framework Strategy for Sustainable Development, two specific features that should be further promoted and strengthened, as they do constitute the necessary decision-making tools for a Region that badly needs stability, partnership, shared prosperity and sustainable development.

Reference documents

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