

The Mediterranean Embarks on Sustainable Development

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The World Summit held in Johannesburg in August 2002 had various qualities. Firstly, it focused its attention on sustainable development, its *raison d'être*, ten years down the line from the Rio summit. Secondly, it placed emphasis on partnership, although the commitment to «type two initiatives»² in 2003 was a little disappointing. Thirdly, and largely unnoticed by observers, it referred to the planet's large regions, or «ecoregions». This is the level on which the follow-up to work geared to sustainable development in the world will have to be analysed in the future, step by step. This constitutes major progress, as prior to that point, there had been no worldwide recognition of these geographical clusters that encompass several countries. The Mediterranean is one of such clusters of territories, along with Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, the Pacific, Latin America, and others.

The Mediterranean, as we know, currently encompasses some twenty-one coastal nations. In 1975 those countries signed in Barcelona (and later joined) the first multilateral cooperation agreement focused on protecting the sea and shores, the environment, and now sustainable develop-

ment. I was one of the architects of that agreement and it is a source of pride for me. It was the first agreement in the world to establish «ecoregional» cooperation, using the term coined by Mostapha Tolba, at the time the executive manager of the UNEP.

Following the Rio summit, it was also the first agreement in the world whereby the institution responsible for it (the Mediterranean Action Programme, or MAP) was provided with a Mediterranean Commission for Sustainable Development. This Commission is highly original in that it encompasses the coastal states, the European Union, five representatives of companies from the socio-economic sector, five representatives of environmental associations and five representatives of local authorities. Established on the initiative of Tunisia and subsequently formally recognised in a convention in Barcelona in 1995, this Commission defined the possible lines of action for sustainable development (with reference to a certain number of sectors, such as water, towns and cities, tourism, and so on) open to each country on an individual basis, as well as to all of them as a collective. It also plays a significant role regarding analysis of both positive and negative consequences of the free-trade area between the SEMC and the European Union, scheduled for 2010.

This is a good thing for the world as a whole, and it is also good for the Mediterranean, which is no longer simply

examining its own reflection in the mirror and is beginning to draw up an inventory of its activities on a global scale. This Commission has understood the message, with the schedule it has established for its tasks, which is now fixed to coincide with that of the World Commission for Sustainable Development (United Nations). This is a first step as far as the recognition of the world's large continental land clusters is concerned.

The new legitimacy endowed upon the Mediterranean area firstly sanctions the combined efforts of the twenty-one coastal states, which although they made a commitment to work together in Barcelona in 1975 through the Barcelona Convention, primarily work within a national context. The budget of the Mediterranean Action Plan, which encompasses some 450 million inhabitants under the auspices of the UNO, stands at around a mere four million euros per year, which is barely equal to the cost of a purification plant for a town or city with fifty thousand inhabitants. All in all, there are no more than 150 people working on the Plan in Athens, Split, Tunis, Barcelona, Sophia Antipolis and Malta. That means that the main effort with regard to action in the field must come from each country. Contrary to the affirmation of Bremond, a French General in the 1850s, the Mediterranean is not yet a nation. It will be a long time before a Mediterranean government or Parliament is established, although the idea

¹ French senior official who, following the Stockholm summit in 1972, was involved in instituting the Barcelona agreements. He created the Blue Plan, which examines the socio-economic and environmental future of the Mediterranean.

² These are significant actions that run over several years, involving states, collectives and businesses, as well as associations on occasions, that choose to contribute their combined financing and knowledge.

has been contemplated. Euromediterranean institutions will certainly emerge beforehand.

From a certain point of view it is fortunate that this is the case, as these coastal countries are the expression of great political, cultural, economic, social and ecological diversity. It is out of the question to propose a unique model and the standardisation of a collective, which despite its members having common points, and the fact that they recognise that to a certain degree they share identifiably Mediterranean characteristics, is for the moment, and certainly will be for the foreseeable future, a juxtaposition of nations. Working nationally also makes it possible to decentralise action to some extent, at regional, provincial and district levels. It is therefore firstly necessary to consider each state in order to determine whether progress is being made in terms of sustainable development. The verdict is positive, as advances have been made since the Rio and Johannesburg summits. However, it must be said that, on the whole, national strategies are still rather diffident, and consist more of series of measures than of real strategies. They mainly cover environmental fields, and are still only remotely connected to economic, social and cultural problems, these being the areas, which along with the environment make up the four cornerstones of sustainable development. Two major weaknesses have to be acknowledged: very little inter-ministerial work is carried out; and frank, trusting openness with regard to civil society is not a particularly widespread virtue, despite the declarations. There is a significant lack of interaction between parliaments, and there is not the connection there ought to be between public opinion and the people living in the affected areas.

Within states, circumstances are a little better, at least at the regional and local levels. In Italy and Spain, regions have often developed strategies for the future (such as Catalonia 2010) and have sometimes worked across borders (as was the case of the working community of the Pyrenees five years ago, made up of seven regions and An-

dorra). However, not all countries are well organised at regional level; Morocco, for example, is only now addressing this problem.

The district or inter-district level recommended at the Rio summit, and that at which responsibility is to be taken for the Agenda 21s (chapter twenty-eight of the Action Plan), is a source of interest. Progress is also being made here, and some three to five hundred towns and cities have become involved. In Italy, a fine web-based initiative sees a national association of elected representatives making an inventory and giving an account of work being carried out in this respect. In France, an association called the Comité 21 is taking its first steps along a similar path. The Mediterranean would benefit from a network being established among the local authorities, which have embarked on action similar to that of the Agenda 21s.

The clearest progress can be seen among businesses, especially when progress in the area of sustainable development is beneficial to them (such as constituting savings in materials, energy and water, and increasing demand from consumers). It is hard to gauge the overall effort being made, but there are certain instruments available for this purpose. For example, 370 companies (out of a worldwide total of 1,240, which is around a thirty percent and a significant proportion) have signed the Global Compact commitment, initiated by the general secretary of the United Nations, Kofi Aman. The number of ISO 14001 companies, a figure that stood at 7,400 on 1st January 2003 (representing fifteen percent of the 49,460 throughout the world), serves as another indicator. Clear progress is made from year to year (an increase of 2,575 in 2002). It would be desirable, for solidarity between those who have obtained certification and those who have not, to act as an incentive for the latter group, as the scale of the gap between the countries of the north and those of the south of the Mediterranean is astonishing. In the south, including Israel, there are just 424 ISO 14001 companies, in compari-

son to almost six thousand in the north, and 326 Global Compact companies.

Returning to a Mediterranean and Euromediterranean level, much can be done to create genuine dynamics between the states, businesses, local and regional authorities and civil society. It would be satisfactory to see this happen more emphatically. It is true that the situation has changed since the fifties, when, in the days of Yves Cousteau and Mann Borgèse, the sea was the only asset that was common to the coastal countries. The 1995 Barcelona agreements placed sustainable development at the top of the list of the MAP's priorities.

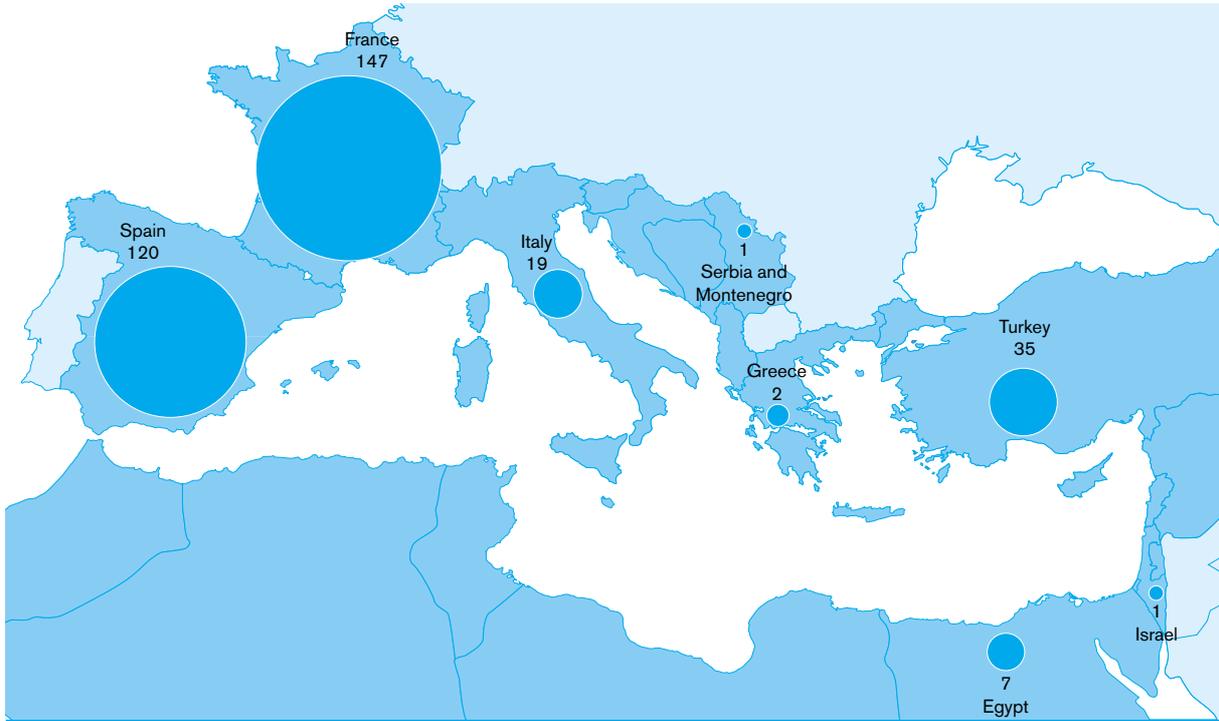
Also in 1995, and once again in Barcelona, virtually the same group of states³ signed a Euromediterranean agreement and initiated a process of cooperation and solidarity that likewise came under the banner of sustainable development. Nevertheless, it must be noted that the creation of a free-trade area, scheduled for 2010, does little to encourage work along these lines. Sustainable development is less relevant to the principal than the environment was to the NAFTA, established ten years earlier between Canada, the United States and Mexico. Encouragement and aid for the south are insignificant at a time when eastern Europe is the focus of all the old continent's attention. Aside from the agreements, agriculture and the rural world are largely or completely ignored. There is plenty to be done in this respect, despite the declarations and the summits (such as that held in Athens in 2002). This would be more decisive than the desire, however highly commendable it may be, to produce a «Mediterranean strategy» for sustainable development on the basis of questionnaires and good intentions.

However, no progress will be made in either respect by linking global politics to the national tasks undertaken in each state. Johannesburg provides an example of what could have been done but was not. It established targets (eighteen on that occasion) for the entire planet, stating that the number of inhabitants without access to

³ With the exception of Libya and the Balkans.

MAP 2

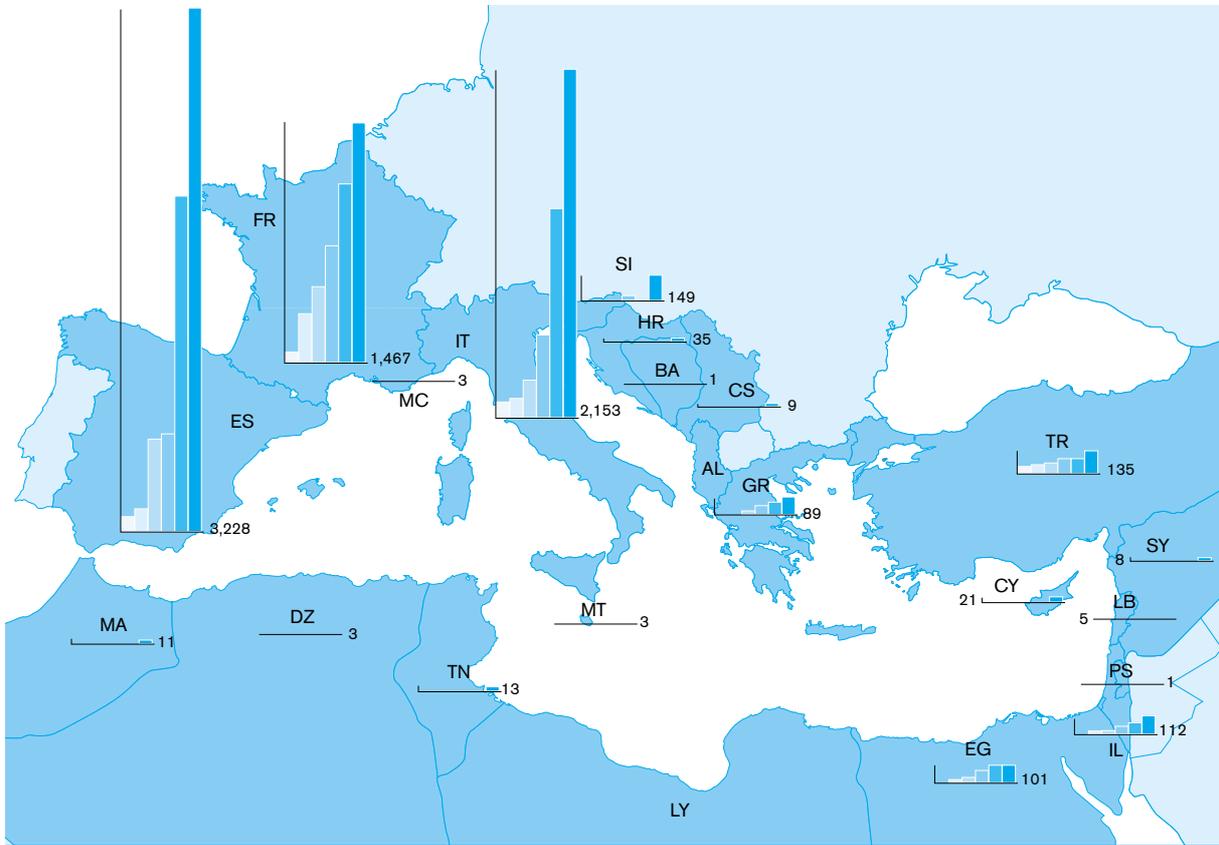
Companies that signed up to the Global Compact programme on 22/10/2003



Source: unglobalcompact.org

MAP 3

Registered ISO 14001 companies as at 15/10/2003



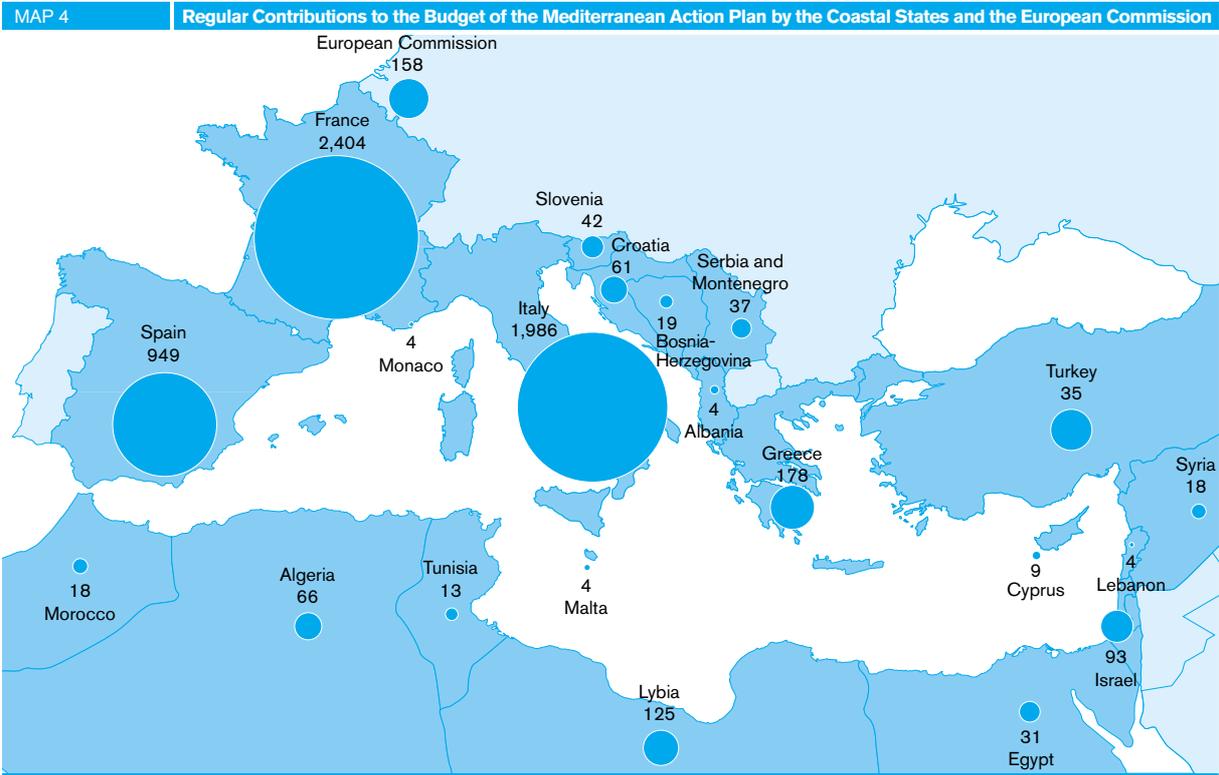
1997 1998 1999 2000 2001 2002

Source: The ISO survey of ISO 9000 and ISO 14001 certificates.

drinking water or earning less than one dollar a day was to be halved by 2015. This is a laudable effort. However, instead of putting forward figures for the planet (for others), it would have been (and still could be) more effective to see each country, each region, publicly

state its intention to set itself a ten or twenty year programme⁴ and to adhere to it. The same could be said of the principal of seeing the international community clearly aiding countries for which the targets are out of range, by allocating part of their debt to meas-

ures geared to sustainable development, for example. Achieving sustainable development in the Mediterranean is still an admirable goal. However, it is one that will require resolve, hard work and solidarity to accomplish it.



Source: Blue Plan 2003
 In thousands of US dollars in 2004
 The map only shows regular donations to the MAP; it excludes financing for specific activities of the MAP on an individual-project basis (e.g. the European Commission's Medstat programme, GEF, METAP, etc.) and the European Commission's voluntary contribution, which stands at 684,000 US dollars for 2004.

⁴ The same could be applied to regions and districts, which for example embarked on programmes geared to reducing the greenhouse effect, thus relating local efforts to their planetary responsibility.