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THE ROLES AND MODALITIES OF THE MEDITERRANEAN COMMISSION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction by the Secretariat of the Coordinating Unit for the Mediterranean Action Plan.

In Marrakech at the 16th Ordinary Meeting the Contracting Parties of the Barcelona Convention (IG 19/8) have requested the Secretariat to proceed with a five-year (2005-10) assessment of the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD) and an assessment of the Mediterranean Commission for Sustainable Development (MCSD) modalities to be carried out by the Secretariat (Decisions IG 17/5 in 2008 and IG 19/16 in 2009).

In this context, the Secretariat has commissioned an independent analysis on the MCSD role and best work modalities for the future for the purposes to stimulate the debate at MCSD, which is presented in this document. It should be noted that an earlier version of this document was been presented and discussed at the Steering Committee of MCSD meeting in Athens (March 2nd, 2011).

On the basis on this document, the MCSD may want to express its views on a number of questions which arise on the role and modalities of MCSD in the future:

- The scope of MCSD and the focus on its functions.
- The methods of work of MCSD in the new context.
- The priorities on which the MCSD should work in the future.
- Participation and mobilization of stakeholders.

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Introduction-Past and present

The Contracting Parties of the Barcelona Convention in the context of UNEP's Mediterranean Action Plan established in 1996 the Mediterranean Commission for Sustainable Development. The 'MCSD is an advisory body and represents a forum for debate'¹ on sustainable development in the region.

Furthermore, the Contracting Parties (CoP) adopted in 2005 the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development. The purpose of this Framework Strategy² is to adapt international commitments to regional conditions, to guide national sustainable development strategies and to initiate a dynamic partnership between countries at different levels of development.

The MCSD was created 15 years ago following the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 1992, which recognised the need to bridge perspectives on development and conservation of the environment. In essence the role of MCSD, as a Commission for Sustainable Development (SD) was focusing on raising awareness on the need to consider environmental issues such as the protection of biodiversity and natural resources in development policies. In the case of MCSD, as part of MAP, its basic role was to assist Environment Ministries in the Mediterranean to support their policies and activities vis-à-vis Development (Sectoral) Ministries by pulling together State, local authorities and NGOs.

Almost fifteen years after its launching MCSD has contributed in many ways to MAP and its activities by broadening perspectives and linking environmental protection to development issues, enriching discussions and eventually policies and actions on environmental management around the Mediterranean, enabling the dialogue with civil society on environment/development issues. MCSD has been an innovation at the global scale, as a special SD Commission at the Regional Seas level of UNEP, benefiting from a long established cooperation on environmental protection in the Region under the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols. In that sense the MCSD supports the catalytic role of MAP in regional governance.

However, it has been noted in several meetings (such as at the 8th Meeting of MCSD³) and in assessments (studies i.e. NSSD assessment⁴, MSSD assessment) that the role of MCSD is limited in scope. This can be attributed to various factors influencing the effectiveness of the MSSD: the long-term horizon of SD strategies, political will and commitment, integration and coherence, stakeholder involvement, lack of effective monitoring, the necessity to strengthen governance mechanisms, etc. These also reflect discussions at global level, such as those preparations for the Commission on Sustainable Development meeting, (Rio+20) in 2012 which will put emphasis on revisiting institutional frameworks towards sustainable development.

In the meantime broader changes in the wider context have brought new perspectives on SD issues (i.e. ecosystems approach, climate change, green economy) enriching the

¹ UNEP/MED IG.8/7 Annex V

² MSSD document (p.2 Introduction)

³ UNEP(DEPI)/MED WG. 217, Cavtat, 2003

⁴ NSSD Assessment

agenda. New initiatives and actors (such as the Union for the Mediterranean) are developing activities adding complexity to the institutional context for sustainable development in the Region.

The wider context is changing: Sustainable Development in the future

1. Sustainable Development related shifts

At a global level, Sustainable Development as a concept was widened further in World Summit on Sustainable Development at Johannesburg in 2002 to include broader development issues, as expressed in the Millennium Goals, but also moved the emphasis from bridging environment/development issues to social development/environment issues bringing on the agenda traditional development issues such as poverty, etc. It enriched the dialogue but eventually weakened the environmental dimension which was the main concern in previous periods. More recent reflections emphasize the need to strengthen the contribution of the economic pillar towards sustainable development as evidenced in the discussions on the green economy approach towards sustainable development. These developments have further implications on the role and focus of Sustainable Development Commissions.

2. Strengthening further the international dimension of environmental protection

The context of environmental policy is becoming increasingly more 'international' in the sense that environmental issues and policies move up the institutional ladder as the global scale of issues becomes prominent. Evidence to that is the increasingly dominant role of global governance in environmental matters (such as for biodiversity, climate change or large scale ecosystem management). In addition, from 'think globally and act locally' the focus of activity is reversing seeking the compliance and contribution of the local level to global concerns such as Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) and climate change. These developments have also implications as to the breadth and focus of sustainable development.

3. Institutional changes

New and old actors are developing their own activities in environmental protection and Sustainable Development at the global, regional and national and local levels adding to the complexity of structures. The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) has adopted a Strategic Plan 2011-2020 which provides for five strategic goals and twenty targets relating to Sustainable Development issues. The development agencies (i.e. World Bank, FAO, UNDP, etc) but also UNFCCC and the CSD are expanding their programmes and activities towards SD adopting comprehensive policy frameworks, as for example the Ecosystems Approach or the Green Economy perspective, which provide enabling platforms facilitating integration of environment/development issues. These platforms provide new challenges for Sustainable Development.

The increasing complexity of international activity and broadening of the agenda perplexes further the role of the regional dimension on Sustainable Development in seeking integration taking advantage of the developing initiatives and platforms.

The regional context is changing

In addition to being influenced by changes in the broader context, the regional context of environmental cooperation is changing in perspective as well. In the Mediterranean there has been an increasingly intensifying cooperation in environmental protection because of MAP. The regional agenda is changing though in terms of approach, scope and complexity of activities related to sustainable development:

1. An integrating approach

In Almeria (2008) the Contracting Parties of the Barcelona Convention decided to begin the process of implementing the 'ecosystems approach' in order to move towards the goal of "a healthy Mediterranean with marine and coastal ecosystems that are productive and biologically diverse for the benefit of present and future generations" (Decision IG 17/6) with three strategic goals:

- 1) To protect, allow recovery, and where practicable, restore the structure and function of marine and coastal ecosystems – thus also protecting marine biodiversity – in order to achieve and maintain good ecological status allowing for sustainable use.
- 2) To reduce pollution in the marine and coastal environment so as to ensure that there are no significant impacts or risks to human and/or ecosystem health and/or on the uses of the sea and the coasts.
- 3) To preserve, enhance, and restore a balance between human activities and natural resources in the sea and the coasts and reduce their vulnerability to risks.

This places back the emphasis on the interaction of human and natural ecosystems and provides an overarching integrating theme for MAP, at the core of Mediterranean cooperation in the protection of the marine and coastal areas, therefore providing also an integrating framework of reference for sustainable development in the Region

2. Increasingly complex structures

In the past decade or so, important developments have occurred in the Region (e.g. launching of the "Union for the Mediterranean", elaboration of the "Strategy on Water in the Mediterranean", promotion of the implementation of the "Horizon 2020" Initiative and the EU Water Initiative – Mediterranean Component etc.), which emphasize the necessity to work through regional structures. These have to be taken into consideration in order to assess the opportunities for complementarities and synergies towards better integration of activities and increased efficiency.

Scope of the MCSD

The emerging context of new activities and actors provides an opportunity to re-think the role of MCSD in:

- facilitating environmental mainstreaming and integration; and
- strengthening cross-sectoral and intersectoral environment/development policy coordination at national and regional levels

In this context MCSD can provide an extremely valuable platform of reference and tool for enhancing regional dialogue on environment/development issues by:

- (i) exploring the coherence of actions aiming at promoting environmental integration in development policies and programmes through mobilizing

- stakeholders/participants beyond Contracting Parties, IGOs, NGOs and local authorities, bringing the private sector on board;
- (ii) assisting Contracting Parties to introduce environmental concerns in sectoral policies; and,
 - (iii) addressing a regional sustainable development agenda by raising issues and priorities relevant beyond the national level.

These tasks outline a complex role for MCSD in the future outlining three possible characteristic and basic, distinct and interrelated functions⁵ as:

- A *forum* for seeking synergies among key stakeholders on critical sustainable development issues
- An *advisory council* for focusing on social, economic and environmental interactions to assist decisions on environmental integration, and/or
- A *think tank* highlighting and exploring future issues.

The S.W.O.T. analysis⁶, which looks in general terms at the advantages and disadvantages for each of the three functions on the basis of the internal and external system characteristics, underscores the necessity to consider these functions in terms of the challenges ahead but also taking into consideration the orientations and resources provided by the COP for the MCSD. It is evident, that each task has implications on the role and working methods of the MCSD.

In principle, the three basic functions could contribute in various ways to MCSD in its role towards environment/development integration, each one in a different type of role with different modes of work and organization. In summary:

A **Forum** provides a widely tested and politically sound basis of reference to discuss and debate new and challenging, sometimes ambivalent issues with the aim to arrive at a basic consensus of principles, goals, priorities, strategies, priorities for action, etc. Most of the sustainable development issues fall in this type of debate. Its particular value lies in raising social awareness, mobilizing major stakeholders, building-up regional consensus by encouraging discussions on multiple views, strengthening the regional image at a global level, etc.

An **Advisory Council** provides a widely used basis of reference for policy analysis and coordination exploring options for strategy development, actions, programme development, etc. often appropriate for policies with a economic/technical/scientific component. Environmental integration issues (i.e. applied SD policy making) are most suitable for this type of platform for discussion, as for example ECAP-ecosystem approach, which brings socio-economic dimensions into environmental protection perspectives. Its particular value lies in raising awareness and support for environment/development concerns across sectoral stakeholders, raising regional capacity to operationalize goals and objectives, improving regional capacity for implementation, etc.

A **Think-Tank** provides a sound basis of reference for in-depth analysis of complex issues bringing in new insight, enriching the perspectives, often suitable for unexplored and open questions/aspects, suitable for strategic level analysis which aim to bring-in long term anticipated or forecasted developments transcending the usual capacity of decision making

⁵ These are codified and presented for comparative purposes in Appendix 1.

⁶ Appendix 2

systems. Its particular value lies in bringing in the wider perspective, raising awareness on future issues, stimulating a long term perspective in policy making, etc.

It is obvious that all three functions are important in policy making and it would be ideal to have access to all of them particularly in policy contexts that involve complex issues such as those related to sustainable development and Regional cooperation. Such an option could be a long-term objective in the context of UNEP MAP.

The following table highlights the possible effectiveness of the three functions in terms of raising societal awareness, mobilization of civic society, organizational complexity requirements and demand on resources, and contribution to sustainable development policies, plans and programmes.

	Awareness raising capacity	Typical participation	Complexity/demand on resources	Policy support capacity
Forum	Global/regional	Extended/widest	Simple/high costs	Relatively high
Advisory Council	Regional	Large/intersectoral	Complex/average costs	High
Think-tank	Limited	Limited	Relative/average	High

In view of the emerging challenges and opportunities discussed earlier and a global thrust to reinforce environmental mainstreaming in sustainable development it is important to strengthen the role of MCSD in supporting the Contracting Parties of the Barcelona Convention and UNEP/MAP towards protection of marine and coastal resources in the Mediterranean.

To strengthen MCSD the following basic assumptions have to be taken into consideration:

- All three functions (forum, advisory council and think tank) are necessary as they have advantages. So the choice of function has to be explored further on the basis of perceived priorities, available resource and institutional capabilities which allow to focus on pertinent regional agenda issues.
- MCSD is an essential support to MAP and should be developed in this context and in close collaboration to MAP priorities and programme of work.
- Priority on integration: on the basis of MAP priorities *extending MAP's capacity for environmental integration* is a central concern.
- Priority should be clear on Regional issues in the sense of seeking Regionally relevant sustainable development issues and Regional responses to global issues.

Considering the above, an approach would be to enhance the Advisory function of MCSD. On the basis of the past experience of MCSD and its contribution to MAP it would be useful to focus on environmental integration issues in relation to sectoral and development goals and priorities. This function could assist MAP to strengthen its communication capacity in the Region in terms of environmental protection. It could strengthen Regional cooperation through awareness, consensus and coalition building. To the extent that substantial changes in economic structural adjustments, social mobility and technological changes are expected to affect the Mediterranean, these will affect environmental policy and integration. It could operationally bring together all actors from across the relevant spectrum to

coordinate, fine-tune and monitor policy and programmatic initiatives.

A Forum functional approach for MCSD could be useful in extending the capacity of the Mediterranean to reach out the broader public and build stronger international regional support for activities, plans and programmes in environmental integration. It could strengthen its contribution to global efforts towards sustainable development particularly on new and emerging issues, highlighting and building on the particularities of the Region.

Methods of work

Regardless of the particular focus there are some key priorities in this context in the next period which have to taken into consideration. These include:

- Establishing a coherent monitoring system of MSSD and its periodic review at the MCSD so that there is proper feedback to the national level.
- Improving synergies at regional level among key international level stakeholders including the establishment of an inter-agency UN platform.
- Mobilizing further key private sector and civic society stakeholders to participate in a regional effort towards sustainable development.
- Maximize flexibility in the organization of activities of MCSD to reflect shifting priorities in global and regional pursuits of sustainable development.

In addition, the above underline the necessity for improvements in mobilization and organization (and resources) of MCSD in the future. Key considerations include:

- a. Streamlining of MCSD and MAP activities taking advantages of the newly developing context of five-year cycles (provided for example in the MSSD, the ecosystem approach, etc.) and the priority setting by the global/international and regional agenda
- b. Enhancing stakeholder participation through improving structures and the capacity to mobilize resources

Conclusions

It is evident that MCSD scope, working methods and composition have to be carefully evaluated and re-organized in order to meet the future challenges of SD in the Mediterranean. Such an undertaking is central to the mandate and on-going discussions on enhancing governance.

Appendix 1. Table 1: Summary characteristics of MCSD potential functions

	FORUM	ADVISORY COUNCIL	THINK TANK	Comments
Basic role	A 'breakwater' of ideas and conflicts	Consultation	Foresight	Primary rationale and function for MAP
Orientation	Political support Extrovert function	Administrative Efficiency Extension function	Intelligence Introvert	Goals
Functions	Consensus building Communication Raising awareness	Smoothing and extension of environment policies	Policy analysis on regional perspectives Decision support	Objectives
Issues/ themes	Discuss Development/ environment problems, opportunities and conflicts	Seeking Environmental integration	In-depth analysis of policy agenda Future issues	Operational purpose for MAP
Expected outputs	Raising global and regional awareness on Med development and environment issues	Raising public admin awareness on env. issues Info sharing among MAP countries	Sensitizing Environment Ministries on long-term future issues	Utility to COPs
Operational Conditions	Autonomy Discussions Small Secretariat External organizational assistance	Advisory to MAP Focusing on policy analysis Small Secretariat/Exec Committee	Independence Advisory to MAP Ensuring High quality inputs Core unit	Basics on operations
Organization and Structure	High level Loose and broad structure	Standard COP based/ Focal Points? Ad hoc extensions	Ad hoc on the basis of issues	
Participation	Broader Representation Private and civic society Other Ministries Political fora	Extended representation Other Min Env NGOs	Scientific Community Eminent experts	Membership
Agenda setting	Global issues	Global/regional COP	Global/regional MAP	Driving factors
Frequency	Once every two years	Once a year	Twice a year	Resources needed

Appendix 2: Table 2 SWOT Analysis

	FORUM	ADVISORY COUNCIL	THINK TANK	Comments
Strengths	Long cooperation in MAP MSSD	Long cooperation in MAP NSSDs MCSD existing structure	Existing experience in some MAP components	
Weaknesses	Lack of regional stakeholders	Lack of experience Limited Influence of Env Ministries in public administration structures Lack of actors	Capacity to 'exploit' Regional capacity limited and imbalance	
Opportunities	Bringing up Mediterranean env/dev issues at the forefront of the international agenda Strengthening MAP Attracting funding Building on the uniqueness of MAP cooperation record	Building on the uniqueness of MAP cooperation record	Contribution to global agenda Build up of MAP as a model on Regional Seas	
Threats	Losing ground Loss of focus on Med from global agenda Multiplicity of actors and activities working at cross purposes	Multiplicity of stakeholders in the Med Economic restructuring and refocusing Competition from governance streamlining	External competition Loss of regional issue focus	