



United Nations
Environment
Programme



Distr.
RESTRICTED
UNEP/IG.20/INF.16
2 October 1980

Original: FRENCH
ENGLISH

Intergovernmental Meeting on
Mediterranean Specially
Protected Areas

Athens, 13-17 October 1980

PROPOSAL FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A
REGIONAL ACTIVITY CENTRE FOR MEDITERRANEAN PROTECTED AREAS

(Document submitted by the Government of Tunisia)

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Introduction

Since the early 1960s, a keener interest in the more effective conservation and use of the living resources of the sea has resulted in several international statements recommending that certain maritime areas should be accorded special protective status.

A statement made at the First World Conference on National Parks, held in Seattle from 30 June to 7 July 1962, was followed by numerous recommendations, in particular at the International Conference on Marine Parks and Reserves held in Tokyo in 1975 and at the Regional Conference on the Promotion of Marine Parks and Reserves held in Teheran also in 1975.

As regards the Mediterranean, a number of initiatives have been taken at the national level, keeping pace with the growing interest in the protection of marine and coastal natural living resources.

The signature of the Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against Pollution, on 16 February 1976, gave a new impetus to a regional approach to the problems of conservation of the Mediterranean ecosystems. This Convention requires that the contracting parties shall individually or jointly take all appropriate measures to prevent, abate and combat pollution of the Mediterranean Sea area and to protect and enhance the marine environment in that area. Subsequently, UNEP, in collaboration with other international organizations, initiated activities relating to the promotion of marine parks and reserves in the Mediterranean.

The first meeting specifically devoted to protected areas was held in Tunis in January 1977. This "Expert Consultation on Mediterranean Marine Parks and Wetlands" placed great emphasis on the value of natural reserves, particularly on their socio-economic value, and made recommendations which were adopted in the following form at the Intergovernmental Review Meeting of Mediterranean Coastal States on the Mediterranean Action Plan (Monaco, 9-14 January 1978):

"27. The Meeting took note of the significance of protected areas from the socio-economic, scientific and conservation points of view and recommended that Governments should support the protection and rational management of existing marine parks, wetlands and other protected areas. They should also promote the creation of new protected areas in the region. In particular, Governments should:

- (i) support the efforts of the Executive Director to create an Association of Protected Mediterranean Areas and advise him on the designation of one member of the Association to act as the co-ordinator of the Association's activities;
- (ii) request the Executive Director to convene periodic meetings of representatives of Mediterranean protected areas to compare and develop their experiences and problems

- (iii) expand the research projects on ecological problems of protected areas and relate them to UNEP MED POL activities;
- (iv) ask the Executive Director to convene an intergovernmental meeting to consider and adopt guidelines and technical principles for the establishment and management of Mediterranean protected areas. The Meeting should also consider the development of a protocol on the protection and management of Mediterranean protected areas (see paragraph 34 below);
- (v) contribute to the preparation and periodic updating of a Directory of Mediterranean protected areas.

"28. In relation to subparagraph (i) above, the Meeting welcomed the offer of Tunisia to serve as the co-ordinator of the Association of Protected Mediterranean Areas."
(UNEP/IG.11/4, annex IV, pp. 4 and 5, paras. 27 and 28, 23 January 1978).

At the first meeting of the contracting parties to the Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against Pollution (Geneva, 5-10 February 1979), UNEP was asked to "convene an intergovernmental meeting to consider, with a view to adoption, guidelines and technical principles for the selection, establishment and management of Mediterranean specially-protected areas and other related matters. The meeting should also consider the development of a protocol concerning Mediterranean protected areas" (UNEP/IG.14/9, annex 5, para. 25).

At the Intergovernmental Review Meeting of Mediterranean Coastal States on the Mediterranean Action Plan (Barcelona, 11-13 February 1980), the delegation of Tunisia reiterated the Tunisian Government's offer to host a centre for Mediterranean specially-protected areas.

The foregoing paragraphs indicate that there is an evident will on the part of the Mediterranean coastal States to increase and co-ordinate efforts with regard to the selection, establishment and management of protected marine and coastal areas of the Mediterranean. The Athens meeting on specially-protected areas is an essential element in these developments.

It is also apparent that Tunisia displayed an interest in the protected areas at a very early stage and has regularly supported and encouraged activities relating to those areas within the context of the Mediterranean Action Plan. In particular, the Tunisian Government has recognized the importance of the development of an association of Mediterranean protected areas as a unique means of fostering co-operation and co-ordination of activities connected with the conservation of Mediterranean species and ecosystem. In order to function satisfactorily and to play its part completely, such an organization needs a permanent secretariat, and Tunisia has helped to bring this about by offering to host a regional activity centre for Mediterranean protected areas.

Role and functions of a regional activity centre for
Mediterranean protected areas

The establishment and management of protected areas in the Mediterranean depends on the decisions taken individually by coastal States in accordance with their needs and resources. But it is in the long-term interest of the States concerned to develop machinery for placing national decisions within the context of a regional approach.

This is so because, firstly, the Mediterranean is an entity in itself from the standpoint of species and ecosystems, and secondly, many factors to be considered when selecting and establishing a protected area assume full significance only within a regional context. Certain national interests such as the protection of migratory species actually require the co-operation of several States.

Furthermore, a regional approach facilitates the comparison and exchange of data and the establishment of a network of protected areas representative of national and regional values and needs.

Lastly, the implementation of a protocol on protected areas - which is to be negotiated - will necessitate increased co-operation among coastal States in this field.

Among the functions which would benefit most from a regional approach, mention may be made of the following:

- Establishing conservation needs according to regional requirements;
- Sharing experiences and the development of methodology and international co-operation concerning surveys and criteria for identifying the critical areas to be protected;
- Encouraging the preparation of regional and subregional systems for the classification of habitats;
- Developing measures for the protection of migratory species;
- Exchanging information on the status, development and management of protected areas;
- Developing opportunities for the exchange of ideas and personnel;
- Encouraging training activities at the regional level;
- Giving technical advice on the implementation of the Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against Pollution and its protocols in so far as they concern the protected areas;
- Maintaining regular contacts with organizations active in the field of conservation of protected areas, whether regional or international.

As has been recommended at several meetings of the Mediterranean coastal States, the establishment of an association of Mediterranean protected areas would be the best means of promoting closer regional co-operation. In order that such an association, or any other mechanism, may function satisfactorily, it is essential to establish a permanent secretariat. The Tunisian Government is convinced that this role should be performed by a regional activity centre whose functions would be the following:

- (a) To facilitate the operation of the association of Mediterranean protected areas or of any other regional mechanism established under the Mediterranean Action Plan for co-operation with regard to the Mediterranean protected areas;
- (b) To act as a clearing-house for the dissemination of information concerning the Mediterranean protected areas, such as data on conservation priorities, habitat classification systems, survey and criteria methods, etc;
- (c) To collect, classify and distribute data on the situation of Mediterranean habitats and species, and, in particular, to prepare and update a directory of Mediterranean protected areas;
- (d) To foster exchanges of ideas and personnel;
- (e) To help in setting up training programmes;
- (f) To maintain regular liaison with international and regional organizations whose activities relate to protected areas;
- (g) To act as spokesman for the association of Mediterranean protected areas at meetings of the contracting parties to the Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against Pollution;
- (h) To provide regular liaison with the other activities under the Mediterranean Action Plan relevant to the protected areas.

Operation of the centre

Most of the centre's work could be done by correspondence and through the regular publication of a liaison bulletin. The centre would organize meetings of the association of Mediterranean protected areas and other ad hoc meetings if necessary. Centre personnel could visit members of the association to discuss problems and progress in the centre's activities and would take part in relevant meetings, in particular meetings organized under the Mediterranean Action Plan.

Personnel

A team consisting simply of one co-ordinator, one reference clerk and one secretary should enable the centre to operate satisfactorily in the initial stages.

Premises and equipment

In order to provide satisfactory service, the centre should have the following facilities:

- Offices for the co-ordinator, the reference clerk and the secretary;
- Documents room;
- Conference room capable of accommodating about 40 persons, with interpretation equipment;
- Telephone;
- Telex;
- Office equipment (typewriters, photocopying and mimeograph machines).

Site

The Tunisian Government reiterates its offer made at the Monaco (1978) and Barcelona (1980) meetings and at several meetings of the Governing Council of UNEP to host in Tunisia a regional activity centre for Mediterranean protected areas.

The Tunisian Government is prepared to make available the premises necessary for the operation of such a centre and to do everything in its power to support and facilitate its activities.

The premises offered are very well situated, overlooking the sea at La Goulette in the suburbs of Tunis, in the building occupied by the National Scientific and Technological Institute of Oceanography and Fisheries (INSTOP). This Institute, which was established in 1924, is the oldest of its kind on the southern shore of the Mediterranean. Its premises at Salammbô, near La Goulette, comprise a library containing approximately 30,000 volumes and the reference collection established by the Mediterranean marine sorting centre. It has an information-access system, which is currently being improved, and its own collections. It is active in the area of fishery resources, oceanography, marine pollution and fishing technology.

It has several aquaculture projects and is participating in the MED POL programme.

It is subordinate to the Ministry of Agriculture, which is also responsible for the marine, coastal and inland parks and reserves in Tunisia.

Besides the availability of the premises mentioned above, there are many other arguments in favour of choosing Tunisia as the site of a regional centre:

- The initiatives taken by the Government of Tunisia to encourage and promote activities concerning protected areas within the context of the Mediterranean Action Plan;
- The results achieved by the Government of Tunisia in protecting the country's important marine and coastal natural areas, in particular, the establishment of:
 - (a) The national park at Ichkeul, a wetland of international importance, recognized as a biosphere reserve under the UNESCO MAB programme and listed as part of the world natural heritage under the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage;
 - (b) The marine and inland Zembra-Zembretta national park, also recognized as a biosphere reserve;
 - (c) The large natural marine reserve at Galiton.
- The interest which the Tunisian Government has shown in international and regional co-operation in the conservation of nature and natural resources. Tunisia is a party to the following Conventions:
 - (a) Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat;
 - (b) Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage;
 - (c) Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora;
 - (d) African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources.
- Its experience in the management and conservation of the many kinds of Tunisian marine and coastal ecosystems (sandy and rocky coasts, islands and islets, coastal wetlands);
- Its excellent air, sea, telephone and telex communication facilities with most of the Mediterranean coastal States;
- Its relatively low cost of living, which would enable the centre to function economically;
- Its long tradition of hospitality, which would favour rapprochement and understanding among the peoples of the Mediterranean coastal States;

- Its numerous high-quality teaching and research institutions;
- The presence of the headquarters of international organizations such as the League of Arab States and the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization.