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THE "BLUE PLAN" AND THE PROSPECTIVE APPROACH

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CONTENTS

	Paragraphs
I. INTRODUCTION	1 - 8
II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE PROJECT	9 - 24
III. THE SEQUENCE OF WORK	25
A. The first phase	26 - 29
B. The second and third phases	30 - 34
IV. CONCLUSION	35

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Executive Director of UNEP convened two meetings of Mediterranean experts and representatives of specialized agencies and bodies in the United Nations system 1/ on 22-23 January 1976 at Geneva and on 17-19 May 1976 at Paris in order to seek their views on the implementation of the "Blue Plan" project, its geographical coverage, its long-term and immediate objectives, and the means necessary to carry it out. The experts who took part in those two meetings considered that prospective methodologies and systems analysis were among the best means of dealing with the problems raised by the "Blue Plan". 2/

2. The purpose of this document is to elucidate, on the basis of the results of these two meetings of experts, the methodological approach proposed for the implementation of the "Blue Plan", and in particular its prospective element. Basically, therefore, it is an information paper except for the section dealing with the priorities which Governments will wish to give to the topics dealt with during the first phase of the project. 3/

3. The primary concern of all the Mediterranean coastal States is, generally speaking, their social and economic development. They realise, although in different degrees, that their legitimate desire for development is quite closely associated with the maintenance of the basic ecological balance in the highly vulnerable area of the Mediterranean sea and its hinterland. This is the whole purpose of the Mediterranean Action Plan, which was adopted by the Intergovernmental Meeting on the Protection of the Mediterranean, held at Barcelona from 8 January to 4 February 1975. It should also be the purpose of the "Blue Plan", which forms part of the social and economic section of the Mediterranean Action Plan.

4. The "Blue Plan" is viewed as a continuing process of co-operative thinking among the Mediterranean coastal States directed towards prompt action:

- 4.1. To promote the social and economic development to which the States concerned are entitled;
- 4.2. To bring about the rational use of the region's natural resources;
- 4.3. To facilitate the maintenance of the ecological balance, while fully respecting national sovereignty.

5. In order to be really useful to Governments in making their decisions, the "Blue Plan" must therefore be more than a document or a compendium; it should serve as a yardstick to place decisions in their proper perspective in terms of space - through the interrelation of one area with another - and of time.

6. One of the objectives of the "Blue Plan" is to help the persons who occupy responsible posts or take decisions in the Mediterranean States to make their choice. It should do this by providing them not only with an assessment of current needs but also an indication of the probable and possible development of such needs in future. The options offered must also be analysed from the prospective viewpoint so that the entire range of choices can be properly evaluated.

1/ See "Introductory report of the Executive Director of UNEP on the origin, objectives and proposals for the implementation of the "Blue Plan", (UNEP/IG.5/3), 21 October 1976, paras. 6 and 7.

2/ Ibid., paras. 19-21.

3/ See document UNEP/IG.5/6, para. 44.

7. Two aspects of this very broad definition should be emphasized:
 - 7.1. The methodology proposed constitutes a close alliance between theory and proposals for action. As the work of investigation proceeds, it should be possible to establish clear-cut and practical objectives for pursuing or concentrating on certain lines of scientific enquiry, and above all to decide upon the action that should be taken by coastal States;
 - 7.2. The originality of the project lies in the fact that, by iterative steps, it reconciles specialized thinking with a global approach to development and environmental conditions in these countries.
8. A clearer picture is emerging of the structure of the different sections in which the salient features of the "Blue Plan" project must be brought out;
 - 8.1. In the section on "general architecture", an effort will be made to describe as simply as possible the practical implications of the methodology used. The global approach will reveal the vital importance of associating the evolution of the natural environment with that of development activities, while prospective research will unite the States concerned in a common enterprise in which their sovereignty will be fully respected and they will be given responsibility for the systematic management and control of the project;
 - 8.2. In the section on "phases of the work", the description of the different stages shows that, because of the interconnexion between these stages, it will be for the countries themselves to decide whether the project is to be pursued, and they will be able at any time to specify the objectives of their studies and the action they take.

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE PROJECT

9. The general design of the "Blue Plan" project is based on the method known as the global approach. Instead of the usual juxtaposition of a large number of highly specific studies dealing with individual aspects, the relationships between forms of economic development and the natural environment will be considered as a whole and analysed as such. Two concepts that were adopted in the course of the preparatory work call for explanation, namely, the Mediterranean ecosystem, and the Mediterranean basin as a de facto ecological community.
10. The term "Mediterranean ecosystem" is not meant to imply the existence of one system embracing the entire Mediterranean. It is a simplification of a highly complex state of affairs, a convenient term used to emphasize the fact that the natural physical environment (air, water and soil), the living environment (human, fauna and flora), and different modes of economic development are all simply part of the whole. The ways in which this unit is likely to develop will be understood more clearly if the main relationships between each of its elements are identified.

11. For example, economic and recreational activities such as agriculture, industry and tourism affect the natural environment and the ecosystem in two ways, namely, by:

- 11.1. Drawing on natural resources for consumption, i.e. irrigation water for agriculture, the fishing of marine fauna, etc.;
- 11.2. Introducing unsettling elements into the natural environment, in other words, its pollution through, for instance, the disposal of sewage at sea, oil spills from ships, etc.

12. Human communities are at the centre of the ecosystem; they transform it by their activities and at the same time endeavour to reproduce it. It is therefore vital to strike and maintain a balance between the natural environment and economic activities. The uncontrolled disposal of industrial waste is liable to make fisheries products dangerous for human consumption while the expansion of tourism can be hampered by over-industrialization. Thus, competition between different forms of development in the same environment means that a choice must be made between them and that steps must be taken to maintain a vital equilibrium. All these relationships must be taken into account in drawing up a comprehensive picture from which development trends can be discerned and a common approach to the future worked out.

13. It is particularly difficult to think along these lines with regard to the Mediterranean, as the development of individual coastal States differs so widely. The impact of these economic differences on the environment cannot be disregarded in the work of the "Blue Plan" because extreme wealth over-pollutes and over-consumes while extreme poverty cannot afford the luxury of safeguarding the environment. A Mediterranean environmental policy cannot ignore inequalities of development.

14. Consideration of the problem is further complicated by the fact that economic development rates do not coincide with natural rhythms. But beyond these divergencies, there is a de facto ecological entity whose existence has been recognized to some extent by the signature at Barcelona in February 1976 of a Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against Pollution, and of two protocols.

15. Apart from a number of similar problems they have to solve, such as industrialization, mass tourism, etc., the Mediterranean coastal States also have certain problems in common. There are three main reasons for this:

- 15.1. The biosphere is continuous; pollution is carried great distances by marine and air currents, and certain diseases can be spread by human migration;
- 15.2. Certain economic processes take place on a Mediterranean-wide scale: international tourism, for instance, is developing at a pace and in a way which cannot be controlled by any one State alone (saturation of certain areas, new clientèle, etc.);

- 15.3. Ecological processes take place in their own time. An economic activity that is of minor importance at the present time may, in the future, require a carefully protected natural environment which is now being threatened. Areas suitable for aquaculture are a case in point.

The general uncertainty created by these three factors should induce the Mediterranean coastal States to give joint thought to the problems they all share.

16. Unless these problems are considered as a whole, there is a great danger that some will be singled out for detailed treatment while others will be ignored, and that the solutions envisaged will simply shift the onus for action elsewhere. Hence the importance of using methods based on systems analysis.

17. Systems analysis also makes it possible to identify the stable elements (constants) in a system encompassing all the processes of change and adaptation about which information must be available if the real evolution of a system is to be understood. Systems analysis covers:

- 17.1. The strategies of organizations and of economic or social agents;
- 17.2. Relationships and processes of all kinds between the agents and elements of a system;
- 17.3. The structure of surrounding systems that influence the system under consideration.

18. Many relationships must be taken into account in describing the operation of the system being analysed. They can, however, be reduced to three kinds:

- 18.1. Those reflecting a cause and effect sequence, in other words, causal relationships;
- 18.2. Those with divergent effects, i.e., conflictive relations;
- 18.3. Those that converge to produce identical effects, i.e. synergetic relations.

19. When a Government decides to embark upon a large-scale land development scheme, such as the construction of a tourist complex or of an industrial port area, it usually becomes committed for 15, 20 or 30 years and must therefore anticipate the relatively long-term effects of its action and assess the probable future evolution of contextual conditions, that will influence the success of the scheme. No Government can afford to ignore or fail to prepare for the future.

20. In this respect the prospective approach can be used as a method for considering possible futures. In the context of the "Blue Plan", it can be used to plan, select and take action now to protect the Mediterranean basin in the future. This is the paradox of the prospective approach: it explores the future in order to throw light on the decisions that must be taken in the short or medium term. Essentially, therefore, it is a method of obtaining information and of aiding decision-making, which takes proper account of the complexities of development in different countries. In this sense it is clearly distinguishable from both forecasting and futurology.

21. As a method of investigating problems connected with the ecological evolution of the Mediterranean, the prospective approach has three main features to recommend it:

- 21.1. It makes for action;
- 21.2. As the work proceeds, it is possible to integrate the study of many branches of knowledge and, in particular, of data that do not lend themselves to quantification;
- 21.3. It adapts well to an international context and respects State sovereignty, as its objective is not to establish what ought to happen in the future but to understand and explain what might happen.

22. The need for active intervention by man himself is the dominant theme. It is central to the prospective approach, so the work proposed in the "Blue Plan" should make it possible to conceive and select sound courses of action at all stages.

23. The whole point of using the method of prospective investigation based on systems analysis is to lessen the risk of undertaking a number of unrelated studies and to combine all the new elements that emerge in the course of the work. It is thus a pragmatic method for constantly devising practical courses of action to deal with all possible eventualities.

24. The title of the "Blue Plan" should not therefore create misunderstandings with regard to the principle of State sovereignty, for its purpose is simply to assist States to choose between the options open to them, and its work should consequently lead to:

24.1. National action by each country, which is in sole command of its development strategy. The "Blue Plan" is intended to be a yardstick, and, as such, to make it easier to evaluate the effects of different decisions, not to impose a uniform viewpoint.

24.2. The elaboration of joint action to be taken at the international level by means that will not infringe national sovereignty in any way.

III. THE SEQUENCE OF WORK

25. The "Blue Plan" will be carried out in phases so as to:

25.1. Enable intergovernmental bodies to provide guidance in the preparation of studies and elaboration of proposals;

25.2. Ensure a logical sequence of work.

A. The first phase

26. The first phase will be one of reconnaissance and investigation in a number of sectors. After about a year, when the expert surveys have been concluded, it should be possible to have a rough idea of all the main development and environmental problems in the Mediterranean. The way in which the work is embarked upon and implemented during this phase will be of decisive importance for the success of the project as a whole. It will be for the Governments of the coastal States at an intergovernmental meeting held at the end of this phase, to take a decision on launching the next phase of the Blue Plan.

27. At that time it should be possible to evaluate the studies submitted and to determine whether two conditions essential for the success of the project as a whole are beginning to be met, namely:

- 27.1. The establishment of true interdisciplinary relationships between the expert surveys made, which should not be specialized inquiries conducted in isolation from one another;
- 27.2. The promotion of scientific co-operation in the Mediterranean based on the decentralized mobilization of the entire range of expertise available in the coastal States.

28. What has been termed the global approach to the Mediterranean ecosystem (see para. 9 above) should make it possible, during the first phase of the "Blue Plan", to draw up a comprehensive picture of the condition and likely development of the natural environment in relation to the dominant forces at work, namely, economic development factors. For this purpose, a number of expert surveys will have to be carried out on a series of interrelated subjects. This work should not be described as sectoral, as its purpose is to ensure that a uniform and integrated analytical approach will be adopted. The subjects that could be dealt with in the light of the priorities set by Governments are listed in the table below:

Natural environment	Economic development and its component elements
1. Man: population and health	10. Agriculture and the problem of nutrition
2. Man: social and cultural environment	11. Fisheries and aquaculture
3. Water: rivers, deltas and groundwater	12. Energy development
4. Sea: marine fauna and flora	13. Industrialization
5. Air	14. Tourism
6. The land and its topography	15. Ocean, air and land transport
7. Subsoil: mineral and energy reserves	16. Urban development
8. Flora	17. Soft technologies
9. Fauna	18. Training and information
	19. ...
	20. ...

29. The way in which various subjects should be studied in order to arrive at an initial synthesis must be determined with great care. Each of the expert surveys should be conducted by a team of two specialists - one from a developing country and the other from a developed country.

29.1. Their terms of reference will indicate not only how their work is to be financed but also the areas on which attention should be concentrated, in accordance with a joint analytical plan covering the work to be done;

29.2. The secretariat of the "Blue Plan" will elucidate the details of each assignment with the experts concerned, make arrangements for the necessary meetings (co-ordinating seminars) and keep a constant check on the progress of the studies, ensuring, in particular, that the time-limits laid down and the general thrust of the work are respected.

B. The second and third phases

30. The second phase is pivotal for the work of the "Blue Plan". Its content will not be definitely decided until the beginning of 1978. All that can be done for the time being, therefore, is to describe it in broad outline.

31. This phase, which will last for 18 months to two years, will have three main goals:

31.1. To make good any deficiencies revealed during the exploratory phase and to pursue, in greater depth, the work already done;

31.2. To draw up a table of interrelationships and of their likely evolution;

31.3. To specify how a number of key activities of strategic importance for achieving the desired objectives for the Mediterranean are to be carried out.

32. Work in the second phase will be aimed at the elaboration of specific proposals for government action in accordance with the objectives of the "Blue Plan", but will be of a more comprehensive nature.

33. In order to ascertain the possible and probable results of the decisions taken by persons in positions of responsibility in various countries, a concerted analysis must be made of the forces and tendencies underlying such decisions, major policy choices and development processes.

34. In this respect, the prospective investigation of Mediterranean problems could be carried out in respect of three types of situations and trends.

34.1. A scenario for reference purposes, to bring out basic development trends and the changes brought about by opposing forces, as well as the key points from which a number of different paths can be taken, depending on the nature of the action adopted. This task will constitute the first part of the prospective investigation;

34.2. The hypothesis of a break-down due to serious short-term or structural dislocation. Such dislocation, hypothetical and yet far from unlikely, would have effects that could be compared with the functioning of the Mediterranean system as outlined in the reference scenario;

34.5. Alternative development strategies of an optional nature. They call for direct participation by the officials of the various Mediterranean countries in the task of defining the purpose of these strategies, conceived as a consistent set of development objectives. Different strategies could then be devised to suit the tempo of development in each country, or different sets of objectives established and compatible strategies sought for them.

35. It would not be appropriate, at this stage of the work, to spell out the organization of the second phase except in very rough outline. It will be for the competent intergovernmental bodies, at the conclusion of the first phase, to take the necessary decisions in this respect. The beginning of the second phase will then be devoted to a detailed definition of the sectoral work to be undertaken, on the understanding that it may consist of either action or studies.

36. The second phase will conclude with an intergovernmental meeting, which will be required to decide, among other things, what parts of the work, whether studies or proposals for action, should be embodied in the definitive documents of the "Blue Plan". This work will be carried out in the third phase, during which the secretariat will make arrangements for the submission of the studies made to an intergovernmental meeting on the Mediterranean Action Plan as a whole. The third phase will be fairly short (about 6 months).

IV. CONCLUSION

37. The method of prospective investigation to be used in the "Blue Plan" should be effective in solving outstanding problems because, while ensuring strict respect for national sovereignty, it will not only take into account the variety of options among which a choice has to be made, and the diversity of country plans but also promote a co-operative approach to the subject and the preparation of the specific courses of action.