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22nd Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the
Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment
and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean and its Protocols

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Agenda Item 5: Ministerial Session

Background Note for Ministerial Discussions at COP 22

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UNEP/MAP
Athens, 2021

Towards A Blue Mediterranean: Leaving A Pollution-Free Legacy, Protecting Biodiversity and Sustaining Climate Stability

Background Note for Ministerial Discussions at COP 22

1. While celebrating the 45th anniversary after adoption, Barcelona Convention and its Protocols are working in order to protect and conserve the common value of the region: the Mediterranean Sea. A long-term experience was gained and best practices were developed after many years of efforts in the Mediterranean at regional and national levels. Today, all the Contracting Parties at COP 22 are gathered around the vision of Blue Mediterranean: clean, litter-free, self-sufficient, sustainable and able to contribute to the Blue Economy.
2. The Mediterranean represents a common home for all Contracting Parties in which communities have lived and prospered for millennia. Therefore, in order to realize our common goal to protect the Mediterranean Region against pollution, Contracting Parties have been maintaining their collective efforts for decades.
3. The UNEP/MAP-Barcelona Convention system initially focused on pollution; it has expanded its perspective further to address effective coastal management, biodiversity and sustainable development through its Protocols and other strategic instruments and policies. Afterwards, the UNEP/MAP-Barcelona Convention system has added a new dimension to its agenda by introducing efforts to link environmental sustainability and socio-economic development.
4. To achieve our common goal, efforts should be made by efficient coordination and collaboration among MAP governing and advisory bodies (COP, MAP Focal Points, Bureau, the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development (MCSDD), Compliance Committee); the governance mechanisms shall continue to support and promote the scientific and technical work in the MAP system (Components/Thematic Focal Points, CORMONs, *ad hoc* technical Working Groups, etc.). UNEP/MAP's comprehensive legal framework is an essential element of regional and national implementation. MAP is also the first Regional Sea Convention to establish compliance procedures.
5. With the guidance of the UNEP/MAP Secretariat, Contracting Parties have achieved efficient compliance, initiated beneficial projects for protection and conservation of the Mediterranean.

DRAWING PICTURE OF OUR BLUE MEDITERRANEAN

6. As a semi-enclosed sea, the Mediterranean Basin is a fragile coastal and marine ecosystem, under tremendous pressure due to the usage by the nations living along its inter-continental coasts.
7. The environmental pressures arising out of human activities are manifold; including intensive fishing, untreated wastewater discharge, heavy shipping traffic, and intensive tourism activities.
8. Increasing natural disasters arising out of climate change, such as wildfires surrounding the Region, marine litter, land and sea-based pollution, biodiversity loss and the Post-COVID-19 impacts have become a current challenge that needs to be taken into consideration critically.
9. According to the recently published IPCC Report, the Mediterranean will be facing an increase in sea level and sea surface temperature and in the number of forest fires¹.
10. SoED, MAR 1 and IPCC Reports indicate that the Mediterranean Region is facing serious problems nowadays. The unique value of the Mediterranean Basin can be protected only by reducing the adverse effects of the prevailing drivers of the environmental change in the Mediterranean, which are marine litter, climate change, land and sea-based pollution that together affect the biodiversity of

¹ IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report

the Region. At this point, it is the most crucial issue to emphasize what is our joint roadmap for the following 10 years in the Mediterranean Region².

11. The UNEP/MAP Medium-Term Strategy (MTS) 2022-2027 presents the opportunity to contribute in a coherent way to global processes, the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and actions towards the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration and the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.

12. The MTS brings forward an innovative approach that aims at achieving transformational change and in substantively progressing in the implementation of the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols by the Contracting Parties, strengthening enforcement and compliance with their provisions and implementation of ecosystem approach for achieving and maintaining clean, healthy and productive as well as ecologically diverse status of marine waters and substantively progressing in achieving the SDGs in the Mediterranean.

13. The MTS 2022-2027 consists of seven programs, of which four are thematic programs. These programs point out a pollution and litter free Mediterranean, healthy Mediterranean ecosystems and enhanced biodiversity, a climate resilient Mediterranean, and sustainable use of coastal and marine resources including circular and blue economy.

14. Marine litter has been a critical matter on the global scale for a long time. Rising tide of marine litter and single-use plastics have been increasing in recent years. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic increased usage of several disposable materials such as masks and gloves lead to growing awareness among the Contracting Parties on the way we produce, consume and dispose.

15. Twenty-one countries are sharing the Mediterranean Sea with marine-life under the water. The generous Mediterranean offers its assets for wellbeing and economical welfare. Therefore, it is our prime concern to sustain, protect and preserve the valuable biodiversity and ecosystems.

16. Meanwhile, most of the Mediterranean countries are dealing with the wildfires, the adverse effects of climate change, the global surface temperature which is expected to severely increase at least until the mid-century under all emission scenarios considered. We need to act urgently and in unity to undertake our part to address adverse impacts of climate change on the marine environment, not only in the sea but also in the terrestrial environment.

17. COP 22 is important for being the first COP after the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the efforts of MAP to link environmental sustainability and socio-economic development, it is time to revive the stagnant economy of the region while protecting the environment.

18. COP 22 aims to maintain a platform to assess the outcomes of efforts made in the last few years and in this respect, COP 22 will consider all global environmental meetings that have been on the agenda of recent environmental efforts on global scale.

Effective Management of Land and Sea-Based Pollution

19. Contracting Parties have negotiated on proposed amendments to the Annexes of the pollution protocols as well as on the elaboration of regional action plans and measures; update of categories of substances; strengthening of a number of new elements, e.g. noise and artificial light. All of these shall be addressed during the adaptation process of the regional plans by taking into consideration regulatory, scientific and technical developments related to land-based sources and activities with a particular focus on those developments related to the implementation of the ecosystem-based approach for achieving clean, healthy and productive as well as ecologically diverse status of the Mediterranean Sea and coast.

20. Contracting Parties have reviewed and agreed to proposed updates with modifications and amendments to the Annex to the Protocol for the Prevention and Elimination of Pollution of the Mediterranean Sea by Dumping from Ships and Aircraft or Incineration at Sea (Dumping Protocol) for

² IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report

better implementation, and also agreed on the creation of the regional action plan for Urban Wastewater Treatment and Sewage Sludge Management.

21. All Contracting Parties of the Barcelona Convention are invited to cooperate in order to prevent littering at source, share technologies and experiences. Furthermore, we strictly aim to protect the marine environment from adverse effects of marine litter, as well as microplastics. The implementation of Updated Regional Plan in the framework of Article 15 of the LBS Protocol on Marine Litter Management in the Mediterranean will accelerate coordination of efforts for a litter-free Mediterranean.

22. The Contracting Parties are expected to provide effective management to prevent, reduce, monitor and control marine litter generation and its impact on the coastal and marine environment while strengthening the development and implementation of programs at national and regional level for addressing main sources of pollution, including plastics in light of decisions taken at COP 22.

Restoration of Biodiversity and Ecosystems:

23. Regardless of the fact that the Mediterranean Sea area covers 1% of the ocean surface, it is home of more than 17,000 marine species and it contributes to an approximated 4-18% of the world's known marine species; of these, over 25% are found nowhere else on Earth³. Despite its unsustainable use among the centuries, the Mediterranean Sea still hosts an extended and an exclusive area of the world's marine biodiversity. Today we came to a point for taking a position of a regardless effective protection management with '*no turning point*'.

24. As it is indicated in the MedECC MAR 1 report, climate change presents novel sources of pressure particularly on vulnerable species and habitats⁴, causing coming years which are hotter, drier and more arid. Pressure from human use (intense fishing activities, maritime traffic, land-based pollution, and marine litter), climate change and invasive species are resulting in biodiversity loss, habitat damage and fragmentation and emerging diseases based on ecological changes⁵.

25. In this regard, the Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity (SPA/BD) Protocol provides concrete protection measures to ensure safeguarding of biodiversity by developing and implementing management plans for protecting habitats through by establishment of marine protected areas.

26. The post-2020 Strategic Action Programme for the Conservation of Biodiversity and Sustainable Management of Natural Resources in the Mediterranean Region (Post-2020 SAPBIO) aims to achieve three overarching goals: reducing the threats to biodiversity, ensuring that biodiversity is preserved and maintained or enhanced in order to meet people's needs and enabling the necessary transformative change, putting in place the tools and solutions for implementation and mainstreaming by recommending their start-up activities, presenting 42 Actions and their expected results for 2027 and 2030.

27. In order to obtain desirable outcomes, Contracting Parties should offer their best endeavours to take the necessary measures for the effective implementation of the Post-2020 SAPBIO and prepare or revise their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans by fully incorporating the relevant elements of the Post-2020 SAPBIO; and maximise their efforts for their timely implementation.

28. Contracting Parties of the Barcelona Convention are encouraged to provide environmentally sound management, to preserve and protect valuable natural cultural assets, by the establishment of specially protected areas, and flora-fauna and habitats of endangered and threatened species as well as coastal and marine ecosystems, landscapes and geomorphology.

³ UNEP/MED WG. 515/14 Annex I, p.12.

⁴ <https://www.medecc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/MedECC_MAR1_complete.pdf>

⁵ United Nations, "The Second World Ocean Assessment Volume II, p. 397,
<<https://www.un.org/regularprocess/sites/www.un.org.regularprocess/files/2011859-e-woa-ii-vol-ii.pdf>>

Combating Climate Change and its Effects

29. Climate change is a global issue with the impacts that are felt at the local level. Previous Assessment Reports of the IPCC refer to the Mediterranean Region as one of the most vulnerable regions in respect of climate change.

30. As a result of its geographical location, the Mediterranean Sea also suffers from the impacts of climate change; resulting in warming 20% faster than the rest of the world on annual basis and 50% in summer season according to the first Mediterranean Assessment Report (MAR 1) prepared by the numerous experts from all the countries at the Mediterranean Expert on Environmental and Climate Change Group⁶.

31. The Mediterranean region with its rich biodiversity has an essential role on global scale, yet its distinctive marine characteristics render it vulnerable to the effects of climate change. With the collaboration of the Contracting Parties, paying special attention to the Mediterranean throughout post-2020 planning will be extremely beneficial in accomplishing the goals. Given the global character of climate change's effects, only long-term and persuasive attempts among the Contracting Parties will be able to mitigate the adverse outcomes. As it was mentioned before, boosting common efforts to provide climate stability in the Mediterranean is an emerging issue. In order for Mediterranean Countries to cope with the challenges of Climate Change, there is a need to increase institutional capacity. It is deemed important to strengthen and support countries through institutional change.

32. Contracting Parties of Barcelona Convention are expected to establish stable natural and socio-economic systems that are resilient to impacts of climate change by promoting adaptation approaches in the Mediterranean Region by decreasing anthropogenic pressure on coastal and marine ecosystems to maintain their contribution to adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change.

PAVING THE WAY TO COMMON ACHIEVEMENTS

33. Adverse effects on the marine and coastal environment can be mitigated through the adoption of common-appropriate measures and policies. Those measures and policies include taking the legal and political steps, achieving the effective collaboration, and observation of the technological advances to improve marine ecosystems through optimizing resource utilization efficiently and minimizing environmental pollution.

34. As it is known, the Mediterranean Sea is surrounded by twenty-one littoral states of varying economic development status who had overcome economic challenges in different levels during the COVID-19 pandemic. UNEP/MAP has several long-term and short-term plans to increase its chances of securing a successful and sustainable outcome, the delivery of these plans would benefit from the extraordinary policy momentum and financial mobilization associated with the ongoing recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, which is defined as the *Green Recovery*.

35. A sustainable blue economy in the Mediterranean Sea offers an important opportunity to build back better from the pandemic by transitioning to *Green Recovery*. In order to enhance joint protective environmental management, Blue Economy also presents an opportunity to tackle some of the biggest challenges of the century; growing pollution and marine litter crisis, global warming from greenhouse gases caused by human activities and loss of biodiversity. A sustainable blue economy can play a critical role to accelerate advances to a net-zero carbon world by 2050 through measures such as green shipping, nature-based solutions to climate change, and innovative carbon sequestration methods such as blue carbon.

36. In order to tackle the existing and future environmental threats to the Mediterranean Sea while recovering from the adverse effects of the pandemic, the approach that needs to be highlighted is a combination of comprehensive efficient management by the Contracting Parties and integration of the blue economy through different maritime sectors such as tourism, fishing and shipping. As for that, the key element of this approach is unity for recovering a better and sustainable marine environment

⁶ (MedECC, 2020).

through modern science facilities, green technology, financial flows, public awareness and engagement, regional harmony and education. There should be unity, cooperation, coordination, and collaboration not only between governments but also between the stakeholders from public-private sectors and between NGOs who have contributed to the monitoring-assessment processes in the Mediterranean Sea. In addition, cooperation among Regional Sea Conventions is deemed quite critical. For example, the joint activities of Black Sea Commission and Barcelona Convention have been a successful platform to exchange experiences in several topics such as fisheries, marine noise, invasive species, ecosystem based approach, and marine litter management.

37. The UNEP/MAP Medium-Term Strategy 2022-2027 (MTS) and a variety of draft decisions have been prepared to be adopted at COP 22. This year, the MTS offers a great opportunity to boost our vision, set new bold goals, and demonstrate our continued commitment for the Mediterranean Action Plan and accessible aims.

38. The main objective of the proposed UNEP/MAP PoW 2022-2023 is to support integrated responses for prevention and reduction of pollution and marine litter in the framework of the Regional Plans and National Action Plans under the LBS Protocol, the Mediterranean Strategy for the Prevention, Preparedness, and Response to Marine Pollution from Ships (2022-2031); and the Regional Action Plan on SCP. The proposed activities aim at promoting a transformational change embracing a circular and blue economy.

39. Achievement of the sustainability of coastal and marine resources through the collaborative implementation of planning and management approaches and integrating circular economy measures and solutions in key Blue Economy sectors need to be assisted. Ensuring an effective initiation of the MTS implementation, building on results and lessons learnt from the implementation of the previous biennial Programmes of Work.

THE WAY FORWARD

40. COP 22 is expected to bring a new vision to tackle all challenges our Blue Mediterranean is facing recently. The Contracting Parties of the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols are welcomed to gather around the Building Back Better approach of the “UN framework for the immediate socio economic response to COVID-19” by contributing to a Green Recovery, supporting new and sustainable business models and empowering green transition to nature-based solutions and circular economy, while ensuring that the UNEP/MAP-Barcelona Convention system’s impact is the driving force behind the transformational change, to effectively manage and reduce threats and enhance marine and coastal resources through concrete actions by achieving a clean, healthy, productive and ecologically diverse status and the relevant SDG targets and the post-2020 global biodiversity goals and targets.

41. By making use of outcomes obtained as a result of all previous efforts, in the upcoming biennium achievements we should gain are;

- Emphasis on the need for implementation of related SDG’s by developing strong and genuine partnerships (e.g. public-private) and fostering effective cooperation and inclusiveness;
- Sufficient engagement of decision makers, and all stakeholders to strengthen and implement appropriate governance mechanisms for a healthy and pollution free Mediterranean Sea;
- Further commitment to the shared vision on Barcelona Convention for a sustainable future for the people of the Mediterranean;
- Establishment of further cooperation in the region, with sufficient professional support to provide the necessary high level of representation and commitment;
- Emphasis on the objective and role of the Compliance Committee in order to facilitate and promote the compliance with the obligations under the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols.

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR THE MINISTERS

42. Ministers and Heads of Delegations will be invited to make interventions during the Ministerial Session, highlighting progress made in implementing the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols, and describing actions and commitments undertaken to respond to national and regional challenges posed by the impacts of the triple crisis of pollution, biodiversity loss and climate change – in the upsetting context of the COVID/19 pandemic.

43. The following questions, laying out some of the most pressing issues that the Ministerial statements may address, are proposed.

- COP 22 marks the 45th anniversary of the adoption of the Barcelona Convention. As a regional UN agreement aiming to turn the tide on the most pressing environmental challenges, the potential of the Convention and its Protocols would benefit from a new push for implementation and enforcement.

Questions:

- 1. What is your view for the future of the UNEP/MAP-Barcelona Convention system in guiding the Contracting Parties in their efforts towards sustainable development of the marine and coastal region of the Mediterranean?**
 - 2. Please share success stories of implementing the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols.**
 - 3. What concrete steps and innovative tools/implementation means are still required/been effective in your view, to overcome implementation and compliance gaps at the national level and achieve the ambitious objectives ahead?**
- Environmental issues in the region have been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic on many levels: from a rise in medical waste and a tide of single-use plastic, to the reallocation of financial resources to health emergencies, and to socio-economic disruptions.
 - COP 22 is an opportunity for the Contracting Parties to initiate multilateral momentum for a regional post-COVID green recovery powered by cooperation and solidarity. All Mediterranean countries have a stake in a complementarity-based institutional landscape in the Mediterranean, where the efficient allocation of efforts and financial resources contributes to a greater collective impact.
 - The new UNEP/MAP MTS 2022-2027 provides the adequate framework for the collective action towards the green recovery, which entail deep transformation in socio-economic systems, including the transition to low-emission development paths and the broadening of the circular economy.

Questions:

- 1. How to ensure that the pressures linked to the COVID-19 pandemic do not derail or jeopardize at national level hard-won gains under the UNEP/MAP-Barcelona Convention and, more broadly, under the 2030 Agenda and relevant SDGs?**
- 2. Within the framework of the new UNEP/MAP MTS 2022-2027, how do you, as a Contracting Party, plan to transform your commitment into action, to generate and switch to the green recovery momentum? and to ensure that the UNEP/MAP-Barcelona Convention system's impact is successfully driving the required transformational change to kickstart a post-COVID green recovery?**

- 3. At the national level, what is needed to set in motion the required transformational change while accelerating efforts to combat marine pollution and litter, protect biodiversity, sustain climate stability, applying integrated management tools (e.g. ICZM and MSP, etc.), and ultimately achieve the good environmental status of marine and coastal environment?**
- The science encapsulated in recent Mediterranean-specific reports, including SoED and MAR 1, and MED QSR has established the facts of the pressures affecting natural systems, including those induced by human activities demonstrating the importance of Science Policy Interface regional platforms and their added value.

Questions:

- 1. What national mechanisms are in place to ensure a functioning science-policy interface - please share good national practices for informed and integrated policy making.**
- 2. To what extent and how regional and global science-policy interaction platforms can guide and provide support to the Contracting Parties efforts?**