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## MEDITERRANEAN ACTION PLAN

Third Meeting of the Task Team  
on Implications of Climatic Changes  
on the Island of Malta

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# **IMPLICATIONS OF EXPECTED CLIMATIC CHANGES ON THE ISLAND OF MALTA**

## **TOURISM**

by

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## THE MEDITERRANEAN

Tourism in the Mediterranean has since time immemorial played an important role in the economic and social development of the littoral countries of the region. It is calculated that tourism contributes an average of 6.5% of the national GDP in these countries.

By the end of the 1980s, over 120 million tourists visited the countries of the Mediterranean, which is about 30% of all tourists throughout the world. By the year 2025, if the present holiday patterns continue, there will be between 35 million and 52 million extra tourists who will visit, the Mediterranean region over the five-week summer tourists peak (June-August).

Tourism, besides generating jobs, is in some instances the major source for foreign exchange earnings. At the same time, an increase in the number of tourists is accompanied by the need to improve and develop further coastal areas, an increase in the water consumption and increases in sewage disposal.

It is obvious that any distortion in the atmospheric environment will adversely effect this important sector of the economy since tourism is largely dependent on factors related to climate behaviour. Tourists, every year, try to escape the daily habitat and the majority go in search of sunshine and warm seas.

The rise in the 1980s in the number of tourists visiting the Mediterranean has also seen a rise in global warming. In fact, the last decade has recorded six of the eight warmest years ever, while in 1990 new ground was broken in that it was the warmest year on record.

The Mediterranean is dotted with holiday resorts of all kinds. If climate change "destroys the interest of national parks, or blights resorts with excessive heat or over-frequent storms, the tourist industry will redistribute itself and the resorts so disadvantaged will suffer".

Climate change also puts pressure on local populations. Sea surface temperatures in the mid-1970s began a rise in the southern hemisphere which continues to break existing records. With the progressive warming of the planet, more water will evaporate with the result that water, particularly drinking water, becomes even more scarce. Indeed, at the Second World Climate Conference, meteorologists from the Mediterranean region, reported that drought was now seriously threatening water supplies that are so essential for a healthy industry such as that of tourism.

## TOURISM IN MALTA

Tourism in Malta has for many years been one of the Islands' most important economic activities. In 1990, tourist arrivals reached the figure of 8711,776 while in 1991 892,547. In 1990, earnings from tourism totalled about Lm 157 million or about U.S.\$ 500 million, which represents 25.1% of exports in goods and services.

The projection to total arrivals by 1994, is set to reach the one million target with the maximum total annual arrivals in future to stop around 1.2 million.

When one considers that the population of Malta is about one-fourth of this figure (1991: ), it is obvious that the tremendous pressure inflicted on the local population as a result of the tourist influx must be compensated by financial rewards.

The heavy demand being created by tourists on this sector of the Maltese economy can be seen from the level of full-time employment in hotels and catering establishments which at the end of September 1991 stood at around 7609 or 5.8% of the total gainfully occupied population. If one were to include the employment levels in tourism-related services, the percentage would be considerably higher.

While efforts are being made to have a closer distribution of visitors throughout the year, the seasonal pattern shows that the peak summer months (July/August/September) continue to attract the major number of tourists arrivals in Malta. The share of arrivals during the September 1991 quarter, with nearly 50% of the maximum total annual arrivals, still constitutes a very important portion of tourist destination.

The sun, sea and sand continue to be the main images and attractions for tourists visiting Malta. Here again, efforts are being made to diversity these images to centre around the cultural and historical assets of the Maltese Islands. Malta has often been referred to as the island of sunshine and therefore the sun worshippers who flee from Northern Europe's cold and damp weather, find in Malta the perfect refuge. This trend is accentuated by the fact that the major EC member states still constitute over 75% of total arrivals.

It is therefore of no surprise that tourism can be adversely affected by drastic changes in the climatic environment of the Maltese Islands. When one considers that the tourist industry is a fragile one and therefore is susceptible to political, economic and social upheavals, a change in climate could add another element of anxiety and preoccupation for a small society like that found in Malta. If the mild and warm frequent tropical disturbances, excessive heat or over-frequent storms, the tourist industry will suffer and with it, a substantial part of the Maltese population.

The impact of climate change on the Maltese Islands can be encapsulated in the message delivered by the Prime Minister of Malta on the occasion of the 1991 WMO World Meteorological Day, who stated that:-

"the very temperature of our people is a reflection of our climate, which has influenced our lives. Atmospheric warning, rainfall deficiency and sea-level life here on it. Water resources and agriculture are two important resources that are already strained. Malta already spends 30% of its energy bill transforming sea-water into drinking water. Tourism, which is one of the island's major foreign-currency earners, employing thousands, would suffer if the heat becomes intolerable. Already, we find that warm summers in the North of Europe - Malta's main market - affect the number of incoming tourists".

A related aspect which can have an adverse impact on tourism in the Maltese Islands is the health hazard as a result of the harmful radiation from the skies. Already, in other parts of the world, public service campaigns are warning of the dangers of sunbathing. As the ozone gets thinner, people may have to cover up all year-round to avoid the risk of damage to the eyes and the skin. This, of course, would influence the number of sun seekers to visit the Maltese Islands.

Climate change and sea-level rise may have significant and mixed impacts on such site-dependent industries as the tourism and resort industry and a whole range of coastal industries, particularly the beach and recreation industry (IPCC Impact Assessment 5.2.1.5).

Considering the infrastructural development directed towards the tourist industry, climate change could render non-functional the buildings along a resort coastline that is largely dominated by tourism. In Malta, the length of accessible coastline which is dominated by tourism is 84% on mainland Malta and 74% on Gozo and Comino. These percentages show in no unclear terms the magnitude of the impact which climate change could have on coastal areas which in Malta's case are significantly dominated by tourism and therefore generate a considerable amount of economic activity.

Sandy beaches which are thronged by tourists who visit Malta, could also be endangered by sea-level rise. Because of the geological nature of the coastline there are few sandy beaches in Malta. Therefore, a fraction of sea-level rise could easily produce wide-scale erosion. In turn, the cost of beach nourishment may be quite considerable and may result in the abandonment of the beaches and of their surrounding coastal communities that cater for tourism.

