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23rd 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

Portorož, Slovenia, 5-8 December 2023

Agenda Item 5: Ministerial Session

Contribution of the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development to the Portorož Ministerial Declaration

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Proposal from MCSD to the COP 23

“Green transition in the Mediterranean: from decisions to actions”.

General Considerations

Hosted by France on June 14-16 2023, the 20th Meeting of the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development (MCSD) requested the President of the MCSD and the Secretariat to inform the Meeting of the UNEP/MAP Focal Points and the 23rd Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols (COP 23) about its conclusions and recommendations, including the present elements on the contribution of the MCSD to COP23, which have been finalized by the Secretariat following a consultation of the MCSD under the guidance of its Steering Committee.

The 20th Meeting of the MCSD reaffirmed the importance of this regional inclusive, multi-stakeholder platform for experience sharing and peer learning established under UNEP/MAP – Barcelona Convention. One of the **major roles of the MCSD is to promote sustainable development in the Mediterranean region through different actions including the evaluation of the development trends on the basis of a set of indicators and main development drivers in the region**, in connection with:

- **the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and**
- **international commitments (COP UNFCCC, CBD, IMO, BBNJ, etc.)**
- **regional evolutions in the Mediterranean**

The 20th Meeting of the MCSD emphasized the importance - for the Mediterranean countries, their quality of life and their sustainable development - of mobilizing common efforts to update the MSSD adopted in 2016, under the French presidency of the MCSD, with the wish to make international decisions more legible and prescriptible taking into account all recent evolutions related to Sustainable Development. This is in line with **the ambitions of the French presidency for UNOC 2025, which will be held in Nice, of maximizing high-ambition coalitions (HAC)**, such as those engaged during the OOS in Brest in 2022 and UNOC 2022 in Lisbon.

Inputs of the 20th MCSD Meeting to COP 23

Main elements for MSSD update

In view of already available data and reports produced under the UNEP/MAP Secretariat's and RACs' coordination, and in view of works published by groups of scientists (MedECC, etc.), the MCSD Steering Committee recommended to **initiate and conduct the revision of the MSSD as soon as possible, that is to say during the next biennium 2024-2025**. This process should start by the production of a synthesis of the already available assessments and data. The ambition is to present the new revised MSSD 2026-2035 to COP 24 in 2025.

To organize the MSSD revision, the MCSD meeting agreed to **establish an extended committee with participation of the MCSD Steering Committee and some additional MCSD members on voluntary basis**, which will work online to finalize the MCSD contributions to the COP 23 under the French leadership.

The Bureau, at its 94th meeting (Izola Slovenia, 20-21 June 2023), agreed that the theme of the Ministerial Session of COP 23 will be “**Green transition in the Mediterranean: from decisions to actions**”. The input of the MCSD to the COP is thus taking this into consideration.

The revised Strategy should take into account the recommendations and priorities highlighted by **previously made reports and evaluations**, with the goal to **suggest appropriate objectives** to face the many challenges that Mediterranean populations and economies already face. Some general intentions are: raising the level of ambition concerning biodiversity, increasing consideration of the issue of climate change and promoting sustainable nature-based solutions, fighting against plastic pollution and illegal or over-fishing, implementing new practices for water security and food security, increasing education, youth engagement and women employment.

Such changes will involve political decision-makers through technical and legislative ways and means, as well as citizens through changes in practice and awareness of the issues to be faced. For that purpose, it is crucial to consider **the role of local and regional authorities and of civil society organizations**, which are in a strategic intermediary position and detain concrete knowledge necessary to an effective implementation of the national agendas approved by the States.

The need for adequate resources, time and skills, which is more prominent in **the southern and eastern part of the basin**, has to be fulfilled by adopting regulatory, technical and financial measures to strongly involve all relevant stakeholders.

In addition to the substantive priorities on key sectors that are affecting the Mediterranean development and its sustainability (i.e. fisheries and aquaculture, energy, tourism, shipping etc.), the 20th MCSD meeting highlighted a number of **cross-cutting elements** to be further taken into consideration in the updated MSSD, and in particular:

- The development and implementation of appropriate **ecosystem service accounting mechanisms** in support of sustainable blue economy to enhance and fuel environmental monitoring schemes (such as the Mediterranean Observatory on Environment and Sustainable Development).
- The use of **legal and political instruments offered** under the MAP Barcelona Convention, or other relevant institutional frameworks, to increase coastal resilience and anticipate the effects of climate change, to reduce all types of pollution, and to **increase the implementation of all Barcelona convention protocols**.
- The importance of **including gender parity and youth engagement in MCSD work and meetings** towards COP 23; to start each UNEP/MAP meeting with a message from the youth; and to support the UNEP/MAP Gender Action Plan targets related to the MCSD which will be presented at COP23.
- The building of **partnerships and networks to promote gender integration**, in order to support the Members of the MCSD in strengthening the gender aspects of their work and guidelines, and to ensure the participation of NGOs with gender expertise as civil society stakeholders in the Commission (i.e. dedicated seat for specialists in gender and development, gender mainstreaming in the selection process).
- The **further promotion of education to sustainable development and the engagement of relevant partners**, including Parliamentarians, in the new communication strategy.
- The suggestion by the Contracting Parties at COP23 to adopt **instruments providing training, financial resources and control of the use of financial resources**, which local authorities might receive as a result of decisions adopted by the states.

- The **involvement of all relevant stakeholders** (including Civil Society Organizations, Academia, regional and local authorities) to be ensured in the evaluation of the implementation of the current MSSD 2016-2025 and the development of the new MSSD (2026).

New flagship initiatives to be included in the updated MSSD

New flagship initiatives are suggested to represent the strategy in an exemplary way and to propose demonstrative actions with significant potential for visibility. The identification/selection of Flagship Initiatives will be based on specific criteria: a) the Initiatives should be aiming at achieving a transformational change to make a difference, b) the Initiatives should be inclusive and supported by a number of Contracting Parties and partners, and c) the Initiatives should have targeted actions and clear outcomes and should also have a strong communication and advocacy value.

The 20th MCSD meeting welcomed the proposal of H.E Minister Hervé Berville, French State Secretary for the Sea, to submit to the COP23 an **ambitious initiative on Posidonia** that would aim to support the action plan of the Med Posidonia Network (MPN), in particular its objective of protecting 100% of seagrass beds by 2030 and thus making it a shared objective. The meeting therefore agreed to further discuss and work for submission to COP 23 of a proposal for « a POSIDONIA flagship initiative », supported by France, voluntary MCSD partners, and the MPN (Annex I).

The meeting further agreed to consider **the re-launch of the Blue tourism initiative** (www.bluetourisminitiative.org) as an MCSD Flagship Initiative, starting by establishing a working group with support from ECO UNION and France. It could be supported by a workshop/side-event at COP23.

Besides, the meeting welcomed the proposal to launch a **new Flagship Initiatives on “the Water Energy Food Ecosystems nexus in the Mediterranean Source to Sea continuum”**.

In addition to this, the 20th MCSD meeting welcomed the proposal to continue work: (a) on the **Flagship Initiative related to waste reduction**, inter alia by considering specific waste streams such as food waste and plastic waste, by looking at Extended Producer Responsibility schemes and by considering zero waste options; (b) on the **Flagship Initiative on public procurement**, as proposed by COMPSUD, Israel, Morocco and ECOUNION, acknowledging the challenges faced on this issue.

It further acknowledged the importance of **youth and of education** as important aspects of sustainable development for consideration in the work of the MCSD and for inclusion in the new updated MSSD, inter alia through the continuation of the **Flagship Initiative on the Mediterranean Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development**.

Thematic priorities for the updated MSSD

- **The preservation of marine biodiversity**

Make the preservation of marine biodiversity a political priority in the Mediterranean. Mediterranean Countries should strengthen their investment in the implementation of **the high-ambition Coalition for Nature and People** by concretizing for the Mediterranean the implementation of the Kunming-Montreal-MPA 30x30 framework. This will be also articulated with the objectives of the PAMEx as well as of SAP BIO, particularly for marine protected areas. In particular, the objectives are to strengthen the effectiveness of the management of MPA/SPAMIs, to improve the monitoring of biodiversity and the associated ecological objectives within the framework of the Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Program (IMAP), and to improve the capacity-building aimed at improving information and data submission.

- **Reduction of pollution-related pressures**

The MCSD suggests to take into greater account, including in the next MSSD, the reduction of certain pressures already identified, but still insufficiently dealt with, which would benefit from better coordination. This would translate into:

- supporting the implementation of **the ECAMED zone** (Med SO_x ECA) and possible future work on a Med NO_x ECA;
- strengthening the work of **the network of prosecutors** to better coordinate the fight against accidental (or criminal) pollution at sea by ships;
- supporting the implementation of **the Particularly Vulnerable Maritime Zones for the protection of cetaceans**;
- supporting the management of **sustainable fishing and the fight against IUU fishing**;
- supporting the **fight against plastic pollution** with a proactive contribution of the UNEP/MAP to the negotiation of the legally binding Treaty against plastic pollution and the promotion of the HAC to eliminate plastic pollution by 2040.

- **Blue Economy, ICZM and Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP)**

Considering the absolute necessity to ensure that the blue economy remains sustainable, towards more energy sobriety and a more sustainable management of marine resources, it is necessary to enhance the protection of the marine environment from land-based sources of pollution, including through conservation.

The MCSD proposes to embody the ecosystem approach to **integrated maritime planning**, still insufficiently implemented in the current MSSD and work of UNEP/MAP. It would lead to concrete energy transition actions, in particular around the decarbonization of ships and the planning of MREs in the Mediterranean.

MSP should also be further implemented by UNEP/MAP and be at the heart of the MSDD's objectives, with the idea to promote dialogue among users of marine and coastal resources at various levels. **Offshore renewable energy infrastructure and the greening of maritime transport are emerging issues at a global level, and should be considered as priority fields for consideration by UNEP/MAP, including in the revision of the MSSD.**

Risks and emergencies are also a major concern for most of the Contracting Parties that have prepared the contingency plans for national emergencies, or strategies for coastal and marine resources, but much remains to be done to improve resilience and adaptive capacity, in the first place in the face of rising sea level. The implementation of the 100 m setback zone is considered extremely useful. **The preparation of the Common Regional Framework for ICZM is recognized as important, and additional support is considered crucial regarding Maritime Spatial Planning.**

The 20th MCSD meeting, stressing the need to include comprehensive integrated MSP in the next MSSD, recommended the **establishment of a dedicated UNEP/MAP Working Group**, building on and collaborating with other MSP mechanisms in the region.

From science to action and decision

It seems necessary to mobilize **financial funds for knowledge and scientific expertise** in the Mediterranean, with the objective to strengthen the science/policy interface (science to policy), working with MedECC, UNEP/MAP, the OCEAN CLIMAT platform, IDDRI and all actors involved in Education for Sustainable Development. Possible actions include to:

- Promote financial support for networks of experts and for the communication and education to sustainable practices, in several languages.

- Develop a participatory science network in the Mediterranean via an experimental and demonstrative project that could take place in 3 to 5 countries around the Mediterranean with the support of local scientists and NGOs and the youth collaboration.

Annexe I

**PROJECT English Version/PROJET Version française
POSIDONIA FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE/INITIATIVE PHARE POSIDONIE**

PROJECT English Version

submitted for first exchange to the extended steering committee of the MCDD on October 30

POSIDONIA FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE

A new flagship initiative, linked to the revised MSSD

The MCSD suggests to the COP to validate the principle of implementation of a new flagship initiative on Posidonia oceanica meadows. It would be conceptualized during the 2024-2025 biennium. Linked with the revision of the MSSD, this initiative, would make it possible to promote existing initiatives, consolidate them and identify in support countries that have taken a position for the protection of posidonia, through national strategies, material and human resources or within the framework of the MPN network in particular, as well as project coordinators and leaders of NGOs involved in that issue.

This initiative could be explained during a side event dedicated to Posidonia during COP 23 in Slovenia.

A FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE LINKED TO THE NEW MSSD: FRAMEWORK

The MCSD suggests to the COP 23, the adoption of a new “flagship initiative” on POSIDONIA, blue lung of the Mediterranean Sea. Such recommendation was adopted during the 20th meeting of the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development, which was held in Marseille, from June 14th to June 16th, 2023.

The protection of Posidonia meadows is indeed crucial for the preservation of species which rely on it (1000 animal species and 400 plant species), and fisheries resources (50 commercial species rely on it). It is also essential to mitigate climate change (carbon stored for thousands of years: more than 5 tonnes per hectare per year); and to adapt to it (reduction of coastal erosion, preservation of beaches). Posidonia is therefore very important for the quality of life of our populations and the good ecological state of our Mediterranean Sea. Its economic value is estimated at 69,000 euros per hectare and per year. It also plays an important role for coral reefs and mangrove. It is the most vulnerable species, growing of about one meter per century and being subject to very few restoration programmes – which are still mostly at the stage of research and development.

The Posidonia flagship initiative would be the continuity of major international commitments such as the Kunming-Montreal agreement, the Specially Protected Areas and biological diversity Protocol, the Post2020 SAPBIO, the "Action Plan for the Conservation of marine vegetation in the Mediterranean" and the Med Posidonia Network's roadmap.

GOALS

This flagship initiative would support the development of an *Action Plan for the preservation of marine vegetation in the Mediterranean*, composed of:

- 1- Actions linked to **the acquisition of knowledge on this species** - in particular its location and repartition, as well as the pressures it suffers from:
 - The mapping of Posidonia presence areas, still insufficiently assessed in many Mediterranean countries, or its update in case of outdated data.
 - The analysis of pressures exerted on Posidonia in each area (anchoring, illegal fishing, artificialization, pollution, invasive species, etc.), the identification of solutions aimed at reducing them, the feasibility of these solutions (costs, means, governance, opportunities, obstacles, etc.).
- 2- Innovative actions, especially on:
 - Innovative financial mechanisms by 2025: the creation of a Posidonia Fund (not linked to carbon compensation) to finance conservation actions in priority sites.
 - The development of active and passive restoration projects (cf EU law on nature restoration), to remove pressures on priority sites for actions.
- 3- Actions on reinforcement of regulations:
 - Prohibition of anchoring in the meadows for ships over 20 meters.
 - The development of MPAs including Posidonia oceanica
- 4- Actions to enhance the management of priority sites for actions (buoys, action plans for sustainable gestion of beaches, etc.)/Actions to raise awareness and engagement:
 - Creation of local and national alliances meant to drive changes in behaviors and positive actions of involved actors.
 - A regional cultural event shared by patrimonial institutions of culture and nature, NGOs, local authorities and citizens. For instance, a “great annual feast for Posidonia”.
- 5- Actions linked to capacity building through the creation of practical toolboxes for managers of marine protected areas. Actions linked to the sensibilization of Maritime Spatial Planners in the region, in order to improve the integration of the protection of seagrass blue carbon ecosystems in these processes.

Considering funding, it would be appropriate to set up a Posidonia fund by 2025. In particular, it could be a Posidonia credit financing mechanism meant to finance areas where action is a priority. An estimated minimum of 50 million euros should be required.

Member States of the Barcelona convention are thus particularly concerned by Posidonia protection and would be encouraged by the MSDD to:

1. Establish national regulations to improve monitoring of the meadows and in particular to prohibit anchoring of large ships on Posidonia;
2. Complete mapping in the southern shore countries;
3. Implement effective monitoring means to prevent illegal trawling on seagrass meadows;

4. Improve quality of water (upgrading to STEP standards, water treatment plants);
5. Reach the goal of establishing 1,000 ecological moorings for small-scale and large-scale pleasure craft in priority action sites by 2030.

PROJET *Version française*

soumis pour premier échange au comité de pilotage élargi de la CMDD du 30 octobre 2023

INITIATIVE PHARE POSIDONIE

Une nouvelle initiative liée à la SMDD révisée

La CMDD propose à la COP 23 de valider le principe d'une nouvelle initiative sur la Posidonie à mettre au point durant le biennium 2024-2026. Cette initiative, en lien avec la révision de la SMDD, permettrait de valoriser les initiatives existantes, de les consolider et d'identifier en soutien des pays ayant pris position pour la protection de la posidonie, via des stratégies nationales ou dans le cadre du réseau MPN notamment, et ayant engagé des moyens matériels et humains, ainsi que les coordinateurs et porteurs des projets, les organismes associés et la gouvernance générale.

Cette initiative pourrait être explicitée durant un *side event* dédié à la posidonie lors de la COP23 en Slovénie.

DANS QUEL CADRE S'INSCRIT CETTE INITIATIVE EN LIEN AVEC LA SMDD ?

La CMDD propose à la COP 23, l'adoption d'une nouvelle « initiative phare » POSIDONIE, poumon bleu de notre mer Méditerranée. Cette recommandation a été adoptée lors de la 20^{ème} réunion de la commission méditerranéenne de développement durable, qui s'est tenue à Marseille du 14 au 16 juin 2023

La protection de l'écosystème emblématique qu'est la POSIDONIE est en effet cruciale pour la préservation de la biodiversité qui en dépend (1000 espèces animales et 400 espèces végétales) et de la ressource halieutique (50 espèces commerciales). Elle est aussi essentielle pour permettre l'atténuation du changement climatique (carbone stocké pour des milliers d'années : plus de 5 tonnes par hectare et par an) ; ainsi que l'adaptation à celui-ci (diminution de l'érosion des côtes, préservation des plages). La posidonie est donc très importante pour la qualité de vie de nos populations et le bon état écologique de notre mer Méditerranée. Sa valeur économique est estimée à 69 000 euros par hectare et par an et joue un rôle aussi important que les récifs coralliens et la mangrove. Elle est l'espèce la plus vulnérable à ce jour, avec une croissance de sa matre proche d'un mètre par siècle et des plans de restauration qui restent essentiellement au stade de la recherche et développement.

La flagship initiative Posidonie s'inscrirait dans le cadre des grands engagements internationaux comme l'accord Kunming-Montréal, le Protocole relatif aux aires spécialement protégées et à la diversité biologique en Méditerranée, le Post2020 SPABIO¹, le "Plan d'action pour la conservation de la végétation marine en Méditerranée" et la feuille de route du réseau Med Posidonia.

QUELS OBJECTIFS ?

Cette initiative phare Posidonie soutiendrait la mise en œuvre d'un *Plan d'actions pour la conservation de la végétation marine en Méditerranée* comportant :

1. **Des actions liées à la connaissance de cette espèce**, notamment sa localisation et sa répartition dans le bassin Méditerranéen, ainsi que les **pressions qui s'y exercent** via :
 - La cartographie des zones où se situent des herbiers de Posidonie, encore insuffisamment répertoriées dans certains pays (ou sa mise à jour quand la donnée est très ancienne).
 - L'analyse des pressions (ancrage, pêche illégale, artificialisation, pollution, espèces invasives, etc.) par territoire, l'identification de solutions visant à les réduire, ainsi que la faisabilité de ces solutions (coûts, moyens, gouvernance, opportunités, freins, etc.).
2. **Des actions innovantes** notamment sur :
 - Les mécanismes de financement innovants d'ici 2025 via la mise en œuvre d'un fonds Posidonie (différent d'un mécanisme de compensation carbone) afin de financer les sites prioritaires.
 - La mise en œuvre de projets de restauration passive et active, via l'enlèvement de pressions sur des sites prioritaires d'action (cadre de la loi européenne de restauration de la nature).
3. Des actions liées au **renforcement de la réglementation** et notamment :
 - L'interdiction pour les navires supérieurs à 20 mètres d'ancrer dans l'herbier.
 - La création d'AMPs incluant la Posidonie.
4. Des actions liées au renforcement de **la gestion des sites prioritaires** : équipement de bouées, mise en place de plans de gestion de plages raisonnés, etc. Des actions liées à la **sensibilisation** et au **processus d'engagement** via :
 - La création d'Alliances locales et nationales visant à entraîner un changement de comportement et une action positive des acteurs engagés.
 - Un évènement régional culturel partagé par les institutions patrimoniales de culture et de nature, les ONG, les collectivités locales, les citoyens. Cela pourrait être par exemple « une grande fête annuelle de la posidonie ».
5. Des actions liées au renforcement des capacités via la mise en place de temps de sensibilisation et de **boîtes à outils pratiques** à destination des managers d'aires marines protégées. Cela dans le but d'améliorer la protection des écosystèmes de carbone bleu de Posidonie dans les AMP.

¹ https://rac-spa.org/sites/default/files/doc_spabio/post_2020_sapbio.pdf

En termes de financement, il conviendrait de mettre en place, d'ici 2025, un fonds Posidonie reposant notamment sur un mécanisme de financement de crédit posidonie d'ici 2030, afin de financer les sites prioritaires d'action. Les besoins sont estimés à minimum de 50 millions d'euros.

Ainsi, **les Etats membres de la convention de Barcelone et particulièrement concernés par la protection de la posidonie, seraient encouragés dans le cadre de la révision de la SMDD à :**

- 1- Mettre en place des réglementations nationales pour la surveillance des herbiers et interdisant le mouillage des grands navires dans l'herbier ;
- 2- Compléter la cartographie de la Posidonie en Méditerranée ;
- 3- Mettre en place des moyens de contrôle pour empêcher le chalutage illégal ;
- 4- Améliorer la qualité de l'eau (mise aux normes STEP, stations d'épuration des eaux usées) ;
- 5- Atteindre l'objectif de mise en place d'ici 2030, de 1000 mouillages écologiques pour la petite plaisance et la grande plaisance dans les sites prioritaires d'action.