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THE MEDITERRANEAN COMMISSION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

**A Tool for Mediterranean Strategy
and a Regional Bridge between
global and National levels**

Introduction

From its inception the Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP) in the mid 70s and its adoption by the Coastal States of the Mediterranean Basin and the European Community, it became clear that the Mediterranean, although a regional sea par excellence, could not be studied solely from the aspect of marine pollution indeed, marine pollution is linked not only to human activities at sea, but also to activities on the land part of the coast thus the concept of eco-development (the forerunner of sustainable development) was from the very beginning a fundamental element of the rationale behind MAP action:

It is in this light that the Contracting Parties:

- adopted the Barcelona Convention and the Protocols concerning the protection of the marine environment,
- developed MED POL, an instrument to acquire scientific knowledge and carry out environmental monitoring;
- put together, through the Blue Plan, a series of analytical studies on the development perspectives of the countries in the region as well as on the impact on coastal areas and natural resources;
- set up PAP/RAC, a Regional Activity Centre which through cooperation, focused on technical economic and political answers to the various problems linked to the interaction between development and environment, especially the concept of "integrated management of coastal areas".

It was therefore natural that after the Rio Conference, the Governments of the Region and the European Community wished to translate to the Mediterranean level the terms of Agenda 21 by:

- participating in the Tunis Conference which adopted Agenda Med 21 (1994);
- deciding to reorient MAP and the Barcelona Convention in order to give legal force to the commitments entered into at Rio (1995) and
- by setting up the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development (1996)

By doing all this, the Mediterranean States reaffirmed that theirs is an eco-region and that they intend to tackle jointly the problems which are local, national and regional at the same time.

I. The problems of sustainable development at the Mediterranean level

The studies carried out in the framework of the Blue Plan and summarized in the introductory report presented in the first meeting of the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development (Rabat, 16-18 December 1996), Agenda MED 21 and MAP Phase II describe clearly the situation which is particular to the Mediterranean, a situation which encapsulates in a very specific way the global problems of sustainable development, mainly:

1. The pressure of anthropogenic activities on natural resources, especially water, soil, forest is especially strong and creates tensions in the medium term concerning the availability and quality of water resources, which is only the technical and financial interventions of the World Bank and the European Union (in the framework of the Euro-Med partnership) are totally justified.
2. Urban development remains extremely rapid; this means large urban areas where the problems of environment, housing, transport and quality of life are predominant.
3. The pressure of urban development plus tourism, which is a major economic and territorial factor, on the coastal areas and especially on landscapes, historical sites and coastal ecosystems is a concern for the whole region; sustainable development of coastal areas is one of the major challenges of the 21st century.
4. The trend of traditional activities (agriculture, fishing) to become more intensive has an impact on the natural resources and the marine environment.
5. A series of "hot spots", industrial/port areas and/or urban areas whose development did not progress in a controlled manner or that lack effective sewage systems and/or appropriate systems for waste management contribute to the pollution of the marine environment, the coast and the air.
6. The studies carried out in the fields of energy, transport and urban wastes showed the need for more rational and sustainable methods of production and consumption. In particular, policies for energy saving and the promotion of renewable sources of energy must be considered a priority.

At the regional level, the studies showed clearly that the management of environmental problems should be carried out in a perspective of development which would promote new financial resources, national and local capacity building, information and awareness of the public, and the involvement and participation of all actors concerned, especially local authorities, enterprises, NGOs, women and young people.

It is interesting to note that as a response to these analyses, not only was MAP refocused but a series of initiatives were also taken, such as:

- at national level with the elaboration and adoption of strategies of sustainable development;
- at regional level with the development of appropriate intervention instruments in the METAP framework, especially as concerns capacity building and
- at Euro-Mediterranean level with the setting up of the partnership adopted at the Barcelona Conference.

Today, at regional level, there is a true inter-institutional collaboration, within which the European Community plays an even increasing role.

II. The MCSD: setting up

1. Purpose and functions:

Recommended in 1994 and approved in 1995, the MCSD was established in 1996 as an advisory body with the following purpose and functions:

Purpose:

to identify, evaluate and assess major economic, ecological and social problems set out in Agenda MED 21, make appropriate proposals thereon to the meetings of the Contracting Parties, evaluate the effectiveness of the follow-up to the decisions of the Contracting Parties and facilitate the exchange of information among the institutions implementing activities related to sustainable development in the Mediterranean;

to enhance regional cooperation and rationalize the inter-governmental decision-making capacity in the Mediterranean basin for the integration of environment and development issues.

Functions:

to assist the Contracting Parties by making proposals on the formulation and implementation of a regional strategy of sustainable development in the Mediterranean, taking into consideration the resolutions of the Tunis and Barcelona Conferences and the context of Agenda MED 21 and MAP Phase II;

to consider and review information provided by the Contracting Parties, in accordance with Article 20 of the Barcelona Convention, including periodic communications or reports regarding the activities they undertake to implement Agenda MED 21, and the problems they encounter, such as problems related to the integration of environment into national policies, capacity-building, financial resources, technology transfer, and other relevant environment and development issues;

to review at regular intervals the cooperation of MAP with the World Bank and other international financial institutions, as well as the European Union, and to explore ways and means for the strengthening of such cooperation, and particularly to achieve the objectives of Chapter 33 of Agenda MED 21;

to consider information regarding the progress made in the implementation of relevant environmental conventions, which could be made available by the relevant conferences or by the parties;

to identify technologies and knowledge of an innovative nature for sustainable development in the Mediterranean region and to provide advice on the various means for their most effective use, in order to facilitate exchanges among the Contracting Parties and to enhance capacities for national development;

to provide reports and appropriate recommendations to the meetings of the Contracting Parties, through the MAP Secretariat, on the basis of a comprehensive analysis of reports and issues related to the implementation of a regional strategy related to MAP Phase II and Agenda MED 21;

to undertake a four-year strategic assessment and evaluation of the implementation by the Contracting Parties of Agenda MED 21 and decisions of the meetings of the Contracting Parties and of actions by the Contracting Parties relevant to sustainable development in the Mediterranean region and propose relevant recommendations thereon;

the first strategic review should be undertaken for the year 2000 (with ministerial participation), with the objective of achieving an integrated overview of the implementation of Agenda MED 21, examining emerging policy issues and providing the necessary political impetus;

the Commission shall make the best use of the main results of MAP activity centres in the field of sustainable development, and those of the MAP Mediterranean Environment and Development Observatory, as well as those of national environmental observatories;

to assume such other functions as are entrusted to it by the meetings of the Contracting Parties, to further the purposes of the Barcelona Convention, MAP Phase II and Agenda MED 21.

2. Participation and meetings

The Commission is composed of a maximum of 36 members, consisting of representatives from each Contracting Party to the Barcelona Convention and representatives of local authorities, socio-economic actors and non-governmental organizations working in the fields of environment and of sustainable development. All representatives shall participate in the Commission on an equal footing. While Contracting Parties are permanent members of the Commission, the representatives from each of the three major groups will have a two-year mandate, in order to allow for a larger rotating participation.

In accordance with the Rules of Procedure adopted by the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention, any State which is a member of the United Nations or the specialized agencies, and any other inter-governmental organizations the activities of which are related to the functions of the Commission, may participate in the Commission's work as an observer.

The Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development shall hold ordinary meetings at least once every year, up to the year 2000, then shall meet at least once every two years.

The Coordinating Unit of MAP, serving as the Secretariat of the Commission, shall provide for each session of the Commission an analytical report containing information on relevant activities to implement Agenda MED 21 and other sustainable development activities recommended by the meetings of the Contracting Parties, the progress achieved and emerging issues to be addressed.

3. MCSD and UNCSD

The Commission shall maintain relations with the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (UNCSD), and shall facilitate the exchange of information and experience among national and regional commissions on sustainable development.

The Commission, in discharging its functions, shall take into account the experience and expertise of the UNCSD, and shall submit relevant reports to the United Nations Commission through the Contracting Parties' meetings on any issues that may be of interest for sustainable development in the Mediterranean region.

The Commission and the Contracting Parties shall, as far as possible and taking into account the particular needs of the Mediterranean countries, utilize the existing reporting system of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development, with a view to streamlining and avoiding duplication of work.

III. The MCSD - first steps and perspectives

Looking at the UNCSD activities and experience and considering the specific Mediterranean context, it appears that the region can play an important role in devolving implementing actions from global to regional level, and in decentralizing responsibilities from national to local level where appropriate. It could be an excellent "case study" through which the UNCSD could test its recommendations concerning relevant chapters of Agenda 21.

Rather than looking to review every chapter of Agenda MED 21, the MCSD will focus on a limited number of key issues, in particular those at the first stages where it is felt that real progress could be done. For general aspects as well as for specific issues, the MCSD should enhance the exchange of information on concrete experiences among countries, NGOs, major groups and international organisations, collecting sound information on the effectiveness of policies and practices, and advocating the use of those that have proven successful.

From UNCSD's experience, the MCSD finds some interest in adopting and adapting several "segments" of UNCSD's activities structure, (task managers, working groups, etc), in the framework of a year-round process fed by all partners.

The first or constitutive session of the MCSD was held on 16-18 December 1996 in Rabat, Morocco. The Commission's programme of work is to be built around short-term and medium-term activities corresponding to some of the priority needs of the Mediterranean area. Two or three subjects will be addressed over a period of one year. A flexible programme of work has been identified for implementation over a number of years with a view to the submission of its results to the meeting of the Contracting Parties to be held in 1999, as well as to subsequent meetings. The work of the Commission will concentrate on the production of pragmatic products of real added value. The decisions of the Commission shall be adopted by consensus.

In order to implement efficiently and usefully these activities and to ensure larger participation, task managers were designated and thematic working groups were organized.

The Commission is expected to be innovative in its working methods and to avoid creating additional administrative structures and holding too many meetings, which are costly and might not be effective. Without being over-ambitious, its work should be realistic while reflecting the Mediterranean character.

The working groups are of flexible composition so as to reflect the diversity of the Commission's membership, avoiding the simplistic division between North and South that is not appropriate in the Mediterranean context.

Publicizing the work of the Commission and raising public awareness of the importance of sustainable development will be given due consideration.

The MAP funds allocated to the MCSD will be considered as seed money since the task managers are expected to look for the necessary additional human and financial resources and expertise for the activities of the thematic working groups. However, the countries involved are willing to support as far as possible these activities through the provision of human and financial resources, being confident that if the Commission selected priority activities that are sound in their substance and organization, they would raise greater interest from donors.

From the various themes of great importance for the sustainable development of the Mediterranean region, the Commission identified eight subjects on which it will focus its attention. Two of these themes were identified as being areas for action in the short term because sufficient work had already been undertaken to permit the development of policy and strategy proposals. These two themes are: the sustainable management of coastal zones, with particular reference to strategic and policy-making aspects; and water, with particular attention to the management of demand. The other themes, identified as medium-term priority themes, for which end-products are to be planned for submission to the meeting of the Contracting Parties to be held in 1999, are: indicators of sustainable development; tourism; information, awareness and participation; free trade and the environment; industry, and sustainable development; and the management of urban and rural development.

Members of the Commission volunteered to fulfil the roles of task managers and members of the thematic working groups, as shown in the attached table. The specific MAP structures that will support the activities of each working group were also identified.

In addition to the inter-sessional activities related mainly to selected themes and their working group, the MCSD will hold its second session in May 1997 in Spain and its third session in October 1997 in France.

TABLE
THEMATIC WORKING GROUPS

Themes	Task managers	Members of the group	Support from MAP ¹
Short-term (over about a one-year period)			
- Sustainable management of coastal zones	Morocco and MEDCITIES	CREE, European Community, Greece, City of Rome, Spain, EcoMediterrania, Monaco, WWF, Italy, EOAEN, Cyprus, France, Tunisia, MIO-ESCSDE, Egypt, Malta	RAC/Priority Actions Programme, RAC/Blue Plan, RAC/Environment Remote Sensing and RAC/Specially Protected Areas.
- Management of water demand	Tunisia and Morocco	Libya, WWF, APNEK, European Community, Egypt, Italy, France, CEFIC, MIO-ESCSDE, Malta, Spain, EcoMediterrania	RAC/Blue Plan and RAC/Priority Actions Programme
Medium-term (until 1999 Contracting Parties meeting and beyond)			
- Sustainable development indicators	France and Tunisia	European Community, Morocco, EcoMediterranean	RAC/Blue Plan
- (Eco)Tourism	Spain, EOAEN and Egypt	Malta, Monaco, Cyprus, Croatia, European Community, Greece, EcoMediterrania, WWF MIO-ESCSDE	RAC/Blue Plan and RAC/Priority Actions Programme
- Information, awareness and participation	MIO-ESCSDE and CREE	European Community, WWF, France, APNEK, Croatia, Egypt, Morocco, MEDCITIES, EcoMediterrania	MED Coordinating Unit
- Free trade and environment in the Euromediterranean context (strategic impact assessment)	FIS	Tunisia, France, European Community, APNEK, Morocco	MED Coordinating Unit
- Industry and sustainable development (cultural, economic, technical and financial aspects of progressive elimination of land-based pollution)	Italy	WWF, Israel, EOAEN, ASCAME, CEFIC, Spain, European Community	MED POL, RAC/Clean Production
- Management of urban/rural development	Egypt	MEDCITIES, FIS, MIO-ESCSDE, Spain, Morocco, France, Malta (Turkey, Bosnia and Herzegovina)	RAC/Blue Plan and RAC/Priority Actions Programme

¹ The Coordinating Unit and the Regional Activity Centres will each provide the necessary support to the different working groups according to their expertise.