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21st 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

Naples, Italy, 2-5 December 2019

Agenda Item 5: Ministerial Session

Background Note for Ministerial Discussions at COP 21

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UNEP/MAP
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Note by the Secretariat

Following the conclusions of the 87th (Athens, Greece, 6-7 November 2018) and the 88th (Rome, Italy, 21-22 May 2019) meetings of the Bureau on the proposed themes of the Ministerial Session of COP 21 and on the preparation of its Ministerial Declaration, and the presentation of these themes at the MAP Focal Points Meeting (Athens, Greece, 10-13 September 2019) through document UNEP/MED WG.468/19, the Secretariat has prepared the attached Background Note for the Ministerial Discussions at COP 21.

At their meeting, the MAP Focal Points decided to focus the Interactive Ministerial Policy Review Session on the strategic guidance for the preparation of the next UNEP/MAP Mid-Term Strategy, considering the current global context and relevant frameworks. These include the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the UN Convention on Biological Diversity post-2020 Biodiversity Framework, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change process and the implementation of the Paris Agreement, the implementation of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification Strategic Framework 2018-2030 aimed to the Land Degradation Neutrality, and UNEA resolutions.

The attached document outlines the context of the Ministerial Session, taking into due consideration the most relevant evolutions at the global level as well as the implementation of relevant UNEP/MAP – Barcelona Convention strategic documents, and sets the questions to facilitate the interventions and discussion by Ministers and Heads of Delegations during the Ministerial Session of COP 21, that will take place on Wednesday, 4 December 2019.

Background Note for the Ministerial Session at COP 21

1. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)/Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP) – Barcelona Convention system, and its institutional, regulatory and implementation framework, is a unique multilateral intergovernmental platform allowing the Mediterranean countries to effectively consolidate the environmental protection of a shared heritage, the *Mare Nostrum*, with its unmatched richness of biodiversity, natural resources and cultural bonds, to advance together through the implementation of common legal instruments, strategies and policies, as well as scientific and technical programs, projects and initiatives, and to ultimately ensure a legacy of sustainability for the future generations of the Mediterranean.

2. The overarching objective of the Barcelona Convention, i.e. “*the preservation and sustainable development of a common heritage, in the interest of present and future generations*” cannot be reached by pursuing current trajectories and requires transformative change: a systemic switch of behavior calls for an inclusive approach with the active participation of all partners and stakeholders in the different steps of the policy cycle. Urgent action is needed to integrate the environmental, economic and social spheres on realistic, yet desirable, transition pathways.

A. The global scenario and the Naples momentum

3. The 21st Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols (COP 21) (2-5 December 2019) of Naples, Italy, comes at a crucial moment of the global agenda to ensure the strategic guidance for the future of the UNEP/MAP-Barcelona Convention system. Within that system, Mediterranean countries are called to address together the environmental and sustainable development challenges in order to ensure the well-being and prosperity of the Mediterranean citizen of tomorrow, and to offer an outstanding paradigm to implement ongoing global processes, goals and targets at a regional level.

4. These include the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) post-2020 Biodiversity Framework, the implementation of the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the UN Convention to Combat Desertification Strategic Framework 2018-2030 aimed to the Land Degradation Neutrality, the relevant UN Environment Assembly resolutions. Other relevant processes include the preparatory works of international fora like the UN 2020 Ocean Conference and the IUCN World Conservation Congress, as well as reports and analyses delivered by science-based in the past months such as IPCC and IPBES reports.

5. In such an articulated framework, several major global and regional events have taken place in 2019 on areas of relevance to the themes of the Ministerial Session of COP 21. These include (in chronological order):

- (i) *On 11-15 March 2019, the 4th UN Environment Assembly (UNEA), held in Nairobi under the overarching theme “Innovative solutions for environmental challenges and sustainable consumption and production”, where the Resolutions 4/7 on “Marine plastic litter and microplastics” and 4/10 on “Addressing single-use plastic products pollution” renewed the global commitment to protect marine and coastal ecosystems by reducing single-use plastic products;*
- (ii) *On 5-6 May 2019, a Workshop on the G7 Action Plan to Combat Marine Litter in synergy with the Regional Seas Conventions was held in Metz, France, followed by the “G20 Implementation Framework for Actions on Marine Plastic Litter” adopted on 16 June 2019 in Karuizawa, Japan, highlighting the urgent need to eliminate discharges of litter and microplastics to the oceans;*
- (iii) *On 7 May 2019, after its 7th Plenary, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) reported on research showing that nature is*

declining at unprecedented rates and launched the “*Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services*” showing that humanity has significantly altered three-quarters of the land-based environment and two-thirds of the marine environment;

- (iv) *On 24 June 2019, the “Summit of the two shores. Mediterranean Forum” held in Marseille called upon a zero plastic, zero waste and low emissions’ Mediterranean, highlighting the devastating effects of global warming in the Region and the social inequalities carried on by chemical and plastic discharges;*
- (v) *On 9 July 2019, the Sustainable Development Goals Report 2019 was released showing the progress made in the implementation of the 17 Goals universally agreed in 2015, remarking the relevant challenges ahead require “much deeper, faster and more ambitious response” as stated the UN Secretary General;*
- (vi) *On 2-13 September 2019, the UNCCD, at its 14th Conference of the Parties, held in New Delhi, India, welcomed the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021–2030) and highlighted how ensuring stability to the amount and quality of natural resources necessary to support ecosystem functions and services as per their use (the “land degradation neutrality” approach) plays a key role to tackle climate crisis, and enhance water supply and biodiversity;*
- (vii) *On 20-23 September 2019, following last year’s “Special Report: Global Warming of 1.5°C.” the IPCC at its 51st Session delivered the Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate (SROCC), providing valuable information about how climate change is affecting ocean and coastal ecosystems, and how nature and society can respond its risks;*
- (viii) *On 23 September 2019, at the 2019 Climate Action Summit held in New York, policy-makers from governments, businesses and the civil society, announced potentially far-reaching steps to confront climate change, paving the way to the 25th COP of the UNFCCC, the “Blue COP”, in Santiago, Chile, next December.*

B. Main challenges and emerging issues

6. Environmental and sustainable development challenges are in the frontline in the global context. The sea is warming at all depths and undergoing loss of oxygen and acidification. This is impacting terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems and causing geographical shifts in marine species while the entire marine and coastal ecosystems are under stress. The coupled effect of warming and drought is expected to lead to a general increase in aridity and subsequent desertification of many Mediterranean land ecosystems. These changes are also affecting human societies impacting freshwater supply, infrastructure, transportation, food security, tourism and recreation, health and wellbeing and culture and social values. More specifically:

- The Mediterranean Sea still faces pollution challenges and is one of the most marine litter-affected areas in the world: nutrients, heavy metals, persistent organic pollutants (POPs), pesticides, hydrocarbons, and marine litter remain the main pollutants of the Mediterranean Sea, with plastics accounting for up to 95% of total floating marine litter and more than 50% of seabed marine litter, mostly originating from single-use plastic products. Analyses show also that five types of debris, mostly single-use plastics, represent more than 60% of the marine litter composition.
- Currently, 8.97% of the surface of the Mediterranean is under a legal designation status, 1.6% and 0.04 % is covered by nationally designated sites and by Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) no-go, no-take or no-fishing zones; however, we did not yet achieve the SDG Target 14.5 to “Conserve at least 10% of marine and coastal areas by 2020”, efforts are still required to reach a more homogeneous spatial distribution of MPAs in the Mediterranean Basin and most alarmingly, only 10% of Mediterranean MPAs are duly implementing management plans;
- The Mediterranean is recognized as a climate change hot spot, with average annual temperatures already above the current global warming trends (+1.1°C), with frequent and extreme rainfall, with sea level rising at an accelerating rate and where the adverse effects of climate change –

including warming, more severe droughts, changing extreme events, sea-level rise and ocean acidification – are exacerbating the existing environmental and social problems.

- The increasing competition for the use of marine space and resources in the Mediterranean calls for an increasing effort to control and minimize the impacts associated with the expansion and diversification of maritime sectors: in 2015, the Mediterranean and Black Sea region had the lowest percentage of sustainable fish stocks worldwide (37.8%), with 78% of Mediterranean and Black Sea fish stocks that are fished at biologically unsustainable levels.

7. These challenges, the global environmental agenda, the decisions of the Contracting Parties and the work carried out by the UNEP/MAP-Barcelona Convention system during the last biennium have been at the basis of the discussions, in view of the preparation of the Ministerial Session and Ministerial Declaration of COP 21. This has led to the identification of the four priority areas, namely Marine Litter, Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and Biodiversity, Climate Change, and Blue Economy (with a focus on Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM)/Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) and Sustainable Tourism).

C. UNEP/MAP – Barcelona Convention: the path ahead

8. The UNEP/MAP-Barcelona Convention system can play a major role in fostering sustainability transitions. However, this requires an urgent step up from planning, engagement and local innovation, to wide-spread implementation on the ground and effective enforcement, in collaboration with local authorities and relevant stakeholders, including relevant private sector and funding agencies. Implementation and enforcement are lagging behind the ambition of commonly agreed objectives and measures, and risk discrediting their comprehensiveness and the major achievements in environmental diplomacy in the region. The imminent threat of severe and irreversible damage to ecosystems and subsequent human wellbeing calls for the urgent implementation and enforcement of agreed actions, capitalization, scaling-up and dissemination of a multitude of relevant innovations in a coherent approach, adequate monitoring and evaluation to ensure that measures are leading to the desired effects, and necessary adjustments when achievements fall behind.

9. Challenges need to be addressed using all the available capacity at local, national, and regional levels for the environmental governance for sustainable development and the protection of the environment. The UNEP/MAP-Barcelona Convention system has a key role in delivering effective responses to protect the marine and coastal ecosystems of the Mediterranean and contribute to sustainable development, through the implementation of its mandate, increasing links and interactions with on-going global and regional processes, and the enforcement of significant increasing commitments taken in more than four decades of working together.

10. In the context of the increased attention given to marine and coastal issues and to sustainable development by the international community, the importance of the regional dimension and of the role of Regional Sea programmes and conventions, several draft decisions have been submitted to COP 21 for adoption, including on: development of Regional Plans to prevent/reduce pollution from Land-Based Sources (LBS); preparation of the new Strategic Action Programme for Biodiversity in the Mediterranean; a roadmap for the possible designation of the Mediterranean Sea Area as an Emission Control Area for Sulphur Oxides (SECA); establishment of new Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Interest (SPAMI); technical Standards and Guidelines to foster the implementation of Protocols and IMAP; a Common Regional Framework on ICZM and a set of regional measures on green and circular businesses and sustainable products; assessment studies, including the 2019 State of the Environment and Development Report, the operational communication strategy, a roadmap for the preparation of a data management policy, etc. At the same time, new funding opportunities will boost implementation, in cooperation with the European Union, GEF, and other partners.

11. The outcome of COP 21 and the guidance provided by Contracting Parties will be crucial as the UNEP/MAP-Barcelona Convention system embarks on the preparation of the new 2022-2027

Medium-Term Strategy (MTS). COP 21, in this sense, constitutes a timely and unique occasion for Contracting Parties to define the main directions for the immediate and medium-term future of the entire system. It is incumbent on Contracting Parties to execute their responsibility to guide the system in developing strategic options that are responsive to the needs of the region and its people, and effective in contributing to the global agenda.

D. Suggested questions for the Ministers

12. Ministers are invited to make their interventions of a maximum length of 7 minutes, emphasizing the progress made so far in implementing the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols, and describing the actions and commitments to respond to national and regional challenges. The following questions have been formulated to focus and facilitate the discussion:

- What are your national challenges and good practices in preventing and reducing marine litter? What other common measures should the Mediterranean countries undertake to offer a collective and effective response?
- What is the expected contribution to the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework from your national and regional perspective? In this context, what is needed at national and regional level to commit and achieve the MPA global targets in the Mediterranean?
- How can emission reductions be promoted through collective action to achieve a progressively air-pollution free future for the Mediterranean citizens from sea- and land-based sources, and to tackle the adverse effects of climate change in the region?
- What is, in your view, the most significant strategic and innovative measure to accelerate the ecological transition of the Mediterranean toward a sustainable future as envisioned in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the MSSD and to boost circular economy?
- Enforcement and compliance with the obligations and commitments deriving from Multilateral Environmental Agreements is proving increasingly complex. What are your views on the best way to ensure their effective and coordinated implementation at global and regional level, in order to maximize their impact?