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Agenda item 7.3: Status of implementation of the GEF Adriatic project on EcAp and MSP

The GEF Adriatic Project “Implementation of Ecosystem Approach in the Adriatic Sea through Marine Spatial Planning”

Note:

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Note by the Secretariat

1. This document highlights the main outcomes of the GEF Adriatic Project, implemented by UNEP/MAP Coordinating Unit with **PAP/RAC** and **SPA/RAC** in coordination with the Ministry of Tourism and Environment, the National Agency for Protected Areas in Albania and the Ministry for Ecology, Spatial Planning and Urbanism in Montenegro.
2. The present document was prepared by SPA/RAC in coordination with PAP/RAC.
3. MEDPOL and INFO/RAC provided support to some activities of the GEF Adriatic project activities.

Status of implementation of the GEF Adriatic project on EcAp and MSP

Project Title:	"Implementation of Ecosystem Approach in the Adriatic Sea through Marine Spatial Planning" (GEF Adriatic Project)
Executing Agency:	UNEP/MAP
Project partners:	SPA/RAC, PAP/RAC
Geographical Scope:	Adriatic Sea
Participating Countries:	Albania, Montenegro
Main source(s) of funding:	1,817,900 USD funded by GEF (International Water and Biodiversity focal areas - GEF 6 Strategy)
Most relevant UNEP/MAP POW outcome(s)/output(s):	This is an innovative approach seeking to: (i) reach a science-based consensus among sub-regional countries on Good Environmental Status (GES) of the Adriatic Sea; (ii) establish a sub-regional programme on integrated observation and monitoring system among Adriatic countries, including a set of regionally agreed common indicators; (iii) demonstrates how environmental status of Adriatic countries could be improved through the application of Marine Spatial Planning; and (iv) increase national and regional awareness of the usefulness of ecosystem approach and marine spatial planning. The project contributes to the UNEP/MAP 2018-2019 PoW outputs 1.1.4, 3.2.3, 3.4.1, 3.5.1, 4.2.2, 4.4.2 and 4.5.1. and the UNEP/MAP 2020-2021 PoW output 3.4.1.1
Starting Date:	October 2017
End date:	June 2021

1. Main Objectives and expected results

The overall objective of the project is to restore the ecological balance of the Adriatic Sea through implementation of the Ecosystem Approach (EcAp as applied by UN Environment/MAP) and improve subregional management capacity through Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) as a viable marine management tool.

In so doing, the project proposes to integrate horizontally management tools through the Ecosystem Approach (MSP, ICZM, MPAs, etc.) and to provide technical assistance to Albania and Montenegro to strengthen their respective management capacity.

All other Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention of the Adriatic sub-region, EU and non-EU members (Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina), while not being direct beneficiaries will indirectly benefit from and contribute to its results.

2. Expected results

- The preparation of the first integrated monitoring programmes, fully in line with IMAP-requirements, for Albania and Montenegro;
- The implementation of Marine field Surveys aligned with **IMAP** in Albania and Montenegro;
- Science-based assessment towards GES for national data base systems in Albania and Montenegro, in line with the **IMAP INFO system**;
- Capacity building trainings organized for Albanian and Montenegrin experts related to IMAP and MSP;
- The initiation of an MSP process in Montenegro.

3. Inception process

The Inception Phase started in May 2017 with the establishment of the legal framework and agreements, the mobilization of the GEF grants and the engagement of the executing partners and experts to assist in the Inception Phase by supporting the preparation of the Inception Report and first Project Steering Committee.

The second semester of 2017 was dedicated to the establishment of working partnerships with the relevant authorities in Albania and Montenegro, and to the definition of a mapping structure of the relevant stakeholders in the two countries. This phase also aimed to secure the nomination of the Focal Points of Albania and Montenegro who would represent the two countries in the PSC. Moreover, the Inception Phase served to select the National Coordinators nominated by the countries as leaders of the national implementation teams. In full respect and coherence with the political priorities, calendars and agendas of Albania and Montenegro, this phase was concluded in March 2018 with the nomination of one national coordinator in each country.

In terms of preparatory meetings and work, after completing the first formal steps of the Inception Phase, UN Environment/MAP, PAP/RAC and SPA/RAC organized a technical meeting in Split on 29-30 May 2017, to trigger initial discussions on methodological aspects of the project's execution. Among them, special focus was given to the linkages between the two components of the project, i. e. the Ecosystem Approach and MSP, more specifically on how the inputs of the first component (Ecosystem Approach) will be integrated into the second one (MSP).

A second meeting to support the Inception Phase was organized on the 2017 Coast Day in Tivat, Montenegro on 27 September 2017.

However, the full implementation of the project was possible only after the nomination of national coordinators and organization of the Inception meeting (May 2018). By the mid-2018, Albania and Montenegro set up their national team of experts for each "cluster" of ecological objectives (biodiversity, NIS, fisheries; coast and hydrography; eutrophication and contaminants; marine litter) in coordination with UN Environment/MAP, SPA/RAC and PAP/RAC.

From this important milestone, SPA/RAC and PAP/RAC, start the implementation of the activities in line with the inception report and in coordination with UNEP/MAP CU and the National GEF Adriatic project coordinators.

4. Main outcomes

The below results of the project were made possible thanks to the great support of the Ministry of Tourism and Environment, the National Agency for Protected Areas in Albania and the Ministry for Ecology, Spatial Planning and Urbanism in Montenegro as well as the active involvement of several international and national experts, support by the GEF Focal Points and the excellent coordination provided by the National coordinators in both countries.

4.1 EcAp, MSP to achieve GES, Capacity building for better understanding, better handling and best practices share

In coordination with the National GEF Adriatic Project Coordinators, several trainings and workshops were organized. Due to Covid-19 situation, trainings were provided online starting from March 2020.

- <Training workshops on integrated monitoring programmes were organized for national teams of experts in 2018 as follow:
 - o E05 Eutrophication and E09 Contamination (02-03 October 2018, organized by PAP/RAC),
 - o E010 Marine litter (22 November 2018, organized by PAP/RAC),
 - o E01 Biodiversity, E02 NIS and E07 Hydrography (26-27 November 2018, organized by SPA/RAC and PAP/RAC).
- Two hands-on training courses were organized for Montenegrin (28 November 2018) and Albanian (17-18 December 2018) experts on eutrophication, contaminants and marine litter. A meeting in Albania was organized in coordination with MED POL.
- A workshop related to the Integration of monitoring for different ecological objectives (Tirana, 5 November, organized by SPA/RAC and PAP/RAC)
- A workshop related to the technical aspects of selected ecological objectives, such as E09 (contaminants) (Podgorica, 25 November, organized by PAP/RAC)
- IMAP Info system trainings on the utilization and reporting based on IMAP Info system, with the support of INFO/RAC were also organized by SPA/RAC and PAP/RAC:
 - o Initial one organized for the RACs (MEDPOL, SPA/RAC and PAP/RAC) on 26 November 2019 in Podgorica, dedicated to technical topics related to the use of IMAP Info system
 - o Second one for the national (Montenegrin) institutions and stakeholders involved in monitoring and data reporting, on 4/5 February 2020 in Podgorica.
 - o Third one was organized online for the national (Albanian) institutions and stakeholders (8 April 2021)
 - o Fourth workshop is planned the 9th of June 2021 for Montenegrin stakeholders related to the linkages between the National IMAP data base elaborated by PAP/RAC within the project and the reporting system within the IMAP Info System.
 - o In addition, series on online trainings with national experts for utilizing the data base were organized.

The main online MSP training is being organized through the PAP/RAC MedOpen platform, through a five-week training course. The finalization of the course is on 7th June. In addition, the overall process of the MSP preparation was done through extensive online meetings, also in the form of capacity building.

4.2 Birth of the first integrated monitoring programmes, fully in line with IMAP-requirements, for Albania and Montenegro

The integrated monitoring programmes, fully in line with IMAP-requirements, for Albania and Montenegro elaborated within the GEF Adriatic project are the first to be elaborated within the EcAp/IMAP process.

The elaboration process started in the second half of 2018 and finalised by 2021.

To do so, the following process was implemented.

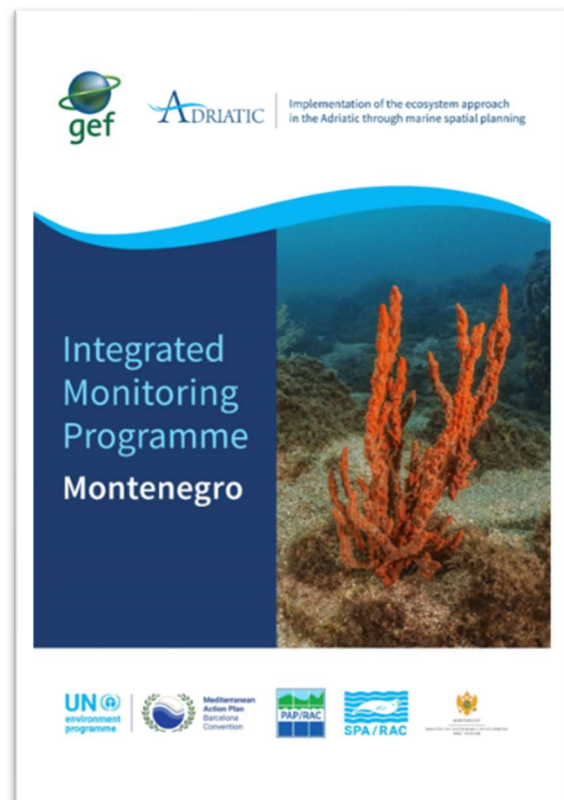
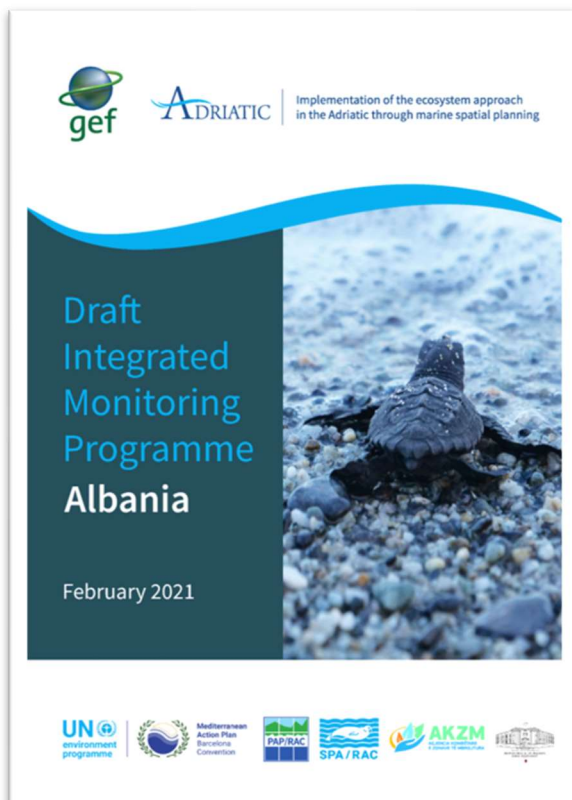
- a. A team of international experts were set supported by a team of national experts in both countries covering all the clusters (biodiversity, NIS, fisheries; coast and hydrography; eutrophication and contaminants; marine litter);
- b. A knowledge GAP assessment for each cluster was elaborated by the expert team for both countries;
- c. A thematic monitoring programmes were elaborated for both countries;
- d. An Integrated IMPs were elaborated for both countries following a series of workshops and meetings where both national experts and international experts were collaborating.

The National IMPs for Albania and Montenegro were also supported by GIS Maps were monitoring stations and areas coordinates are included to support the field implementation of the monitoring.

MEDPOL, INFO/RAC and GFCM provided support to the process.

The collaboration among international, regional and national multidisciplinary actors where the key for the successful bottom-up approach which led to the birth of these two first integrated monitoring programmes, fully in line with IMAP requirements.

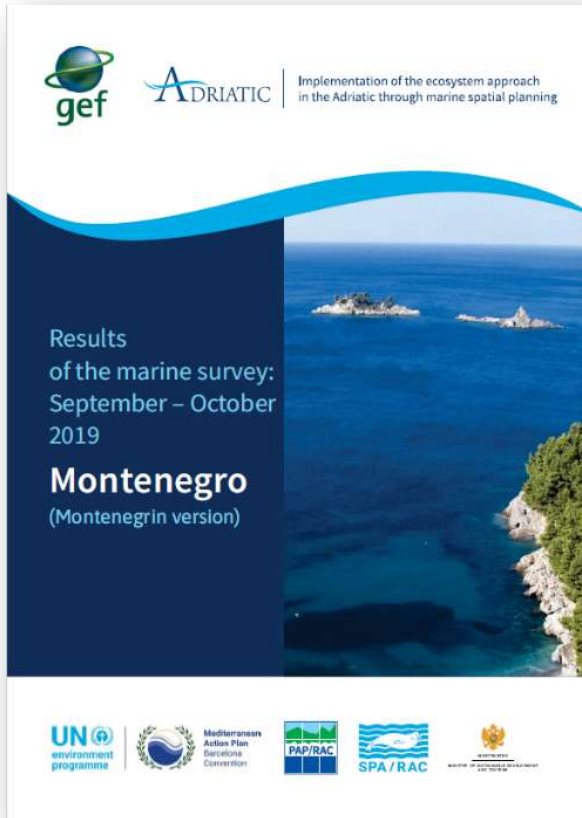
A a Main lesson learned for this process, it could be advised to avoid „sectoral” EOs approach and start from interconnections and interlinks between EOs for future IMP elaborations in the Mediterranean within the EcAp/IMAP process.



4.3 The way forward, first integrated monitoring surveys, fully in line with IMAP-requirements, for Albania and Montenegro

As a supporting action for the Monitoring programmes and GES assessment, field surveys were organized in Albania and Montenegro fully in line with IMAP requirements.

Montenegro:



The marine survey was undertaken in October 2019 by a consortium of one international institution (Institute for oceanography and fisheries from Croatia) and 2 national ones (Institute for marine biology and Center for ecotoxicological research). The survey was implemented along Montenegrin coasts.

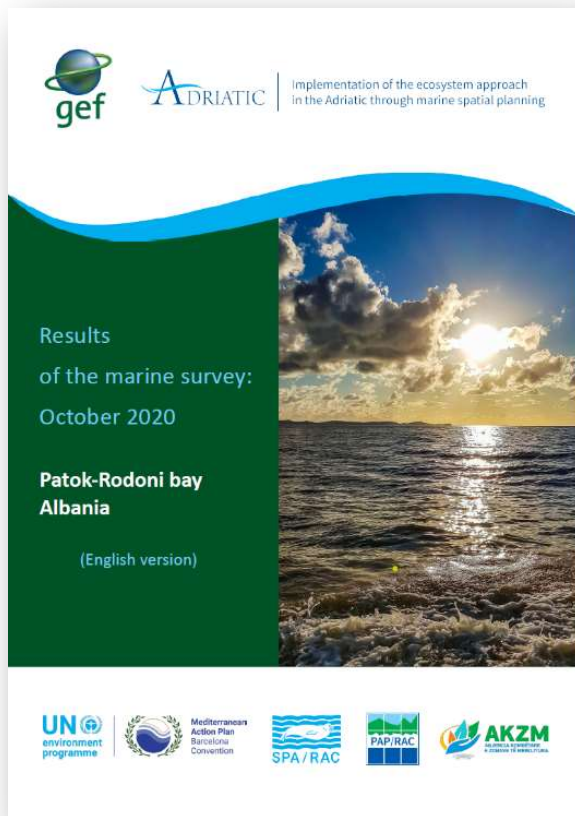
The main results of the survey were the following:

- Relevant findings on eutrophication, contaminants, hydrographic conditions, Posidonia and corraligenous communities were recorded. In particular those of the corraligenous in Boka Kotorska Bay
- Survey stations used were those from the proposed monitoring programme. Therefore, the field survey was pilot testing of the proposed monitoring programme for Montenegro and its results could be used as an initial baseline for the future monitoring.

- For the first time ever data for E05, E09 and to some extent E07 were collected in offshore stations.
- As part of the survey, a detailed assessment of national capacities to undertake future monitoring based on IMAP, was performed (including intercalibration of results between 3 institutions, evaluation of application of methodologies for data collection and analysis etc.). In addition, tailor made capacity building of national institutions was organized, in particular for the assessment of coralligenous assemblages and eutrophication.

Albania:

Despite the Covid-19 constrains, a marine survey was undertaken in October 2020 by a joint team of International and Albanian experts. The survey was implemented in a pilot area: Patok-Rodoni Bay.



- Relevant findings on biodiversity, eutrophication, contaminants, marine litter and hydrographic conditions, were recorded.
 - Survey stations used were those from the proposed monitoring programme with additional ones to assess the status of the bay. Both coastal and offshore stations were assessed including the use of ROV and SSS.
 - The field survey was the first one to be implemented in Albania fully in line with IMAP and in one selected area. This pilot testing of the integrated monitoring survey and its results provided a first approach to assess the GES of one area.
 - As part of the survey, an on-the-job field training (23 October 2020) related to IMAP monitoring in Albania and related to Biodiversity, hydrography and Pollution.
 - The survey results were discussed and validated within a participatory approach which involved several Albanian Institutions and stakeholders.

- A short documentary about the survey is available within this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mFoFG89qZzk&t=63s>

Data from both surveys was made available in DDs IMAP Info system format and several GIS Map layers were developed compatible with the SPA/RAC MBP.

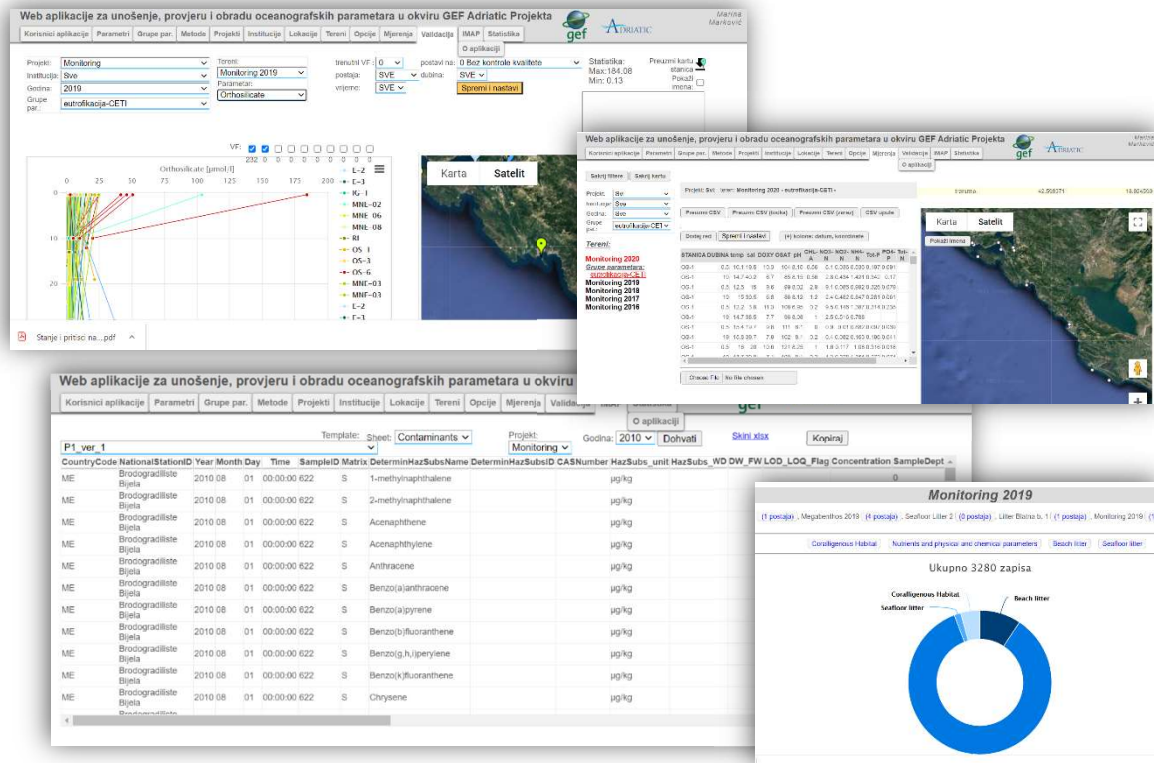
The data from both surveys were used within IMAP Info system trainings (see 4.1) provided for both countries and are also among the first IMAP data to be set within the IMAP National databases developed for both countries within the GEF Adriatic Project.

4.4 Data collection, the multi tool database

In order to support the future implementation of national monitoring in line with the National IMP there were a need to develop National databases platform which allow:

- Store IMAP data in line with IMAP Info system format requirements;
- Include a data check system and its conformity IMAP Info system;
- Show data series, trends, figures, etc.;
- Check the monitoring stations position within georeferenced maps;
- Download/export data in several format;
- Export data into IMAP Info system;

For this aim, a national database was developed for both countries and online meetings and trainings were organised to show its multiple options and scope as well as its handling.

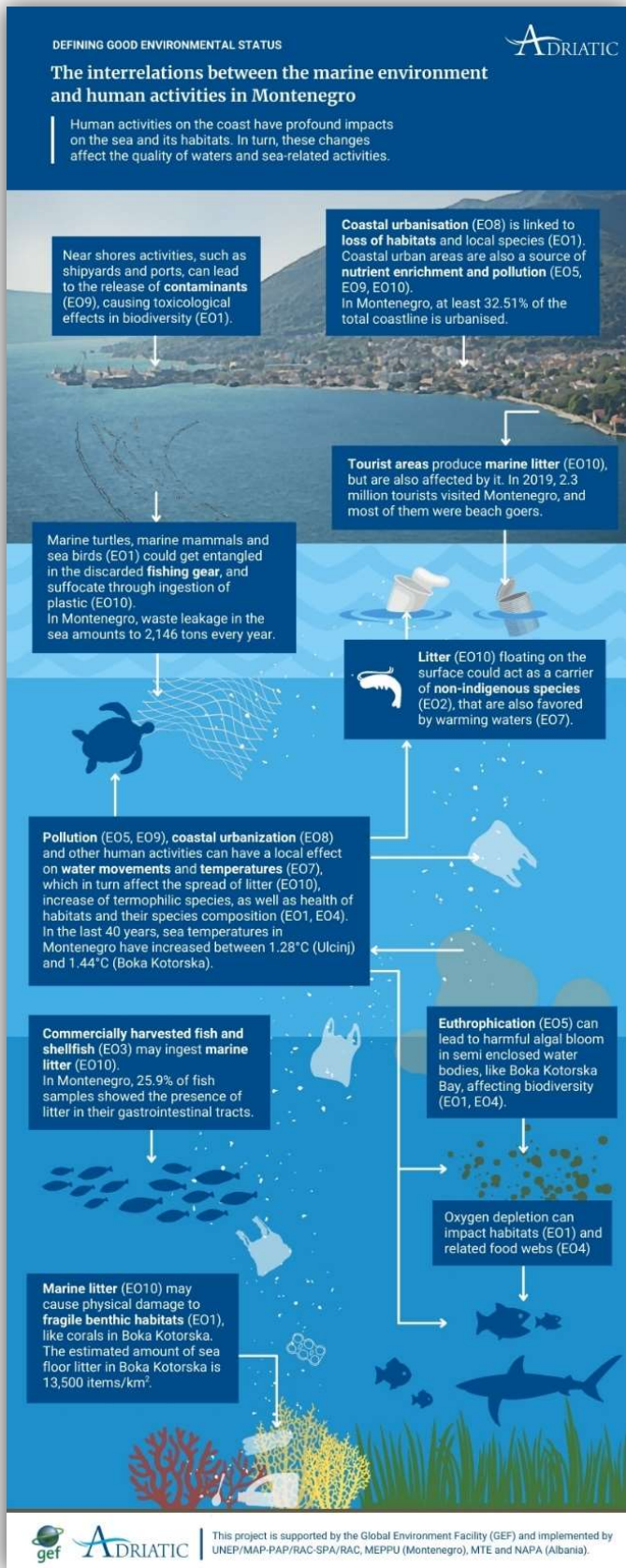


4.5 No integrated monitoring programmes with no integrated Good Environmental Status approach

One of the important outputs of the project is assessing the status of the marine environment in Albania and Montenegro and how close or far we are of reaching Good Environmental Status.

Thus, in parallel to the elaboration of National IMP for both countries, there were a to start the elaboration of an Toward Integrated Good Environmental Assessment based on the available data and fully in line with IMAP requirements.

For this purpose, a team of National and International experts were set onboard by SPA/RAC and PAP/RAC to start the elaboration of reports toward GES for Albania and Montenegro.



The integrated assessment is based on the existing and available data on biodiversity (EO1), non-indigenous species (EO2), eutrophication (EO5), hydrographic conditions (EO7), eutrophication, contaminants (EO9), marine litter (EO10) and coastal urbanisation (EO8) through the integration of the sectoral IMAP EOs assessments elaborated under the GEF Adriatic.

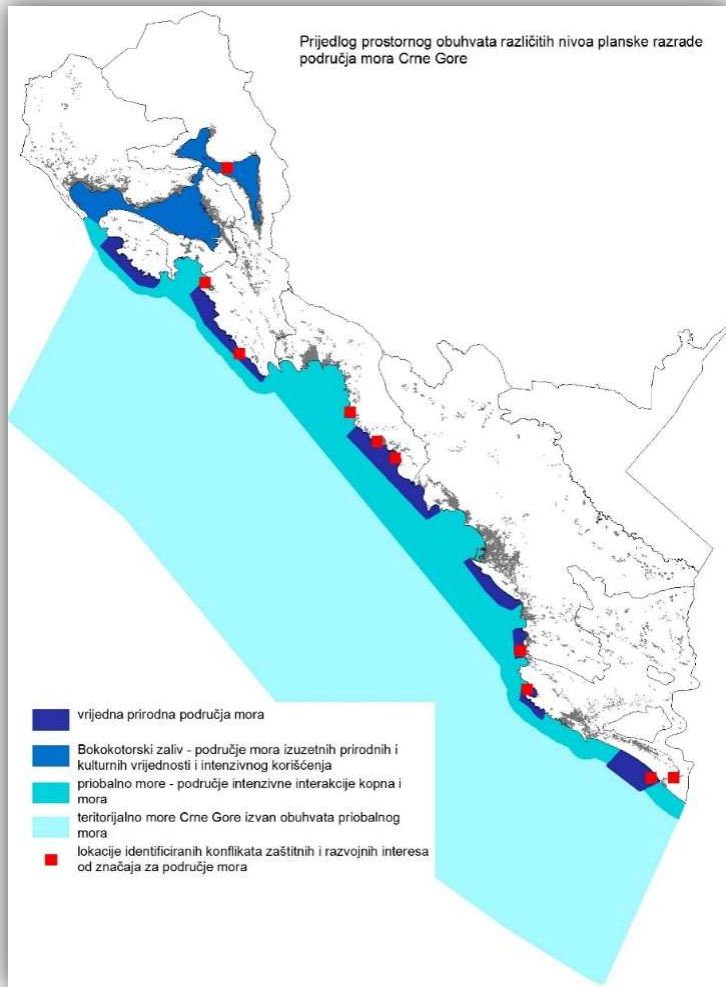
The approach for this integrated assessment was done following this process:

- An initial overview of economic activities (1), being drivers of the predominant pressures and their impacts on the marine and coastal environment (2)
- Elaboration of initial GES assessment for the individual EOs, including the baseline analysis based on recent studies (3),
- Definition of the Interrelations between Ecological Objectives (4),
- Definition of the GES assessment gaps and needs (5),
- Proposition of Initial measures to achieve GES targets (6).

Following this process, thematic toward GES reports were elaborated for both countries and the Integrated toward GES reports for Albania and Montenegro are planned to be finalized by mid-June 2022 providing both countries with the first set of proposed measures to achieve and/or maintain GES.

4.6 The Marine Spatial Planning, the EcAp/IMAP best friend

4.6.1. MSP in Montenegro



Using the ecosystem approach, the Marine Spatial Planning process can evolve through a series of sustainability assessments and generate an integrated plan that considers environmental, economic, social and cultural factors.

For this purpose, within the framework of the project, a team of experts for the MSP was established in Montenegro and a series of meetings and trainings with national institutions were organized.

As a result, a draft Marine Spatial Plan is being elaborated for Montenegro, based on the Conceptual Framework for MSP, adopted by the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention, and taking into consideration the MSP process proposed by the IOC of UNESCO.

The draft MSP identified spatial conflicts and compatibilities in the marine areas as well as the projections of current trends in spatial and temporal needs of current activities.

The draft Marine Spatial Plan of Montenegro is a demonstration project for the Adriatic Sea region and present an outline of specific management measures to achieve the projected sustainable development in the selected areas and to reach the GES based on the EcAp.

Guidelines on how to prepare the Marine Spatial Plan as well as to implement the entire MSP process in the national context was also prepared for Montenegro.

4.6.2. MSP in Albania

In Albania, based on the GEF Adriatic Project approach and outputs a complementary MSP project allowed implementing of the first preliminary MSP study, guidelines and training. Indeed, under the Cooperation Agreement between the Italian Ministry of Ecological Transition and UNEP/MAP and in synergy with the GEF Adriatic Project, SPA/RAC in coordination with PAP/RAC implemented 3 Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) studies in Albania during the second semester of 2019 which allow to start the first steps of the MSP process in the country: Assessment of the Ecological Status and MSP preliminary initial assessment in Vlora Marine Area ([Albanian- English](#)), Guidelines for MSP process in Albania ([Albanian- English](#)) and Anchoring buoys for small pleasure boats in Albania ([Albanian- English](#)). This assessment outcome was used for the installation of anchoring buoys by the Albanian authorities.



4.7 Promotion and Experience share

From 2018, the GEF Adriatic project results were promoted within several events. The project was promoted in several national, sub regional and regional events/meetings: the Annual Meeting of the National Council for Sustainable Development Climate Change and ICZM (December 2019, Podgorica, Montenegro), Meetings and training courses of the MSP Pilot Project (September 2019-January 2020), MSP Forum (November 2019, Riga Latvia), Pan Adriatic Scope Meetings (November-December 2019) PSSA Mediterranean and Adriatic Workshop (December 2019, Tirana-Albania), MSP webinar, etc.

Several communication materials were also elaborated and disseminated, and the project supported several events in both Montenegro, Albania but also at regional level focusing on ecosystem conservation activities and EcAp/IMAP and MSP process.

Additionally, through the project several awareness raising activities were organised: clean-up event in 2020 in Montenegro; summer awareness workshops in Albania during summer of 2020; Coast Day event in Montenegro, etc.

Furthermore, the project supported the 1st International Conference on Water Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development WEPSD-2021 organised in Tirana from 17 to 18 May 2021 and during with several outcomes of the project were shared.

Finally, the project final event is planned to be organised in Montenegro by the 28/29 June 2021 to present all the outcomes of the project.