



**Mediterranean
Action Plan**
Barcelona
Convention

5 October 2023
Original: English

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

Portoroz, Slovenia, 5-8 December 2023

Agenda Item 5: Ministerial Session

Background Note for Ministerial Discussions at COP 23

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Background note for ministerial discussions at COP 23

1. The Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols is the foremost regional gathering on environmental and sustainability issues in the region. This is where representatives of the 21 Mediterranean coastal countries and the European Union come together to ponder the state of marine and coastal ecosystems, consider interactions between socio-economic and natural systems based on science, and agree on pathways to decouple development from the drivers of the triple crisis of climate change, biodiversity and nature loss, and pollution and waste.
2. Established in 1975, MAP will mark its 50th anniversary in 2025, a pivotal year that will also see the Mediterranean city of Nice (France) host the United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC). The organization of a high-level event at UNOC is foreseen with strong engagement by all the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols. The 2024 Our Ocean Conference, that will be hosted by Greece, constitutes also a milestone to this direction.
3. The adoption of the Convention marked a watershed moment in the region as it provided the Mediterranean Action Plan and the Contracting Parties with a robust legal platform consistent with international law. The Convention was amended in 1995 to encompass the global consensus on sustainable development achieved at the Earth Summit in 1992. Since 1976, the Barcelona Convention and its seven Protocols have been complemented with more than 20 regulatory measures and 27 strategies and action plans. These address a wide range of themes, ranging from waste management to pollution prevention through the promotion of sustainable consumption and production and the introduction of circular economy approaches.
4. COPs of the Barcelona Convention constitute the principal intergovernmental meeting dedicated to the marine and coastal environment and sustainable development in the Mediterranean region. The COP agenda typically includes elements related to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and synergy with global Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), including UNFCCC, UNCBD, the Basel-Rotterdam-Stockholm and the Minamata Conventions. By allowing a regionally coordinated approach to the global environmental and developmental agenda, COPs of the Barcelona Convention serve as the “COP for the Mediterranean”.
5. “Green transition in the Mediterranean: from decisions into action”, the theme that the Bureau of the Contracting Parties articulated and adopted for the Ministerial Session, will serve as an overarching headline for the ministerial discussions and will be reflected in the Portoroz Ministerial Declaration. Two years after the adoption of the Antalya Ministerial Declaration, which was phrased as a regional green manifesto, time has come to take stock and reflect on acceleration pathways towards greener economies.
6. The world’s natural capital has declined by [40 per cent](#) in two decades. The unsustainability inherent in prevailing production and consumption patterns is fueling the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity and nature loss, and pollution and waste. The Mediterranean region is no exception, as confirmed by the findings of the 2030 Mediterranean Quality Status Report (2030 MED QSR), which provides a snapshot of the state of the marine and coastal environment based on the compilation of nationally sourced data. The 2030 MED QSR findings are consistent with those of the [State of the Environment and Development in the Mediterranean \(SoED\) Report](#). Published in 2021, the SoED report indicated that the drivers of environmental degradation in the region are rooted in key economic sectors. It [warned](#) that “unless urgent and resolute action is taken to halt current trends, environmental degradation could have serious and lasting consequences for human health and livelihoods in the region”.

The far-reaching and harmful impacts of the unfolding environmental crisis make the green transition a vital and urgent endeavour for the entire Mediterranean region.

7. Greening economies boils down to decoupling human activities from the destruction of nature. It means safeguarding the foundation that underpins both economies and societies. The transition towards energy- and resource-efficient economies and societies with sustainable consumption and production patterns and climate neutrality is gaining ground thanks to at least three favorable factors: rapid progress in science and technology (e.g., breakthroughs on electric batteries for green mobility), the gradual improvements in governance regimes (e.g., the much anticipated global treaty on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, and a possible global regime on chemicals), and growing green policy acumen and public awareness of sustainability issues and of corresponding solutions.
8. For a green, just, and inclusive transition to take place in the Mediterranean, a dual whole-of-government, whole-of-society approach is needed. Meaningful engagement with youth and women, as key agents of change, is crucial; the

President of the Republic of Slovenia, Mrs. Nataša Pirc Musar, also wishes to highlight their importance during the high-level segment of COP 23. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in its multiple forms and modalities (formal, non-formal and informal), including but not limited to ocean literacy, can help enlist the support of well informed, green-minded and committed citizens and thus open intergenerational highways for the green transformation.

9. The ongoing universal endeavor to achieve the SDGs, including well elaborated, target-based, and nationally appropriate frameworks, provide readily available launch pads for the transition at the national level, complemented with built-in safeguards to “leave no one behind”. Through the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development (MCSD), the Mediterranean region has a well-established, inclusive, and robust framework to deploy regionally agreed solutions to green economies, including through a new generation of high-ambition, well-funded Flagship Initiatives of the Mediterranean Strategy on Sustainable Development (MSSD), featuring partnerships with United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs).

10. A comprehensive rethinking of the way prevailing economic models function is needed. In this framework, nature-based solutions must move from the fringe to the center and become enablers of the achievement of the SDGs. The UNEP/MAP-Barcelona Convention system is well positioned to support this paradigm shift in the Mediterranean region.

11. It is well acknowledged that turning the green economy concept into reality presents momentous policy challenges. The drivers of environmental degradation are so deeply enmeshed in the fabric of pivotal economic sectors in the region, that not every Mediterranean country has the wherewithal to undertake the required sweeping, large-scale transformation. Regional solidarity will be essential.

Wide leaps towards a greener more resilient future in the Mediterranean are possible.

12. There is an encouraging policy momentum in the region. At COP 22 of the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols, the Contracting Parties [pledged full support](#) to a green recovery of the Mediterranean region, “to secure a sustainable, resilient, inclusive recovery that accelerates progress in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs”. The UNEP/MAP Medium-Term Strategy 2022-2027, adopted by the Contracting Parties at COP 22, builds on important initiatives in the region, including the EU’s Green Deal, which can act as one of the engines of the green transition around and across the Mediterranean Sea. The pursuit of greener economies lies at the heart of the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD), adopted under the auspices of UNEP/MAP within the framework of the MCSD.

13. The full implementation of the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols remains a mandatory step in the journey to a greener future. No itinerary leading to the green transition in the Mediterranean can possibly circumvent or side-step full compliance. It is with this in mind that the mandate of the Compliance Committee established under the Convention is being strengthened.

14. One recent collective accomplishment illustrates the centrality of the UNEP/MAP-Barcelona Convention system to the Mediterranean region’s aspirations to a greener and more resilient future. In December 2021, it was under the impetus of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols that IMO, the global authority on maritime affairs, designated the Mediterranean Sea as an emission control area for SOx emissions from ships. This measure is expected to not only improve air quality and protect nature as well as human health in coastal zones, but also send a strong signal across all blue economy sectors that the time has come for investing in sustainability.

Closing implementation gaps and strengthening enforcement of the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols will make Mediterranean economies greener and societies more resilient. The region—a climate change hotspot—must take urgent and effective measures to adapt to the impacts of the unfolding climate crisis. ****

Following the above considerations, the Contracting Parties’ interventions during the COP 23 Ministerial Session may be articulated around the following themes:

- **How to ensure that green transition policies are grounded in a robust evidence base?**
The reengineering of economies must be grounded in a robust evidence platform covering the state of the environment and based on the precautionary principle (enshrined in the Barcelona Convention). There is a need for science-policy interfaces and for economy-environment national policy hubs based on a silo-breaking, whole-of-government approach.
- **How to make green policies popular and the required individual transitions bearable?**
The green transition will come at a cost. Social and fiscal policies can help spread costs and alleviate the burden of the capital investment required to make economies greener. Fiscal instruments, including carefully calibrated

taxation, can incentivize a collective shift to sustainability (e.g., by encouraging individual investment in electric vehicles, home-insulation, or in low-emission, environment-friendly heating/cooling systems).

- **How to ensure the flow of finance and technology for an inclusive green transition in the region?**
Leaving no one behind, the motto underpinning the pursuit of the SDGs, is also relevant for the green transition. For the required transformation to happen at scale, the mechanisms of regional solidarity must be leveraged to enable technology, capacity building and financial support to flow to the countries that need it. Bridging regional “green chasms” is essential.
- **How to enlist citizen support and ensure the required upskilling for thriving green economies? What education systems and skillsets are required for tomorrow’s green economies?**
The success of a green transition hinges on uptake by all economic agents, primarily citizens. Policies must ensure that the cost of the economic transition does not turn the public against this green transition (e.g., diverting fossil fuel subsidies to renewable energy kits for homes). Involving young people in the activities of local, national, and regional institutions and in environmental policy-crafting and deployment is crucial. Promoting intergenerational cooperation in planning and implementing measures to adapt to climate change, protect biodiversity and bolster the resilience of ecosystems and communities lie at the heart of the policy response to the triple planetary crisis.
- **How to upscale bright spots?**
If there are signs of progress in the pursuit of green economies in the Mediterranean region, attention should be devoted to upscaling best practices and to deploying informed policy that lets nature drive economic transformation. The challenge for policymakers is to identify nationally adequate options that reconcile value and job creation with the protection of the global commons, respecting rights, and delivering nature-based benefits for all.
