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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**Initiative for the sustainable development of the blue economy in the western
Mediterranean**

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1. INTRODUCTION

The maritime economy of the western Mediterranean region has huge potential for development in all related sectors. The region has 200 ports and terminals and nearly 40 % of all goods (by value) pass through the Mediterranean.¹

The western Mediterranean region attracts the largest number of tourists in the Mediterranean basin, in part because of its art and cultural wealth. It is a biodiversity hotspot, with 481 marine protected areas, including Natura 2000 sites.² The region is a rich fishing ground, accounting for over 30 % of the total value of landings at first sale in the Mediterranean and providing more than 36 000 direct jobs on fishing vessels.³

Despite these major assets, the region faces a number of challenges which add to its general geopolitical instability: a prolonged economic and financial crisis with high youth unemployment in several countries, growing coastal urbanisation, the overexploitation of fish stocks, marine pollution and last but not least the refugee crisis.

Climate change greatly affects the region,⁴ and the rise in sea level is a major threat to coastal ecosystems and economies. Other factors such as population growth and ageing, migration and deepening globalisation will also magnify these pressures.

There is therefore a clear need for a joint initiative to enable the EU and neighbouring countries to work across borders to:

- increase safety and security;
- promote sustainable blue growth and jobs; and
- preserve ecosystems and biodiversity in the western Mediterranean.

On the issue of maritime governance, joining forces will also allow countries to coordinate action, use tools more effectively and maximise the use of funding and financial instruments, with the possibility of leveraging more private investment than on their own, including by tapping into the recently launched EU Neighbourhood Investment Platform.⁵

Consequently, in 2015 the Union for the Mediterranean Ministerial Declaration on the Blue Economy⁶ invited the participating countries to explore the added value and feasibility of appropriate maritime strategies at sub-regional level, and build on the experience of the 5+5 Dialogue. In October 2016, the Foreign Affairs Ministers of Algeria, France, Italy, Libya, Malta, Mauritania, Morocco, Portugal, Spain and Tunisia encouraged further work on an initiative for the sustainable development of the blue economy, together with the Union for the Mediterranean Secretariat.⁷

¹ <http://msp-platform.eu/sea-basins/west-mediterranean>.

² <http://www.mapamed.org> (April 2016).

³ <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i5496e.pdf> (FAO 2016).

⁴ <http://www.cmcc.it/publications/regional-assessment-of-climate-change-in-the-mediterranean-climate-impact-assessments>.

⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/news-and-events/state-union-2016-european-external-investment-plan_en.

⁶ http://ufmsecretariat.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/2015-11-17-declaration-on-blue-economy_en.pdf

⁷ <http://ufmsecretariat.org/foreign-affairs-ministers-of-the-55-dialogue-discuss-pressing-regional-challenges-and-highlight-the-positive-contribution-of-ufm-activities-to-the-enhancement-of-regional-cooperation/>.

This Initiative stems from that request and comprises this Communication and the accompanying Framework for Action. Both have been drafted in close cooperation with the countries concerned and the Union for the Mediterranean Secretariat. The Communication outlines the main challenges, the shortcomings that need to be addressed and possible solutions. The Framework for Action presents the proposed priorities and their added value, actions and projects in detail, with quantitative targets and deadlines to monitor progress over time.

The Initiative is based on the Commission's long-standing experience with sea basin and macro-regional strategies⁸ (such as the Atlantic Strategy, the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region). It is also based on over two decades of work within the 5+5 Dialogue, which has created strong ties between the participating countries. It also builds on other EU policies linked to the region, such as the European Neighbourhood Policy Review priorities and the recent Communication on International Ocean Governance.⁹ The Initiative benefits from:

- the regional dialogue taking place on Maritime Policy and the Blue Economy under the umbrella of the Union for the Mediterranean;
- cooperation in fisheries management, which was recently strengthened by the Catania process launched in 2016, and cooperation on the sustainable development of aquaculture, both within the framework of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean; and
- cooperation within the Barcelona convention for the protection of marine environment and coastal regions of the Mediterranean and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the efforts made in implementing the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development.

Although the Initiative focuses on the western Mediterranean region and the 10 countries mentioned above, its scope of action — and potential benefits — could easily extend beyond this sub-basin. Therefore, depending on the needs to be addressed, actions may involve partners in the central Mediterranean and north-east Atlantic and will remain open to other partners.

Given that it concerns both EU and partner countries, it will have to be politically endorsed first in the EU and then in the Union for the Mediterranean, bringing together all the 10 countries concerned.

⁸ COM(2014) 284 and COM(2016) 805.

⁹ JOIN(2016) 49.

2. CHALLENGES AND GAPS

Extensive consultations between stakeholders and national authorities have pointed to a series of challenges and gaps that can be summarised in three main areas as follows:

2.1 Safety and security

On average, there are around 60 maritime transport accidents a year in the western Mediterranean, 15 of which involve tankers transporting oil or chemicals.¹⁰ Nearly half of the accidents leading to significant spills (100 tonnes or more) over the last decade have occurred in the western Mediterranean Sea.¹¹ The region still fares rather well compared to other sub-basins, but new economic developments may expose it to more risks, especially in areas where maritime traffic is congested (such as the Strait of Gibraltar, the Strait of Bonifacio or the Strait of Sicily), and within harbours and terminals. The doubling of the Suez Canal may exacerbate traffic congestion. The concentration of ships increases the risk of collisions, environmental and noise pollution and accidents.

This region is also particularly sensitive from a security perspective. In 2013-2015, an average of 11 000 illegal migrants crossed its waters every month,¹² causing growing concerns both for human lives and economic activities. The current demographic trends and climate change are expected to heighten the current competition for resources and fuel the geopolitical instability of the region.

Ensuring the safety and security of maritime activities is key to promoting the sustainable development of the blue economy sectors and the prosperity and stability of the region. Efforts to address these risks and threats include:

- the Regional Transport Action Plan for the Mediterranean Region¹³ and EMSA/SAFEMED projects;
- the EU Maritime Security Strategy and its Action Plan;
- the 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy and the Lomé Declaration on Maritime Security;
- the European Border and Coast Guard package¹⁴ and a related pilot project launched in 2016 to improve operational cooperation on Coast Guard functions between three EU agencies (FRONTEX, EFCA and EMSA) in the western Mediterranean;

Since the refugee crisis and migration control became a priority in 2015, numerous activities focusing on migration have been developed under the European Agenda for Migration. The Seahorse Mediterranean Network, the European and Mediterranean Coast Guard Functions Forums have also helped to improve cooperation between the countries involved.

However, initiatives and projects are still relatively scattered across the region, and law enforcement capacities, data availability, accessibility, processing and understanding are still dissimilar and fragmented between the two shores. Cooperation between EU Member States and southern partner countries need therefore to be strengthened to address those gaps by

¹⁰ [Http://www.medmaritimeprojects.eu/download/ProjectMediamer/SH_Meeting_WME/WM_Transport_factsheet_300115.pdf](http://www.medmaritimeprojects.eu/download/ProjectMediamer/SH_Meeting_WME/WM_Transport_factsheet_300115.pdf).

¹¹ <http://arxiv.org/pdf/1510.00287.pdf>.

¹² <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/EPERS/EPERS-AaG-565905-Recent-Migration-flows-to-the-EU-FINAL.pdf>.

¹³ Adopted by the EuroMed Transport Forum in March 2015.

¹⁴ Regulations (EU) 2016/1624, 2016/1625 and 2016/1626.

facilitating interoperability and data exchange, building capacity and improving real-time response to emergency situations.

2.2 High youth unemployment rates versus ageing maritime workforce

There is an employment paradox in the western Mediterranean region, in that youth unemployment rates are extremely high — between 14 % and 58 % — yet maritime businesses in both emerging and traditional sectors cannot find the requisite skills and profiles. This mismatch between demand and supply is mainly due to a lack of dialogue and cooperation between industry and the different levels of education.

There is also a dual R&D challenge. On the one hand, activities such as tourism, transport and fisheries that are traditionally at the forefront of the blue economy require greater innovation and diversification to remain sustainable, competitive and profitable over time and to provide qualified employment. On the other, several emerging activities and value chains (such as blue biotechnology, marine renewable energies, living and mineral resources)¹⁵ require dedicated support in order to reach their full potential, achieve sufficient critical mass and attract tailored R&D and investment.

A number of strategic initiatives and frameworks are currently being promoted across the western Mediterranean to boost economic activity, research and innovation. These include:

- the EU Blue Growth Strategy and the Maritime Policy
- the EU Strategy for more jobs and growth in coastal and maritime tourism;¹⁶
- the BLUEMED Initiative;
- FAO Blue Growth.

These initiatives target either the EU or the Neighbourhood countries, but not both. Initiatives implemented through EU calls do not always reflect the specific needs of beneficiaries in the western Mediterranean, and support for cross-cutting activities among southern and northern stakeholders is usually limited. Action is required to tackle asymmetries in terms of their geographic scope, align funding instruments, generate the critical mass for economic activities currently not appealing to private investors, address the current mismatch between supply and demand for blue skills, increase stakeholders' capacity for partnerships across the two shores of the region and finally boost investments and create jobs in the region.

Other initiatives do cover both shores of the region such as the Action Plan for Sustainable Consumption and Production and the Regional Transport Action Plan for the Mediterranean region. They offer an opportunity and would benefit from greater synergies and cooperation across stakeholders and greater private sector involvement in implementing them at western Mediterranean level.

¹⁵ This will be aligned with the European Bioeconomy Strategy and related to the International Bioeconomy Forum.

¹⁶ COM(2014) 86.

2.3 Diverging and competing interests at sea

The western Mediterranean region has the greatest biodiversity¹⁷ and the highest number of endemic species in the entire basin. However, similarly to the rest of the sea basin, several of its fish stocks have been subject to long-term overfishing.¹⁸ Nationally designated marine protected areas and Natura 2000 sites cover around 3.5 % of its waters,¹⁹ which is still some way off the 10 % coastal and marine area conservation target.²⁰

The region generates 48 % of the gross value added and 45 % of the employment for the Mediterranean as a whole thanks to the main maritime sectors of tourism, aquaculture, fisheries and transport. It is a hotspot of economic, demographic and environmental pressures and as many as 7 of the 13 areas of the Mediterranean where dense economic activity strongly interacts with conservation issues are found there.²¹

Potentially competing maritime economic activities in the same waters may deter or prevent investments. These activities may also increase waste generation and energy and water consumption, exacerbate the exploitation of biological and other resources and ultimately lead to more pollution and a serious deterioration of marine and coastal ecosystems.

This is why efforts have been made in the region to implement a wide range of initiatives and agreements such as the EU's Maritime Spatial Planning and Marine Strategy Framework Directives, Blue Growth Initiative by FAO, UNEP/Mediterranean Action Plan – Barcelona Convention and its Regional Action Plan for Marine Litter and Protocol on Integrated Coastal Zones Management among others. The recent General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean mid-term strategy (2017-2020) towards the sustainability of Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries and MEDFISH 4EVER also offer a good basis to address the current overexploitation of fish stocks.

While there is real political will to resolve environmental and fisheries challenges, the region is still lacking appropriate awareness, dissemination and cross-sectorial evidence-based policymaking. Many shortcomings also remain in implementation and enforcement, in particular at national and local level.

Moreover, stress tests on marine data indicate serious knowledge gaps on the geological and ecological nature of the southern waters and a decrease of public investment in monitoring programmes in the north. Information gaps on catches and the effort of small-scale fisheries make the support to the fisheries sector quite challenging.

¹⁷ Species diversity in the Mediterranean increases from east to west: 43 % of known species occur in the eastern Mediterranean, 49 % in the Adriatic, and 87 % in the western Mediterranean.

¹⁸ Notably, 44 out of 48 stocks assessed in 2012-2014 were considered to be outside safe biological limits. (source: Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries and General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean).

¹⁹ <http://www.mapamed.org> (April 2016).

²⁰ Established by the Aichi Biodiversity Target 11 and adopted under Sustainable Development Goal 14.5.

²¹ MEDTRENDS Report 2015:

<http://d2ouvy59p0dg6k.cloudfront.net/downloads/medtrendsRegionalReport.pdf>.

3. THE RESPONSE: ACTIONS TO ADDRESS THE CHALLENGES AND FILL THE GAPS

A rolling Framework for Action²² (see accompanying Staff Working Document) identifies the gaps that need to be filled and the potential added value of the priorities and actions proposed. The Initiative will be funded by existing international, EU, national and regional funds and financial instruments, which will be coordinated and complementary. This should create leverage and attract funding from other public and private investors. Potential funding sources are indicative and subject and without prejudice to the assessment of the evaluation procedures and criteria for the concerned funds, programmes and project.

By fostering the coordination and cooperation among the 10 countries this Initiative aims to:

- increase safety and security
- promote sustainable blue growth and jobs; and
- preserve ecosystems and biodiversity in the western Mediterranean region.

Following extensive consultations with the national authorities and stakeholders, the Initiative will focus on three main goals that address these three main challenges.

3.1 Goal 1 — A safer and more secure maritime space

Ensuring the safety and security of activities at sea is essential for the sustainable development of the maritime economy, maintaining and creating jobs and for the proper governance of the sea and coasts.

Priorities:

1.1 Cooperation between coastguards

At present there are several initiatives developing maritime security and safety, but assets are deployed at different levels or by different partners in the western Mediterranean region. Progress has been made to facilitate voluntary data exchange, but cooperation between coastguards across the two shores remains limited and the real-time response to emergency situations at sea still needs to be improved.

Actions:

- Increase cooperation between coastguards across the two shores of the western Mediterranean region through actions such as networks among training centres, joint training and staff exchanges.
- Support capacity building in areas such as illegal unreported and unregulated fishing, vessel traffic service, maritime search and rescue, fight against smuggling of migrants and other illicit trafficking at sea (including through the further development of the Seahorse Mediterranean Network).

Potential funding sources: European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF), European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI)

²² The Framework for Action will be regularly revised and updated as new needs emerge.

1.2 Maritime safety and response to marine pollution

Maritime data sharing needs to be optimised across the two shores of the western Mediterranean region in order to improve situational awareness, ensure national funding is used effectively and improve cooperation on cross-border operations. Some partner countries share environmental data through EMSA/SAFEMED, while bottlenecks prevent their access to SafeSeaNet.

Actions:

- Encourage data sharing on maritime traffic by giving southern countries support to improve their infrastructure (Automatic Identification System/Vessel Traffic Monitoring and Information System) and help them access existing platforms (SafeSeaNet and Marine Pollution Common Emergency Communication and Information System).
- Enhance capacity (planning, preparedness and tools) to respond to and counter marine pollution from accidents.

Potential funding sources: ENI, ERDF, EU Horizon 2020, National Funds

Targets for goal 1

- Full coverage of Automatic Identification System by 2018 aiming to share more maritime traffic monitoring data at regional level;
- Border surveillance strengthened by involving neighbourhood countries in the Seahorse Mediterranean Network by 2018.

3.2 Goal 2 — A smart and resilient blue economy

Innovation and knowledge sharing are key to addressing the generational change in the labour market and making the region more sustainable, competitive and resilient to cyclical crisis and shocks. This goal largely builds on existing initiatives such as BLUEMED²³ and its Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda, and encourages partner countries to be better involved.

Priorities:

2.1 Strategic research and innovation

Partners and stakeholders from the southern shore of the western Mediterranean will be invited to join the BLUEMED Initiative to create economies of scale and foster partnerships between research and industry across the two shores.

²³ A research and innovation initiative for blue jobs and growth in the Mediterranean area, jointly developed by Cyprus, Croatia, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain.

Actions:

- Promote bio-based innovative industries and services, including food ingredients, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, chemicals, materials and energy.
- Develop new technologies for ocean observation and monitoring, including of deep-water and seafloor biological and other resources.
- Develop new concepts and protocols by private companies and maritime operators to maximise the use of infrastructure, ships and platforms for scientific, environmental, safety and security purposes.
- Develop tailor-made solutions and new technologies to harness marine renewable energies and to mitigate and adapt to climate change.
- Develop capacity building for knowledge and technology transfer.

Potential funding sources: EU Horizon 2020, National funds, EMFF, ERDF, ENI, LIFE, Green Climate Fund

2.2 Maritime clusters development

Maritime clusters clearly contribute to creating innovation, jobs and growth. They play a key role in generating the critical mass for economic activities that do not currently appeal to private investors.

Actions:

- Support the development of medium, small and micro enterprises in the blue economy (through national maritime clusters, incubators, boosters, business angel services and tailor-made financial vehicles).
- Foster an effective network of maritime clusters across the region.
- Establish regional clusters on renewable energy, wellbeing and active ageing, based on marine and maritime resources and technologies.

Potential funding sources: EMFF, COSME, ENI, ERDF, National funds, European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI), European Fund for Sustainable Development (EFSD)

2.3 Skills development and circulation

Maritime training and education institutions have identified a number of possible ways to address the current mismatch between supply and demand of maritime skills and to increase cooperation.

Actions:

- Foster the development of innovative maritime skills through a range of strategic actions to match demand and supply.
- Promote networking and exchanges between maritime, port and logistics institutes and academies.
- Raise awareness of maritime professions and their appeal to young people.
- Match supply and demand for jobs in multimodal freight transport services, supply chains and infrastructure.
- Harmonise existing skills and functions for managing migration issues across the region and promote more effective circular migration.

Potential funding sources: EMFF, Blue Growth Initiative — FAO, European Social Fund (ESF), ENI, ERASMUS+, Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), National funds

2.4 Sustainable consumption and production (maritime transport, ports, maritime and costal tourism, marine aquaculture)

Maritime and land-based activities, along with the progressive urbanisation of the coastline, exert pressure on the marine and coastal ecosystems of the sub-basin and can affect the long-term sustainability of sectors such as marine aquaculture and maritime and coastal tourism. This priority will encourage the implementation of the Action Plan for Sustainable Consumption and Production in the region and a shift towards smarter and greener mobility, sustainable tourism and sustainable aquaculture practices.

Actions:

- Implement sustainable consumption and production models and practices; support the use of clean energy sources for seawater desalination; promote energy efficiency and adaptation to climate change in coastal cities.
- Promote green shipping and port infrastructure for alternative fuels; optimise port infrastructure, interfaces and procedures/operations; further develop the Trans European Network for Transport and motorways of the sea and related port connections.
- Develop new theme-based tourist products and services including:
 - natural, cultural and historical itineraries, nautical and cruise tourism, sustainable marinas, pesca-tourism and recreational fishing;
 - building eco-friendly artificial reefs;
 - linking up sea and inland attractors (food, culture, sports, etc.).
- Develop common technical standards for sustainable marine aquaculture across countries, diversify the sector and build capacity.

Potential funding sources: EMFF, COSME, CEF, LIFE, ENI, ERDF, EU Horizon 2020, National funds, Blue Growth Initiative — FAO, European Investment Project Portal, EFSI, EFSD

Targets for goal 2

- Western Mediterranean countries included in the BLUEMED Initiative and in its Strategic Research Agenda by 2017;
- 25 % increase in certified eco-ports and marinas by 2022;
- 20 % increase in sustainable aquaculture production value by 2022;
- 20 % increase in off-season tourist arrivals by 2022.

3.3 Goal 3 — Better governance of the sea

Achieving healthy marine and coastal ecosystems while promoting socioeconomic development requires a solid institutional, legal and technical framework that can balance competing demands for limited natural resources and space.

Priorities:

3.1 Spatial planning and coastal management

Consistency will be sought in the implementation of the Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) and Marine Strategy Framework Directives and the Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) protocol.

Actions:

- Improve the management of maritime and coastal areas by local actors and ensure an appropriate and coordinated implementation of the MSP Directive and the ICZM protocol, including an ecosystem-based approach.
- Improve knowledge of land-sea interactions and develop eco-friendly engineering solutions for the good environmental status of seas and coasts.
- Develop tools to select appropriate sites for offshore installations and to fulfil the energy and environmental requirements of the region.

Potential funding sources: EMFF, ERDF, ENI, EU Horizon 2020, National funds

3.2 Marine and maritime knowledge

Evidence-based policy making requires harmonised and up-to-date marine and maritime data on areas such as investments, gross value added, employment, waste production and disposal, bathymetry, water quality and environmental monitoring. Necessary data are often either unavailable or available only to some countries.

Actions:

- Promote data collection, maintenance and storage through the existing instruments, databases and projects (notably the European Marine Observation and Data Network - EMODNET, the Virtual Knowledge Centre that is managed by the Union for the Mediterranean Secretariat and Horizon 2020 projects) and expand their geographical and thematic scope across the region.
- Maintain and update information on erosion phenomena and coastal risks; harmonise and expand the coastline monitoring systems at sub-basin scale, and develop common tools to assess the impacts of human activities.
- Develop unmanned autonomous vehicles and related underwater infrastructure.
- Build capacity on maritime affairs.

Potential funding sources: EMFF, ENI, ERDF, LIFE, EU Horizon 2020, National Funds, Green Climate Fund

3.3 Biodiversity and marine habitat conservation

The region's biodiversity is threatened by pollution, eutrophication, the destruction of marine and coastal habitats, disruption of wildlife migratory routes, changes in coastal dynamics, marine litter and noise. Countries will be supported in their efforts to meet agreed international commitments such as the Barcelona Convention, including its Marine Litter Regional Plan in the Mediterranean and the Convention on Biodiversity.

Actions:

- Assess the atmosphere-land-sea pressures and the risks for both ecosystems and human health.
- Help to establish and manage marine protected areas, reduce marine litter, manage ballast water and monitor acoustic pollution.
- Reinforce the local ability to identify invasive alien species and routes of invasion and the structure and functioning of marine ecosystems.
- Support awareness campaigns on marine environment and biodiversity and environmental volunteering across the region.

Potential funding sources: LIFE, ERDF, ENI, EMFF, EU Horizon 2020, National Funds

3.4 Sustainable fisheries and coastal community development

Actions are currently fragmented across the two shores, so greater regional coordination and cooperation will be pursued through the implementation of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean mid-term strategy (2017-2020) towards the sustainability of Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries. This will also ensure that the common fisheries policy is implemented more consistently at sub-basin level.

Actions:

- Foster the sustainable development of small-scale fisheries and coastal communities by increasing the region's ability to manage fish stocks through multiannual fisheries plans, technical measures, area closures and other specific conservation measures.
- Boost the region's ability to ensure proper data collection, regular scientific assessments and an adequate legal framework for control and inspection.
- Establish local technical groups to analyse specific opportunities and threats and define joint measures and intervention techniques.
- Disseminate best practices for the marketing of fisheries products, increase their added value and diversify economic activities in coastal communities (also through bottom-up approaches such as the Community-Led Local Development).

Potential funding sources: EMFF, ENI, Blue Growth Initiative — FAO, GFCM.

Targets for goal 3

- 100 % of the waters under national jurisdiction and 100 % of coastlines to be covered by Maritime Spatial Planning and Integrated Coastal Management and their implementing mechanisms by 2021;
- At least 10 % of the coastal and marine areas to be covered by marine protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures by 2020;
- 20 % reduction in marine litter on beaches by 2024;
- Southern Mediterranean countries to be included in EMODNET by 2020;
- All States equipped with adequate legal framework and human and technical capabilities to meet their fisheries control and inspection responsibilities as flag, coastal and port States by 2020;
- 100 % of key Mediterranean stocks²⁴ to be subject to adequate data collection, scientifically assessed on a regular basis and managed through a multiannual fisheries plan by 2020.

4. GOVERNANCE AND IMPLEMENTATION

4.1 Coordination

Political coordination will be provided through the existing mechanisms and processes of the Union for the Mediterranean, including senior officers' and ministerial meetings. *Operational* coordination will be ensured through a WestMED Task Force linked to the Union for the Mediterranean Working Group on the Blue Economy and will include national focal points from the relevant ministries, the European Commission and the Union for the Mediterranean Secretariat. Representatives of existing Mediterranean regional organisations could be also invited to join the Task Force.

²⁴ http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/faoweb/GFCM/News/Mid-term_strategy-e.pdf.

4.2 Implementation and reporting

For the Initiative to work, a number of key conditions must be met:

- ministerial endorsement to acknowledge that the Initiative cuts across policies, ministries and levels of government. The countries shall set priorities, take ownership and responsibility, align policies and funds at country level and provide the decision makers and those implementing the policies with the appropriate powers and resources at all administrative levels;
- the Commission shall ensure a strategic approach at EU level, including coordination with existing EU-related initiatives;
- governments shall monitor, report to the Task Force and evaluate national progress and provide guidance for implementation;
- coordination with the work of existing regional organisations shall be ensured through the Union for the Mediterranean Secretariat;
- the key stakeholders shall be involved: national, regional and local authorities, including managing authorities, economic and social actors, citizens, academia and non-governmental organisations. Public events will also promote this involvement (for example annual forums, business to business and investors pitch/speed-funding events);
- a dedicated assistance mechanism shall provide support upfront to countries and to the Task Force; support should also include the involvement of and partnering between stakeholders and the collection of any data needed to establish baselines, monitor and report on progress.

5. LINKS WITH EU POLICIES

Instead of creating new legislation, this Initiative aims to achieve the Union's goals (the priorities on 'Jobs, growth and Investment', 'Energy Union and climate change', 'Migration' and 'A stronger global actor') by strengthening the policies relevant to the region and fostering compliance with EU law.

The emphasis is on a better coordination between the funding instruments and on a truly integrated approach that ties together different policy strands and strongly interconnects EU policies and initiatives such as the maritime policy, the common fisheries policy, the cohesion policy, environment and marine and coastal policies, the global strategy for EU's foreign and security policy, the border and coastguard package, the strategies on Blue Growth, Maritime Security, MEDFISH 4EVER, biodiversity, adaptation to climate change, the 7th Environment Action Programme, the R&D framework programmes and the Communications on 'A Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean'²⁵ and on 'International Ocean Governance'.²⁶

²⁵ COM(2011) 200.

²⁶ JOIN(2016) 49.

6. WIDER LINKS

Coordination is needed with Mediterranean-wide programmes²⁷ and initiatives and with the adjoining Atlantic Action Plan and the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region, as well as with the BLUEMED and PRIMA²⁸ Initiatives. The INTERACT programme can provide assistance in this respect within the limit of its competence.

The Initiative must also be consistent with existing legislation. Synergies must be sought with the Union for the Mediterranean process, the 5+5 Dialogue, the Regional Transport Action Plan for the Mediterranean Region, the Trans-Mediterranean Transport Network, and broader frameworks such as those provided by the Barcelona Convention and the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean.

By showcasing sustainable ideas and creating jobs and growth, the projects supported by the Initiative could spread to other parts of the Mediterranean, making the Initiative a gateway for sustainable growth in the basin.

7. CONCLUSION

The Commission invites the European Parliament and the Council to endorse this Communication. The Commission also invites the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee to provide Opinions on this Initiative.

The Commission will report on the implementation of this Initiative to the Council and the European Parliament by 2022 based on countries' reporting.

²⁷ For examples: Mediterranean Programme and European Neighbourhood Instrument Cross-Border Cooperation Mediterranean Sea Basin Programme.

²⁸ Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area.