Towards an initiative for the sustainable development of the blue economy in the western Mediterranean

GOALS and PRIORITIES

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Why this Initiative?

"Millions of holiday makers have a happy association with the Western Mediterranean. Like the millions more who live across the region, they understand the fragile link between conserving national habitats and traditions and ensuring economic viability. Blue economy is important for each of the countries involved and they have recognised the strength of working together."

Karmenu Vella, Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries

How was this Initiative formed?

Major assets
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.

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.

The region is a rich fishing ground, accounting for over 50% of the total value of landings at first sale in the Mediterranean and providing more than 36,000 direct jobs on fishing vessels.

Major challenges
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, 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;
- 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.

The Initiative is based on the Commission’s long-standing experience with sea basin governance and macro-regional strategies (such as the Atlantic Strategy, the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region).

The Initiative is also based on other EU policies linked to the region, such as the European Neighbourhood Policy Review priorities and the recent Communication on International Ocean Governance.

Political involvement
In 2015 the Union for the Mediterranean Ministerial Declaration on the Blue Economy 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.

The Initiative is focused on the Commission’s long-standing experience with sea basin governance and macro-regional strategies (such as the Atlantic Strategy, the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region).

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.

Stakeholder involvement
In drafting this Initiative, the European Commission made a point to strongly involve all relevant actors and stakeholders so to ensure that all their interests and concerns were duly taken into account and provide every possible opportunity for coordination and cooperation.

Actors and stakeholders were involved through a series of communication initiatives ranging from organising stakeholder meetings on both sides of the western Mediterranean to newsletters, social media, a dedicated website and a large scale conference.

This new regional initiative recognises and taps into the economic potential of the Mediterranean Sea and its coastlines to further enhance economic growth, contribute to job creation and eventually the stabilisation of the region. It is an important step towards closer coordination and cooperation among participating countries.

Johannes Hahn, Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations

**Geographical scope**
Although the Initiative focuses on the western Mediterranean region and the 10 countries of the 5+5 Dialogue, its scope of action and potential benefits could easily extend beyond this sub-region.

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.

**Political involvement**

**Stakeholder involvement**

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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.

Challenges

Increased risk of accidents and spills

On average, there are about 60 maritime transport accidents per year in the western Mediterranean, 15 of which involve tankers transporting oil or chemicals. Nearly half the accidents leading to significant spills (of more than 100 tons) over the last decade occurred in the western Mediterranean Sea.

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 Bonifacio Strait or the Sicily Channel), and within harbours and terminals.

High exposure to migration

The region has been highly exposed to migration. In 2013-2015, for example, an average of 11,000 illegal migrants per month crossed the region through the western and central Mediterranean routes.

The central route in particular has seen a dramatic increase in violence, exploitation and abuse perpetrated by smugglers against migrants, and in the number of casualties.

Managing mixed migration flows towards Europe has become an increasingly complex issue and one of the main priorities of the EU Neighborhood policy.

Moreover, the current demographic and climate change trends risks exacerbating the existing competition to control resources and could fuel the geopolitical instability of the region.

The doubling of the Suez Canal will exacerbate the threats. The concentration of ships increases the risk of collisions, environmental and noise pollution as well as accidents.

Initiative’s Resolve

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 include for instance networking among training centers, common exercises, and joint Search and Rescue operations.

Maritime safety and response to marine pollution

Maritime data sharing needs to be optimized 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 planning.

Some partner countries have access to some EMSA/SAFEMED, while bottlenecks prevent their access to SafeSeaNet.

Actions include for instance coordination of Vessel Traffic Services and traffic data sharing and developing a new generation of Decision Support System tools for emergency response.

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 BLUEMED and its Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda, and encourages partner countries to better involved.

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**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.

**Challenges**

**Anthropic pressures**

The western Mediterranean region is a hotspot of anthropic pressure (economic, demographic and environmental). As many as 7 of the 13 areas of the Mediterranean where dense economic activity strongly interacts with conservation, issues are found there.

Potentially competing maritime economic activities in the same waters may deter or prevent investments, while their cumulated pressures can increase waste generation and energy and water consumption, exacerbate the exploitation of mineral and biological resources and ultimately lead to more pollution and the serious deterioration of marine and coastal ecosystems.

**Fish stocks overexploitation**

The region has the greatest biodiversity in the Mediterranean and is one of its most productive areas. However, similarly to the rest of the sea basin, several of the region’s fish stocks have been subject to long-term overexploitation. Nationally designated marine protected areas, including Natura 2000 sites under EU Birds and Habitats Directives, and SPAMI sites, cover together about 3.5% of the western Mediterranean waters, which is still quite far from the target of having 10% of the coastal and marine areas conserved through effectively managed and well-connected system of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures.

**Fish stocks overexploitation**

**Marine litter**

It is also worth mentioning that marine litter has been found at all surveyed locations in the western Mediterranean sub-basin, including off the Catalan coasts and canyons, the Gulf of Lions, and the Algero-Balearic basin, with high densities found at its north-western part and on the continental slope. A recent large-scale study targeting floating debris reported densities of up to 195 items per km² (98% of which were polymers), with one of the peaks located in the Algerian Basin.

**Actions**

- For instance improving cooperation among fishermen and sustainable fisheries management.
- Mon fisheries policy is implemented more consistently at sub-basin level.
- Towards the sustainability of Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries.
- Ensuring that the community’s 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.
- 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.
- The inclusion of western Mediterranean countries in the BLUEMED Initiative and its Strategic Research Agenda.
- Full Automatic Identification System coverage to share more maritime traffic monitoring data at regional level.
- Border surveillance strengthened by involving neighbourhood countries in the Seahorse Mediterranean Network.
- Inclusion of western Mediterranean countries in the BLUEMED Initiative and its Strategic Research Agenda.
- 20% increase in off-season tourist arrivals.
- 20% increase in sustainable aquaculture production value.
- 25% increase in certified eco-ports and marinas.

**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 include for instance promoting coordinated MSP and ICZM.

**Marine and maritime knowledge**

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**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.

**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 include for instance improving cooperation among fishermen and sustainable fisheries management.

**Initiative’s Resolve**

- The region is a hotspot of anthropic pressure (economic, demographic and environmental).
- As many as 7 of the 13 areas of the Mediterranean where dense economic activity strongly interacts with conservation, issues are found there.
- Potentially competing maritime economic activities in the same waters may deter or prevent investments.
- While their cumulated pressures can increase waste generation and energy and water consumption, exacerbate the exploitation of mineral and biological resources and ultimately lead to more pollution.
- The serious deterioration of marine and coastal ecosystems.
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- The serious deterioration of marine and coastal ecosystems.

**Initiative’s targets**

- (tentative and non-exhaustive)
Political endorsement

Under the Maltese Presidency of the European Council, the European Commission adopted the Communication on this Initiative for the sustainable development of the blue economy in the western Mediterranean on 19 April 2017.

Subsequently, on 26 June 2017, the Council Conclusions on Blue Growth endorsed the contents of the Communication, welcomed its accompanying rolling Framework for Action, and invited the countries involved, the European Commission, and the UfM Secretariat to take forward the implementation of the Initiative in coherence, complementarity and coordination with all the other existing initiatives which are taking place in the region.

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.

Links with EU policies and Funding

Instead of creating new legislation, this Initiative aims to achieve the Union’s core priorities: ‘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 therefore 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’ and on ‘International Ocean Governance’.

Further information

Project website: [http://westmed-initiative.eu](http://westmed-initiative.eu)


UFM secretariat: [http://ufmsecretariat.org](http://ufmsecretariat.org)


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