CONCLUSIONS OF THE INTERMEDITERRANEAN COMMISSION PLENARY MEETING

Wednesday 27 October 2021 – [:] Online Meeting – 10.30-12.00 (CET)

WELCOME AND OPENING SESSION

Élodie Nunes introduced the meeting and passed the floor to Gaetano Armao who first of all excused Nello Musumeci, President of the Intermediterranean Commission and President of Region Sicily, who was stuck in Catania following the very heavy flooding that had just happened on the Island. The floods had already had catastrophic consequences, and Sicily was in a state of emergency. An exceptional climatic event which unfortunately gives full meaning to our work which aims to avoid the disastrous consequences of this type of event for our fellow citizens. Gaetano Armao reminded participants of the work of the Intermediterranean Commission and the Islands Commission and confirmed that action must be taken. Very concrete challenges have to be faced for future generations, but also for the current generation. He reminded participants of Sicily’s commitment to blue sustainability and Mediterranean ecosystems. He mentioned the next COP 26 and expressed his hope that this event will be a huge success because immediate measures are necessary to fight against climate change, to continue on the path of the transition towards cleaner green economies to protect humanity. This is why the plenary is so important, plenary, with in particular the validation of the two political documents along these lines.

Gaetano Armao then presented the agenda for the meeting, which was unanimously approved. He then requested the approval of the conclusions of the General Assembly (July 2021), which were also unanimously approved.

POLICY AND VOTING SESSION – INNOVATION AND SUSTAINABLE BLUE ECONOMY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

Alessandro Dario, from Emilia-Romagna Region, presented the BLUE BIO MED Call to action for blue bioeconomy in the Mediterranean. The Call to action aims to gather public authorities, research organisations, higher and technical education institutions, business, innovators, civil society and all bridging organisations in the Mediterranean innovation ecosystems committed to accelerate the transition toward sustainable development to join forces in order to:

- Boost potential of this sector to generate shared value (economic, social and environmental);
- Mobilise efforts to face urgent challenges to Mediterranean sustainability;
- Explore the potential of blue resources to support sustainable development in all other sectors.
This call to action is the first step of a Mediterranean Alliance for sustainable blue economy while the second step is the BBM forum in Ferrara (18-19 November). After the forum, the Alliance will start a co-decision process. A. Dario invited everyone to read the Call to action, get in contact to have further information and subscribe to the Blue Economy Innovation Forum of BLUE BIO MED before Thursday 11 November.

The Call to action also includes the recommendations given by the Intermediterranean Commission. At the end of his presentation, the Call to action was endorsed by the IMC and the CPMR, with the idea to implement some elements of the Call during future projects.

Emmanuel Maniscalco, CPMR EU Programmes Senior Officer, presented the Interreg MED Programme’s Blue Growth Community position paper. The document was drafted in reaction to the Communication issued by the European Commission in May 2021 on a “New approach for a sustainable blue economy in the EU - Transforming the EU's Blue Economy for a Sustainable Future.” This communication is a key step in the transition towards a more sustainable approach in the development of blue economy sectors, and particularly for the Mediterranean.

The Blue Growth Community drafted this position paper to promote a new vision on the transition towards a sustainable blue economy, together with promoting the Communication issued by the European Commission. The Paper is articulated around key messages identified by the Blue Growth Community project related to areas covered by the Communication, including circular blue economy, maritime spatial planning, research and innovation, blue investments, blue skills, maritime security, territorial cooperation, biodiversity and nature preservation, waste prevention, renewable energies.

The rationale behind the position paper considers the effects of both the pandemic and climate change, as well as the sectoral approach, trying to gather the main conclusions that came out from the Blue Growth Community activities.

The position paper was approved by the members of the Community on 12 October 2021, during the Community’s Annual Assembly. The position paper, now including some amendments from the Intermediterranean Commission, was also endorsed by the IMC and the CPMR.

**UPDATE ON THE WORKING GROUPS**

*Presentation of the Mediterranean Prize for intercultural dialogue: launch of the platform and application procedure*

José Enrique Millo Rocher, Secretary General for External Action, Andalusia, thanked the Intermediterranean Commission for inviting him once again to speak about the Mediterranean Awards.

He emphasised the commitment of Andalusia to the European agenda, especially the strategic agreement with the different countries in the region, notably the digital and environmental aspects. He recalled the common challenges and the importance of working together to respond to them and to relaunch the post-pandemic economies. The Mediterranean regions are not alone on this path, and that they can count on the support of the Intermediterranean Commission and the Mediterranean Culture Foundation.

The aim of these Awards is to make the Mediterranean region visible by recognising the work of people and institutions that have participated in sustainable development and peacekeeping in the region. To this end, the Mediterranean Awards are deployed through five categories: Digitalization, Environment and sustainable development, Women’s entrepreneurship, Solidarity and South-South cooperation.

In addition, there is the “Ad hominem” prize of the year, which recognises the work of an individual on their commitment to a more united and prosperous Mediterranean.

J. Millo invited all members to share and disseminate these awards on social networks and to invite any relevant person to apply. He thanked once again the Intermediterranean Commission and its President and invited his technical team to present the platform and the application form: Mediterranean Awards (premiosdelmediterraneo.org). The technical team invited the members of the Intermediterranean
Commission to browse the guidelines on the platform and to contact premiosmed@tresculturasy.org in case of questions.

Élodie Nunes thanked J. Millo for this exhaustive presentation and asked if it is possible to present oneself as a person from civil society and not as a person affiliated to a particular organisation/region, which Andalusia corroborated replying that it is possible to apply as a person in their own right.

Finally, É. Nunes concluded by informing the members of the Intermediterranean Commission that an email will be sent to them to summarise this information once again. She also pointed out that the results of these Awards will be presented at the next General Assembly of the Intermediterranean Commission.

**Economic and Social Cohesion, Occitanie & Lazio**

Laure Lhermet, from Occitanie region, provided an overview of the RESET project, of which the Region Occitanie is the Lead Partner. The project aims at re-launching employment in the social economy sector, following the recession caused by the pandemic, encouraging the creation of sustainable and ‘non-offshorable’ jobs on the territories. Within this project, a workshop will take place in Bologna in November 2021, tackling measures to ensure the inclusion into the labour force of people with disabilities and discuss the impact of social economy as propeller of territorial development.

Valentina Corrado, from Region Lazio, provided updates on the work of the Mediterranean Youth Council recently launched to merge the activities of the Youth Assembly of the French Region Sud and the IMC Youth Assembly. 46 young Europeans were selected to join one of the five working tables within the newborn assembly which, according to Valentina Corrado, is the opportunity to establish a structured dialogue for the youth in order to guarantee peace, prosperity, and sustainable development in the Mediterranean area. The IMC will have a central role in expanding this initiative to other regions.

Flora Leroy, CPMR IMC Project and Policy Officer invited participants to save the date for the MED Sustainable Tourism Days, which will take place from 14th to 17th of December in Rome. As part of this series of events, key outcomes of projects in which the Intermediterranean Commission and some of its members are involved, will be showcased with the aim of contributing to the recovery of the tourism sector in a smarter and greener way. On day one, DestiMED PLUS project will organize its Mid Term Think-Tank. Day two will be dedicated to the Intermediterranean Commission Sustainable Tourism and Culture Task Force meeting as a follow-up to its study and survey on the recovery of the tourism sector after COVID and to its last meeting in July 2021. Indeed, key tools from BEST MED, SMARTMED and DestiMED PLUS, will be presented and combined with a capacity building workshop coordinated by the Union for the Mediterranean. Finally, the BEST MED workshop on data management and sharing for sustainable tourism and its Field Trip will take place on the last two days.

**Territorial Cooperation and Macro-Regional Strategies, Catalunya & Sud**

Muntsa Vilalta, Government of Catalonia, addressed four issues related to the Mediterranean Cooperation Alliance:

Concerning the actions towards the creation of a macroregional strategy (MRS) for the Mediterranean, the French Presidency of the Council of the EU could be an enabling factor. Region Sud has been coordinating a Report as part of the work of the Committee of the Regions' (CoR) Commission for Territorial Cohesion Policy and EU Budget (COTER Committee) on this very issue, that strongly support the creation of the MRS. Catalonia is pleased to see that the MED Cooperation Alliance has been quoted in two documents i.e. European Parliament’s Briefing “Working towards a macro-regional strategy for the Mediterranean” released in October 2021; as well as Policy Analysis of the CoR COTER Committee released on 27 October 2021. Both documents recognise the important role of the MED Cooperation Alliance, as well as key initiatives and actors such as the Interreg MED PANORAMED project, the IMC and the Union for the Mediterranean, among others.

She also mentioned the online Seminar “How does multilevel governance foster green transition?” organised by the Euroregion Pyrenees-Mediterranean/Adriatic-ionian on 14 October, as part of the European Week of Regions and Cities. The main idea that was defended on this occasion is that in order to achieve a just and fair transition towards sustainability, multilevel governance is essential.
About the upcoming activities, Catalonia intends to push for the submission of a proposal for an institutional project under Interreg Euro MED’s first call for proposals to be launched in February 2022. MedCities is coordinating the preparation of the application, while trying to work hand in hand with other thematic projects.

**M. Vilalta** finally mentioned the first edition of the Mediterranean Day, to take place on 28 November this year, that was impulsed by the Union for the Mediterranean. Catalonia will be trying to organise some actions as part of this event.

**Update on ETC programmes by Guillaume Huet, Region Sud**

Guillaume Huet expressed his deep sympathy and solidarity to the people living in Sicily and offered to help Sicily region identifying relevant EU financial aid, notably through the EU solidarity Fund that Region Sud had to activate on the occasion of the flood disaster that hit the Roya Valley (Alpes Maritimes) in October 2020.

Then, he provided an update on Interreg NEXT MED and EURO MED programmes, for which Region Sud represents the national authority.

**Interreg NextMED:** the Programme has been extended to new countries (15 countries in total, including 7 countries from the Northern shores and 8 countries from the Southern and Eastern shores, including Turkey and Algeria as newcomers). The Programme will focus on usual sectors i.e. support to SMEs, education/training, energy efficiency and water management among others. Some new themes will also be addressed i.e. health, circular economy, fight/mitigation against climate disasters. The financial agreements with Southern countries are expected to be ratified in 2022. The programme should be submitted in late 2022 and the first calls should be launched in early 2023.

**Interreg Euro MED:** 2 new countries joined the programme’s eligible area, namely North Macedonia and Bulgaria. The overall budget of the Programme is €260 million. The last draft of the Programme was recently validated and should be submitted soon. The first call is expected to be launched in January/February 2022, with a total budget of €38 million. This first call will be open for Institutional and Thematic Community Projects only. Each project is expected to have 6 to 8 partners and will last 80 months (November 2022-June 2029). An event on the launch of the new Programme will take place on 2 December in Lisbon.

Finally, about the report on a MRS in the Mediterranean coordinated by Region Sud as part of the work of the CoR’s COTER Committee, G. Huet stressed that this is a good timing for pushing for the creation of new MRS considering the upcoming presidencies of the Council of the EU that include Mediterranean countries in favour of it. Commissioner Ferreira also showed to be quite favourable to new MRS in the EU. The report focuses on governance and promotes multilevel governance (EU, national, regional levels). A first draft has been produced and is expected to be shared with IMC members in November. Then, the report will be presented to the COTER Committee in January 2022, and hopefully approved by COTER members in February. The final approval of the report in the CoR’s plenary session is expected to take place in April 2022.

**Water and Energy, Valencia & Rabat-Salé-Kénitra**

Juliette Olivier, CPMR IMC Project and Policy Officer presented the updates of the SolaQua project, funded by the Horizon 2020 programme, which aims to facilitate the development of a well-functioning market for photovoltaic irrigation systems (PVIS) in the Mediterranean.

The last meeting took place on the 15 and 16 September 2021 and the project is well underway.

The partners have submitted several deliverables to the European Commission for validation which will serve as materials and tools to address the technical and economic challenges linked to the development of photovoltaic irrigation projects.

For example, the SolaQua consortium developed:
- a methodology to assess the environmental impact of installing a PVIS which will help facilitate this process and ensure a sustainable and appropriate systems.

- a standard power purchase agreement between the contractor and the irrigator to install a PVIS, which will serve as a standard for these projects.

- More precisely the CPMR IMC is currently developing tools to address the policy challenges, including:
  
  o A deliverable on “legislation and best practice” containing an analysis of legal and administrative obstacles to the introduction of PVIS;
  
  o A deliverable focusing on best practice in the use of EAFRD financial instruments.

The deliverables will soon be available and will be useful resources for all actors in the field of solar irrigation (farmers, communities of irrigators, SMEs, public authorities) to facilitate the implementation of PVIS.

The next meeting will take place mid-March 2022 to review the progress of the project.

Robin Guillon, Region Sud, presented the updates of the AGRIMED Task Force on Sustainable Agriculture and Food Sovereignty.

The first meeting took place on 6 July 2021 and started with a presentation of the ARLEMM report “Agriculture and food security in the face of climate change in the Mediterranean” which established an alarming diagnosis of the situation in the Mediterranean as well as recommendations, followed by an institutional session with representatives of the FAO, the Union for the Mediterranean and CIHEAM. Moreover, European funded projects relevant to the theme of the Task Force were presented.

This meeting was also the occasion to circulate a questionnaire to the members, whose answers will allow the elaboration of a roadmap for the Task Force. About ten regions responded, including Italian, Spanish and French regions. There is still the possibility of responding to this questionnaire [here](#). From the answers received so far, the issues on which there is the greatest consensus seem to be those of youth and generational renewal, the scarcity of water resources and short distribution networks.

The results of this questionnaire will be analysed and condensed into a report that will be presented at the next meeting of the Task Force on the 10 December 2021. This second meeting of the Task Force will also be the occasion to debrief on the UN Food Systems Summit 2021, to focus on the blue economy component of food systems, and to follow up on the SolaQua project, presented earlier.

Transport & Integrated Maritime Policy, Murcia & Sud

**Update on transport in relation to CPMR activities**

Adrian Zittelli Ferrari, Murcia Region, shared the main actions in which the working group have participated since the last IMC General Assembly on 9 July 2021:

- **Participation in the CPMR IMC Transport Working Group** held on 21 September 2021 that focused on the following topics:

  o **Call for proposals in the framework of the funding mechanism “Connecting Europe Facility”** making available 7 billion euros for projects to build/upgrade/improve European transport infrastructure, support actions in the framework of Cohesion and Military Mobility (TEN infrastructure project, smart transport, infrastructure for alternative fuels, noise reduction in rail freight transport, improving road safety, among others).

  o **On-going work on Territorial Accessibility**, which started in early 2021 and aims to provide a tool to influence the TEN revision and the complexity it entails for maritime peripheral regions, which face connectivity gaps. The accessibility of ports and airports in outermost and island regions will be studied as a single access point for these regions.
- **Proposals adopted by the EC to adopt a series of policies including transport to reduce greenhouse gas emissions** by 55% by 2030. It needs to take combined measures to tackle road transport emissions - stricter standards for CO₂ emissions from passenger cars and vans.

- **Participation in the CPMR General Assembly Accessibility session**, that focused on the initiatives taken by regions to ensure connectivity while contributing to the fight against climate change. EC and MPE participated in the session. As a result of this session, the CPMR will identify the initiatives taken by the regions to decarbonise the transport sector and the main obstacles they face.

  - The next Working Group meeting scheduled for early 2022 will focus on the TEN-T legislative proposal to be published in mid-December.

  - Murcia Region is also organising a session in the framework of the Future of Europe conference on the future of mobility.

**Restoration of lagoons in the Mediterranean**

Following the first meeting on 15 July, the working group continued drafting a project under HORIZON EUROPE mechanism "Zero Pollution", which aims to develop innovative governance solutions (at different administrative levels) to limit nitrogen and phosphorus emissions in rural, urban, and coastal environments.

This project aims at restoring lagoons that have been polluted by excess nutrient supply. They will be tackled from a circular economy approach. The consortium is still being evaluated and receiving good practices that have been developed in this area.

**Zero plastic initiative**

**Benoit Garrigues**, Region Sud, following the work of the IUCN congress that took place in Marseille in September 2021, signed an agreement to promote an integrated approach to fight plastic reduce the level of plastic waste, at a political and operational level.

  - **Political level**: It is essential to share practices, policies, actions, and measures implemented to fight against plastic waste together in all the MED regions.

  - **Operational level**: projects are being implemented in order to reduce this pollution, retaining the macro/micro plastic waste in key points since most of the plastic waste comes from the land.

This is a main topic for the EC and supported by many funding mechanisms such as ProMED, LIFE programme or Horizon Europe (Ocean Mission). They can help to achieve this goal concretely and prevent/reduce plastic pollution in the Mediterranean regions.

They are now thinking about the possible actions and the partners that should take part in it to implement these projects concretely in the Mediterranean. In the next weeks, Region Sud will propose a working meeting in the political aspect related to reduce plastic pollution in which they will keep identifying partners that can help achieve this goal. He finally mentioned BLUE BIO MED as a key project that is trying to tackle this topic.

**INTERNAL MATTERS OF THE INTERMEDITERRANEAN COMMISSION**

**Élodie Nunes** presented the Intermediterranean Commission’s Activity Report.

**Davide Strangis** made a short presentation of the synergies with the work of the CPMR and the other Commissions. In particular the CPMR working group on macro-regions. He mentioned a common position paper and recommendations formulated on the lobbying activities of the Intermediterranean Commission. This document will serve as the basis for online messages to the European Parliament, the European Commission and Member States for meetings organised at the start of 2022. He mentioned the CPMR Political Bureau that will be held in Catalonia on 25 March 2022. He then added a few points on
tourism in the context of DG Growth’s consultation on sustainable tourism, and the work on a plastics strategy.

Élodie Nunes gave a quick update on current and new projects. She reminded participants that all information is included in a document that is available on the Intermediterranean: Report on the participation of the Intermediterranean Commission in EU Cooperation projects (October 2021).

Élodie Nunes presented the financial papers. She indicated that some projects are nearing the end and that the IMC is now concentrating on future calls for projects. Proposals will be made on themes of interest to the Member Regions of the Intermediterranean Commission.

Regarding the calendar, she reminded participants that it is available online on the Commission’s website for our events and via this link for all other events of interest: https://teamup.com. The Political Bureau will meet at the start of the year and the 2022 General Assembly will be held in person in Seville. The dates are still to be confirmed. Regarding the working group meetings, the AGRIMED and Culture and sustainable tourism Task Forces will meet on line on 1 and 15 December 2021 respectively.

Finally, Élodie Nunes reminded participants that Region Dytiki Ellada represents the Intermediterranean Commission in ARLEM, and that Region Murcia, represented by Adrian Zittelli, will take over the substitution from now on.

The session was adjourned.