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Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development

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MEDITERRANEAN STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: *A Framework for Environmental Sustainability and Shared Prosperity*

INTRODUCTION: WHY A MEDITERRANEAN STRATEGY?

Sustainable development is a global objective that aims to respond to the needs of current generations without compromising the abilities of future generations to meet their own needs. The Millennium Development Goals, approved by 189 countries in September 2000, and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, adopted in 2002 by the World Summit on Sustainable Development, emphasize the urgent need for greater commitment to reduce inequalities and assist in the development of poor countries. They also emphasize the need to change unsustainable production and consumption patterns, as confirmed by the Marrakech process, to protect and manage natural resources sustainably for economic and social development, to safeguard health and integrate the objective of sustainable development more effectively into the process of globalization. The WSSD also calls for regional and national strategies in recognition that sustainable development cannot be achieved in isolation and that international prescriptions have to be adapted to local circumstances and to the conditions of the eco-region.

The 21 Mediterranean countries and the European Community decided, at the 12th Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention (Monaco, November 2001), in line with the WSSD process, to prepare a "Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development" (MSSD). They requested the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development (MCSD) of the Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP) to develop a draft of the Strategy. The 2nd Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on the Environment (Athens, July 2002) endorsed this initiative.

Despite the progress made, there is a latent but growing awareness throughout the Mediterranean that current development trends are unsustainable. Mediterranean people are becoming increasingly aware that it is just not possible to keep using resources, building up coastal areas and developing industries, especially tourism, without an adequate integrated planning framework, a reduction of North-South disparities and the necessary policy reforms. The Mediterranean partners have already made much progress in this respect through the Barcelona Convention and the MCSD. The Strategy offers an excellent opportunity for these partners to make substantial advances towards sustainable development, based on genuine partnership and co-development.

The Mediterranean Strategy is a *framework strategy*. Its purpose is to adapt international commitments to regional conditions, to guide national sustainable development strategies and to initiate a dynamic partnership between countries at different levels of development. By making a public and high profile commitment to sustainable development and to reporting on the progress achieved, countries as well as donors and the other partners concerned will help to produce and sustain a common dynamic in which much greater attention is paid to achieving harmonious growth throughout the region. The Strategy calls for action to pursue sustainable development goals with a view to strengthening peace, stability and prosperity, taking into account the threats and weaknesses in the region as well as its strengths and opportunities. It also takes into consideration the need to reduce the gap between developed and developing countries in the region.

The MSSD is based on the *Vision and Framework Orientations*, which have already been endorsed by the MCSD and the Contracting Parties. In the development of the Strategy, valuable inputs were provided by the assessment and prospective documents prepared by various MAP components, as well as by other Mediterranean cooperation networks. The Strategy takes into account recent developments in regional cooperation, with particular reference to the Mediterranean Action Plan and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, the Arab Initiative for Sustainable Development and the EU Sustainable Development Strategy. The EU Strategy directly concerns Mediterranean EU Member States and countries likely to become EU members. It also indirectly affects the EU's Mediterranean neighbours in setting the requirement that all Community policies must place sustainable development as their priority.

The EU and developed countries on the northern shore will have an important role to play, through vigorous aid policies, in promoting the co-development of the North and the South. The EU and its Mediterranean partners will also have to work together to develop democratic processes, strengthen institutional capacities, improve governance and enhance the peace process in regions of conflict. The implementation of the Strategy through a Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the new EU Neighbourhood Policy focussing on sustainable development will help Mediterranean countries to achieve these aspirations much sooner. The Strategy could, in particular, facilitate the goal launched by the EU commitments to "depollute" the Mediterranean Sea.

The challenge for all Mediterranean countries is to use the Strategy as an opportunity to make coordinated and joint progress in the fields of human and economic development, environmental protection and cultural advancement.

1. TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE MEDITERRANEAN: THE NEED AND THE WAY FORWARD

The environment in the Mediterranean forms the basis for the development of the region, and it is crucial to put an end to the environmental degradation that is already giving rise to very high economic and social costs. The region also needs to redirect its development to meet the economic and social needs, which are considerable in the South and East, without increasing the process of environmental degradation.

The Strategy therefore focuses mainly on the integration of environmental concerns into key economic development sectors, while giving due consideration to social and cultural dimensions

As a basis for building up a dynamic regional process of sustainable development, the Strategy outlines the main needs and challenges in the region, before going on to identify four major objectives and sets of actions to be carried out in seven basic priority fields of action. A set of indicators, annexed to this report, will contribute to the follow-up of the implementation of the MSSD.

1.1. Sustainable development, a vital necessity to meet developmental challenges in the Mediterranean

In general terms, the environmental challenge is one of the most critical. With a degraded environment, the Mediterranean is in grave danger of losing the main assets which make it so unique, especially in agriculture and tourism. Continued poor management of scarce natural resources, with particular reference to water, agricultural land, energy and coastal zones, will compromise economic development, the quality of life and social stability. Population dynamics and unemployment together with the entrepreneurial sluggishness and social concerns will add to these pressures. Moreover, without improved regional cooperation and governance mechanisms, the globalization process might worsen the negative trends.

The environmental challenge

In recent decades, environmental degradation has accelerated, setting in motion irreversible trends, including:

- Valuable agriculture land is being lost to urbanization and salinization. More than 80% of arid and dry areas are affected by desertification and the consequences will be exacerbated by the impact of climatic change.
- Scarce, over-used water resources are threatened with depletion or degradation.
- Urban standards of living and health are being degraded by traffic congestion, noise, poor air quality and the rapid growth of waste generation.
- Coastal areas and the sea are affected by pollution and coastlines are being built up and/or eroded, while fish resources are being depleted.
- The unique landscapes and biodiversity of the region, ranging from densely populated coasts to marginalized inland areas, are being disrupted by over-exploitation in many cases and abandonment in others.

Although it is difficult to assign specific values, the costs of environmental degradation are clearly very significant. In addition, the region is increasingly vulnerable to flooding, landslides, earthquakes, tsunamis, droughts, fires and ecological imbalances, which have a direct and immediate impact on the livelihood and welfare of a large proportion of the population.

The potential increase in environmental pressures on coastal regions over the coming 20 years is considerable, particularly in the areas of tourism with 137 million more visitors, transport which is projected to more than double in volume, urban development (to house 33 million more people) urban sprawl and energy infrastructures. The continued spread of unsustainable production and consumption patterns is likely to increase the costs of environmental degradation dramatically, which already account for between 3 and 5 per cent of GDP, according to the World Bank. The environment should not be considered as an additional constraint, but as a driving force, an asset and an incentive.

The people of the Mediterranean are now much more aware of the threats to their environment and their unique natural and cultural heritage. Important policy initiatives which have been adopted in almost all countries show that solutions can be found which are adapted to the specific characteristics of the Mediterranean's problems, regions and cultures. Nevertheless, such efforts are too few in number to reverse current unsustainable development

trends. Unless significant changes are made, the Mediterranean, the world's leading tourist region, could "jeopardize" its major assets, resulting in additional economic constraints and a deterioration in living conditions.

The demographic, economic, social and cultural challenges

There is a stark contrast in the demographic situation in countries to the North and South of the Mediterranean. Northern Mediterranean countries are faced with the problem of an ageing population. In southern and eastern countries, population growth is still a major issue, with an increase of 90 million people expected by 2025. However, a spectacular fall in fertility rates over the past ten years is now resulting in a demographic transition in these countries.

Although it is traditionally a region of trade and transit, the Mediterranean has only occasionally succeeded in being competitive on international markets. Despite the success of some dynamic growth poles and clusters, all too often its enterprises, which are mostly small and medium-sized, lack dynamism and competitiveness. They have not generally stood out in terms of innovation, as they were based for too long on a 'rent economy', fostered by a mining-like exploitation of the region's geographical location and natural resources.

A dramatic problem of labour market integration exists, particularly among youth. The North is not able to absorb the considerable pressure for emigration from southern and eastern Mediterranean countries, which are faced by the need to create over 30 million new jobs by 2025. Unlike in comparable regions in other parts of the world, these countries have not yet managed to 'take off' economically and average GDP per capita in purchasing power parity of several for them is still one-fifth of the level in Mediterranean EU countries.

Most Mediterranean economies, which have been insufficiently dynamic for the past 20 or 30 years in relation to other regions of the world, are experiencing difficult employment situations, with unemployment rates ranging generally between 8 and 25 per cent. Poverty is closely related to the employment situation, as well as changes which marginalize categories of society, such as the very rapid transformation of the agricultural, crafts, and rural sectors.

Social issues are also a major concern, particularly in southern and eastern Mediterranean countries. Despite progress, they are still backward in terms of literacy and gender equality. Poverty, especially in rural areas, is still a dominant problem in many countries, although there is relatively little extreme poverty. The situation is aggravated by the un-equitable distribution of wealth. The populations of many southern and eastern Mediterranean countries also suffer from insufficient access to safe drinking water and sanitation.

The situation between countries with regard to their cultural capacity is very uneven, although that is partly hidden by the lack of cultural indicators, which are admittedly more difficult to develop than for other sectors. The work of the Strategy has made it possible to measure both handicaps and elements of diversity, which are also broad and need to be respected insofar as they demonstrate the will to reaffirm natural diversity in a context of globalization, and promote the unique Mediterranean culture as a basic economic and social asset.

The challenges of globalization, regional cooperation and governance

The challenge of globalization requires widespread regional cooperation, political stability, efficient governance and social protection. Yet the situation of Mediterranean countries in fulfilling these conditions is very asymmetrical.

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