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DRAFT REPORT

to the

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY, ENVIRONMENT, AND WATER OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE UNION FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN

The creation of marine parks in the Mediterranean as a means of preserving biodiversity

by

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Measures and instruments to protect biodiversity in the Mediterranean

The ecological richness of the Mediterranean Sea is seriously jeopardized by a combination of factors ranging from climate change and over-exploitation to various forms of pollution. Each specific threat needs to be matched by specific countermeasures, to be adopted and implemented jointly by all Mediterranean countries through integrated policies.

In recent times, maritime traffic through Mediterranean sea routes has significantly increased in spite of the dent that the current crisis has made in economic growth and development.. Although the financial crisis and the ensuing economic crisis caused a contraction in global trade, the volume of traffic using the Mediterranean route from the Red Sea through the Suez Canal and the Pillars of Hercules exceeds by 10% the traffic along the sea routes that circumnavigate Africa for freight shipping between Asia, Europe and America. Maritime traffic via the Suez-Gibraltar route has steadily increased and reached 35 million containers a year, an amount that is still rising. To carry this cargo, the equivalent of 910 million tons, 21,000 ships use this route every year.

With such massive shipping volumes and the constant presence of large container ships, which by necessity dump pollutants in varying amounts, control systems need to be put in place and initiatives undertaken to protect the environment as a whole and to safeguard the rich biodiversity of fish species that populate the waters of the Mediterranean.

In addition to the negative repercussions of the recent sharp increase in shipping, other elements are also having a deleterious impact on the Mediterranean environment and its biology to the detriment of its potential for sustainable development. These elements include urbanization, the intensive use of nitrogen- and phosphorus-rich fertilizers and resulting in marine eutrophication, the pollution caused by waste water containing heavy metals and organochlorines, oil spills, the introduction of alien species, overfishing and the lack of eco-friendly fishing methods, and tourism.

There are currently three key **regulatory frameworks** for the protection of biodiversity in the Mediterranean: the "Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against Pollution" (the Barcelona Convention, for short), the Directives and Communications of the European Union and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). As we shall see, within each of these regulatory frameworks increasing attention is given to the creation of protected marine areas. Scientific research and political institutions

alike recognize protected areas as constituting an effective and versatile method to protect marine environment.

As regards the **Barcelona Convention**, which is the legal and operational instrument - created for the implementation of the United Nations Mediterranean Action Plan - has been ratified to date by 32 countries. Two of its Protocols are of particular interest: the Protocol concerning specially protected areas and biological diversity in the Mediterranean (SPA/BD protocol); and the Protocol on pollution from offshore activities (Offshore protocol). As part of the Barcelona Convention, work is also underway on a EU-funded project to create protected areas in the Mediterranean open seas. Twelve such areas have been identified, one of which is the Strait of Sicily.

The **European Union** has on many occasions addressed itself to the concerns that we are considering here. The Action Plans for Biodiversity (e.g. the Action Plan for Natural Resources or the Action Plan for Fisheries) seek to assimilate biodiversity into the EU's policies. In 2007, the Commission developed guidelines for the extension also to the marine environment of "Natura 2000", a European network of areas of special conservation interest created for the protection and conservation of habitats and species. This network is intended to have a key role in the battle to save biodiversity in the territories of the European Union. Natura 2000 consists of a network of specially protected areas and is still in the process of formation. The Marine Strategy Framework Directive (2008/56/EC), which dates back to 2008, sets out a strategy for the protection and conservation of the marine environment, the sustainable use of the seas and the conservation of marine ecosystems. The Directive requires Member States to carry out an initial analysis of the marine waters and of the environmental impact thereon of human activities, to set specific environmental targets and take steps to establish protected areas.

The **Convention on Biological Diversity** (CBD) is a key point of reference for the protection of biodiversity. It has been signed by 193 countries that met at the Tenth Conference of the Convention held in Nagoya in late October. The Conference endorsed the strategic plan for the years 2010-2020.With regard to the seas and oceans, the CBD, among other things, set the goal of protecting 10% of coastal water and high-seas areas, thus paving the way for further actions that need to be undertaken to halt the loss of biodiversity. Although far less than what many environmental organizations are seeking, and less also than what many studies suggest is necessary, the target of 10% is still ambitious (at present, Mediterranean protected areas make up less than 1% of the total area) and represents a reversal of trend. It is now up to each signatory State to implement what has been agreed in the new strategic plan.

The most important measures for the preservation of the biodiversity of the marine environment are:

- the integration of environmental considerations in fisheries management;
- the control of accidental or deliberate oil pollution by ships;
- the strict regulation of oil and gas extraction activities to reduce their negative effects on the marine environment;
- the management of areas subject to military activities (the impact of sonar on marine mammals)
- the control of the dredging of navigation channels and the control of the extraction of gravel and sand;
- the control of agricultural and industrial pollution;
- the careful management of tourism in nature areas.

It should be borne in mind that several distinct stress factors will generally combine to act simultaneously on a given marine environment, resulting in a **cumulative impact** that is far greater than a sum of its parts. One of the first areas of action (while not enough in itself to resolve the problems) may be to map the number and intensity of impacts with a view to developing strategies to relocate or reposition certain activities. This would make it possible to protect areas that are particularly vulnerable, and reduce the cumulative effect on areas that are subject to too many simultaneous pressures.

Another possible action is for each coastal state to set up an Ecological Protection Zone (EPZ) that extends beyond its territorial waters up to the 200-mile offshore limit as defined by international law. In this way states can enforce their marine environmental protection laws over a broader stretch of sea, and reclaim them from the status of international waters. Italy, for example, is on the point of setting up its first Ecological Protection Zone in the north-western Mediterranean.

A broader strategy of marine conservation and sustainable development, however, implies that any protection measures, whether already in force or referring to the areas of action listed above, will have to be applied to the Mediterranean as a whole. Provisions relating to fishing or pollution, for example, must necessarily be implemented on a large scale and not restricted to protected areas only. As the European Environmental Agency has observed, it is not enough to have environmental policies that concentrate on preserving islands of biodiversity if nature is disappearing all around.

Against this background, the creation of protected marine areas as defined by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) is of fundamental importance. Measures that refer to the marine environment as a whole will be applied incrementally. Their scope of application will be greater in protected

areas where there is a need to restrict human activities considered harmful to biodiversity, up to a maximum level of enforcement in integral nature reserves where all forms of activity and the exploitation or use of marine resources is banned ("no take-no dump").

The creation of marine parks in the Mediterranean as a means of preserving biodiversity

The urgency of the need to establish more protected marine areas and integral reserves with the specific purpose of safeguarding fish and mammal life in the Mediterranean emerges strongly in scientific studies, one of which is the **Census of marine life**. The census is the result of an international research project started ten years ago involving 360 researchers from 80 countries. Some data from this research was published recently.

The census found, for instance, that more than 230,000 different marine animal species live in the 25 areas it surveyed, and of these only a tenth have been catalogued. With 17,000 animal species, the Mediterranean is the fourth most biodiverse place in the world after Australia, Japan and China. On a worldwide scale, a comparison of current with historical data shows that the populations of several species have declined by up to 90%, and may soon disappear entirely. Studies of species have been successfully carried out both in the coastal and in the deep-sea waters of the Mediterranean and some of the findings have been surprising. In deep-sea areas, for example, at depths where no life was thought to exist, 3,500 different species were discovered of which 75% have yet to be catalogued. One reason for safeguarding deep-sea areas, then, is simply that we cannot afford to lose what we have yet to learn about.

The need to create marine reserves inevitably comes up against many obstacles, most of which derive from the prevalence of short-term economic considerations. In reality, marine reserves offer breeding havens for particular species of animals and are the only means of preventing inevitable species extinction, which would have an even more damaging economic impact. The areas where protection is therefore vital are: those where species such as bluefin tuna, sea turtles, the white shark, the sandbar shark and so on can breed and mature; those accommodating a high diversity of species; and those that contain, in close proximity, high variety of different types of habitat.

The creation of marine parks may involve more than one country, which makes close cooperation between nations important. As a first step towards the creation of a marine park in the Strait of Bonifacio, Italy and France recently signed a Declaration of Intent.

Conclusions

The Mediterranean urgently needs an integrated approach to the management of resource exploitation by humans whose activities are impinging ever more severely and invasively on its biodiversity. When designing this integrated approach, we need, on the one hand, to strike a balance between protected marine areas and the rest of the sea, so that the protected areas are not just small islands of diversity in the midst of devastation. On the other hand, we ought to avoid conflict between environmental claims and economic needs. We have to pursue a win-win strategy in which both the environment and the economy will draw the greatest benefit. If done right, the creation of protected marine areas has the potential to spearhead the process of convergence between the necessity to protect resources and the demands of growth.