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BACKGROUND DOCUMENT

Is the Union for the Mediterranean paving the way for sustainability?

The repeated postponement of the UfM Summit to be held in Barcelona, could unfortunately provide a sad confirmation to those who believe that the Union for the Mediterranean is not necessary. On the contrary, WWF believes that more things bring us together than separate us in the Mediterranean and that enhanced cooperation is essential for sustainable development. The fact that the programme on ocean depollution, Horizon 2020, is still operational shows that the environment can overcome all obstacles and erase any differences that may exist. Therefore, WWF is urging Mediterranean states to overcome obstacles and make the UfM work for the benefit of Mediterranean people and environment.

There is still much to be done to put the Mediterranean basin on a path to becoming a truly sustainable region. The state of environmental degradation is such that we need to adopt and implement immediately new strategies on water, climate change, renewable energy sources, biodiversity and ecosystem protection as well as a fully integrated marine strategy.

To do this, an effective political cooperation process is necessary and the UfM is at present the closest to such a process that is available in the Mediterranean. Making it function can hasten progress towards peace, security, prosperity and ecological sustainability.

The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM): current status

The UfM was formally established in Paris on 13 July 2008 at the first summit of European and Mediterranean Heads of States to reinforce the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), with the aim of building on its achievements and “to inject a new and continuing momentum into the so called Barcelona Process” that initiated the EMP in 1995. The UfM also increased the number of countries involved in the process, extending it to the West Balkan countries.

Building on existing activities (in particular, it integrates most of the EMP sectoral initiatives) and reinforcing the main fields of cooperation established by the EMP, the UfM aims at:

- Upgrading relations between EU members and Mediterranean Partner Countries – by holding biannual Summits at the level of Heads of State and Government;
- Increasing co-ownership of the process and multilateral relations – through a co-presidency, institutional structures and a joint secretariat;
- Making the cooperation more concrete and visible to citizens – through additional regional and sub-regional concrete projects addressing major priorities.

The institutional architecture of the UfM is almost entirely in place with the two Co-presidencies and the Secretariat. The major challenge that remains is to achieve high level political commitment and participation amongst the partner countries, as well as support for the UfM project initiatives.

Two years after the inception of the UfM, it is time to assess its impact and its added value with regards to the EMP and in particular the contribution it is expected to give to achieving the sustainable development dimension originally inscribed in the 1995 Barcelona declaration.



Nature and environment – why is the Mediterranean so unique?

The Mediterranean region is a global biodiversity hotspot. While the Mediterranean represents only 0.8% of the world's seas, it harbours 10,000 to 12,000 marine species, almost 10% of the global marine biodiversity, one fourth of which are endemic. Mediterranean landscapes have more plant species than tropical Africa, and half of them are endemic to the region. But many factors make this heritage more fragile.

The region suffers from water scarcity. Many countries, especially in the southern Mediterranean, have less than 1000m³ per capita per year (e.g. Cyprus, Egypt, Morocco, Syria) others even less than 500m³ (e.g. Algeria, Libya, Malta, Palestinian Territories, Israel, Tunisia). More than 50% of wetlands have been lost over the last decades.

Fish stocks in the Mediterranean Sea are seriously depleted due to rampant overfishing. Attempts to regulate fisheries at a regional level have failed. Meanwhile, little attention is paid to marine biodiversity protection as only 0.4% of the marine area is protected, predominantly in an ineffective manner.

Industrialisation, urbanisation, wildfires, soil erosion and drought have altered the forest and other wooded land areas. Forests are expanding in north Mediterranean countries (although not necessarily recovering their full ecological functions) following the abandoning of agricultural or grazing practices, while in south Mediterranean countries they are being heavily degraded, overexploited and gradually losing their regeneration capacity due to greater pressure from a dense and poor rural population. In the Western Balkans illegal logging is a major threat.

Mediterranean biodiversity and ecosystems are not simply a natural heritage – they are part of the cultural identity and economic wealth of the region. Moreover, these ecosystems have been developing in interaction with human beings and Mediterranean civilisations for centuries often creating unique natural and cultural landscapes that today are threatened by rapid change in land and natural resources use.

On the way to sustainable development in the Mediterranean

WWF believes that no long-term social and economic development is possible without preserving functioning ecosystems and ensuring that development does not destroy its ecological foundations. This requires full implementation of tools to integrate the environment in development policies and economic practices, enhanced environmental governance and new and innovative funding instruments.

In particular, what is required is:

- Promotion of an ecosystem-based approach to conservation, up-scaling investments in the management and restoration of ecosystems, recognizing the value of ecosystem services in decision making, and generating investment in natural capital (see the results of the TEEB programme (The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity)).
- Sectoral policies/programmes and investment projects which are systematically subject to strategic environmental assessments (SEA) and environmental impact assessments (EIA) to ensure that environmental concerns are taken into consideration.
- To enlarge and reinforce environmental cooperation. Flagship projects such as the Mediterranean Solar Plan or Horizon 2020 should be used as inspiring models to replicate the lessons learned in other fields of environmental cooperation.
- To ensure public participation and civil society involvement in the decision-making process, for example as observers in UfM policy development. Transparency would also be greatly improved through systematic evaluation and monitoring of UfM-funded projects.



Will the UfM be successful in leading on environmental challenges?

For the past two years, in terms of addressing environmental challenges, the UfM-Barcelona Process has been active in three major fields: the Mediterranean Solar Plan (MSP), the Horizon 2020 initiative, and the preparation of a Mediterranean Strategy for Water. The MSP is a brand new project with the ambition of installing 20 billion Watt (GW) of solar electric power generation in southern Mediterranean countries to supply renewable energy to the region. The Horizon 2020 project started with the Cairo Ministerial Declaration in 2006 and aims to significantly reducing Mediterranean sea pollution from land-based sources. The success of these projects will depend on the implementation of the principles mentioned above, but also in the ability of the countries to set up and adopt integrated strategies. For the time being, the UfM has failed in reaching agreement on a Mediterranean Strategy for water. The success of the UfM also depends on mobilising national efforts and generating new sources of funds.

Other subjects, fisheries and marine protected areas development, forests and woodlands protection and restoration, climate change and in particular climate change adaptation , better land use planning in urbanisation and transport, have so far been neglected by the UfM. WWF has concrete proposals to shape a sustainable Mediterranean in these sectors.

After its postponement in June 2010, the UfM Summit was expected to be held in November 2010 to adopt the programme of work for the next two years. The further postponement of the Summit is a missed opportunity to advance on the path to sustainability. Mediterranean civil society is calling for more cooperation and common action. The environment and nature in the Mediterranean deserve and need an effective cooperation process, and the people of the Mediterranean are waiting for political will to be clearly demonstrated.

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