



**European Committee  
of the Regions**

**COTER VII-013**

**151st plenary session, 10-12 October 2022**

## **OPINION**

### **Towards a macro-regional strategy in the Mediterranean**

#### THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

- points out that the Mediterranean area is warming at a 20% faster rate than the global average. The effects of climate change are already highly visible through the proliferation of extreme natural events or water scarcity, affecting food security;
- calls as a first step, for efforts to focus on key challenges - climate change, digital transformation, the environment and humanitarian crisis, as well as the necessary green transition;
- stresses that it is necessary for Mediterranean territories to finally have an operational instrument enabling them to develop and implement a concrete action plan and joint projects in response to common priorities identified in existing frameworks such as the UfM, ARLEM, etc.;
- stresses that the macro-regional strategy (MRS) must incrementally and ultimately cover the three Mediterranean sub-basins (Western, Eastern and Adriatic-Ionian) and pay particular attention to island territories;
- considers that a MRS must be based on a solid and representative multi-level governance scheme involving regional and local authorities as well as their respective associations and euroregions;
- points out that a large amount of funding can be mobilised to support Mediterranean projects, (NDICI, ETC programmes, Horizon Europe, LIFE or Erasmus also open to third countries);
- proposes that, in the short term the European Commission should support the emergence in 2024 of a pilot project on zero marine pollution in the Mediterranean and thus test the key principles of a Mediterranean MRS around a concrete objective;
- calls on the European Council to refer the matter to the European Commission in 2022 to draw up a Mediterranean macro-regional strategy, with a view to its approval under the Spanish Presidency in 2023.

Rapporteur

Nikola Dobroslavić (HR/EPP)

# Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions Towards a macro-regional strategy in the Mediterranean

## I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

### THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

*The contribution of macro-regional strategies to territorial cohesion, local democracy and cooperation at the external borders*

1. considers that macro-regions play a key role in strengthening the economic, social, and territorial cohesion of the European Union and its close neighbourhood by empowering cross-border areas to address specific and shared challenges collectively, through exchange and cooperation and implementation;
2. stresses that this approach allows for greater coherence and complementarity between policies, actions, and funding programmes implemented by different government levels in a defined geographical area. In doing so, by promoting multilevel governance, macro-regions contribute to increased policy effectiveness and impact;
3. recalls that macro-regional strategies are based on the multi-level principle and that EU and non-EU regions must play a key role in their development, their construction and the definition of their common objectives alongside the EU Member States and other countries concerned;
4. notes that the Mediterranean area comprises several candidate and potential candidate countries as well as non-EU countries and stresses the importance of macro-regions in strengthening cooperation across EU borders. This collaboration is necessary in order to address common challenges and to also engage non-EU countries in a deeper and more enhanced cooperation with the Union;
5. recalls the adoption of the European Parliament resolution on 3 July 2012, entitled Developing EU macro-regional strategies: current practices and prospects for the future, in particular in the Mediterranean<sup>1</sup>;
6. recalls the ARLEM report on "A Cohesion Strategy for the Mediterranean" (2014), that outlines the premises of reflections for a macro-regional governance framework for the Mediterranean, based on the principles of multi-level governance and a progressive and geometry variable set-up;
7. recalls also that the Council of the European Union<sup>2</sup> has indicated that it is open to consideration of joint initiatives aimed at establishing new macro-regional strategies;

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<sup>1</sup> P7\_TA (2012) 0269

*A Mediterranean macro-region, a key tool to address challenges in the Mediterranean*

8. highlights the unique resources of the Mediterranean. With its 46 000 km of coastline and 22 riparian countries, it is home to more than 500 million people, with 1/3 of the population concentrated in coastal areas and some 150 million jobs directly linked to the Mediterranean Sea;
9. underlines the environmental importance of the Mediterranean Sea, which accounts for only 1% of the world's oceans, yet contributes 20% of the world's marine production<sup>3</sup>. It is also one of the major reservoirs of marine and coastal biodiversity, with 28% of endemic species, 7.5% of wildlife and 18% of global marine flora;
10. stresses the potential of the Mediterranean basin, which is a coherent geographical area whose populations share a common historical and cultural heritage, resulting from a long tradition of collaboration and exchange of ideas, goods and people between its three shores;
11. recognises that the Mediterranean basin faces governance, socio-economic, humanitarian, climate, security, and environmental challenges which call for joint action;
12. stresses, as highlighted by the First Mediterranean Assessment Report on Climate and Environmental Change in the Mediterranean, released by MedECC, that all Mediterranean sub-regions are impacted by recent anthropogenic environmental changes, and that the main drivers of change include climate, population growth, pollution, unsustainable land and sea use practices, and non-indigenous species. In most areas, both ecosystems and human livelihoods are affected<sup>4</sup>;
13. points out that, at the current rate, global warming will reach 2.2 degrees in the Mediterranean area by 2040, while the region is warming at a rate 20% faster than global average. The effects of climate change are already highly visible through the proliferation of extreme natural events. Thus, Mediterranean societies are suffering the most from climate change (already accounting for 50% of the world's water-poor population, with water scarcity affecting food security; 49 of the 51 UNESCO cultural sites are also at risk). Most of the climate change effects are amplified by other environmental challenges, such as overly intensified urbanization, agriculture, fishing, and tourism, land degradation, desertification, and pollution (air, soil, freshwater and seawater);
14. highlights, as did the opinion Towards a sustainable use of natural resources in the Mediterranean island context, the very high vulnerability of Mediterranean islands in the

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<sup>2</sup> 13424/20. Council conclusions on the implementation of macro-regional strategies, 2 December 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Randone. et al. 2017, *Reviving the Economy of the Mediterranean Sea: Actions for a Sustainable Future*, WWF Mediterranean Initiative.

<sup>4</sup> MedECC (2020) Climate and Environmental Change in the Mediterranean Basin – Current Situation and Risks for the Future. First Mediterranean Assessment Report [Cramer, W., Guiot, J., Marini, K. (eds.)] Union for the Mediterranean, Plan Bleu, UNEP/MAP, Marseille.

context of global warming, which already has economic (fisheries, tourism, etc.) and social consequences (emigration, etc.) and recommends developing a specific approach to the impact of climate change at macro-regional level for this territory type, which will consider the particular needs of archipelagos and islands and foster closer cooperation between these territories, the Member States and the European Union in tackling environmental challenges and promoting sustainable development;

15. highlights that, despite obvious commonalities, the Mediterranean area is characterised by wide disparities in development levels. These disparities, including weaknesses in institutional capacities, infrastructure interconnection and trade relations, affect the stability, prosperity, and security of Mediterranean societies;
16. considers that the COVID-19 crisis is a reminder of the urgent need for a coordinated approach and strengthening of joint resilience to epidemics, economic shocks and climate change;
17. maintains that the Mediterranean macro-region can also serve as a coordination tool for management of migratory flows which especially affect regional and local authorities on the external borders of the EU;
18. reminds that, in view of the attack of Russia on Ukraine, the Mediterranean has a key role to play to mitigate the effects of the war, the greeting of displaced populations, while keeping its efforts to ensure progress toward peace building across its riparian territories;
19. in the face of these challenges, affirms the need to bring together all three shores in a more integrated way in order to strengthen cohesion, increase the region's Europe-wide and global weight and its innovation potential and contribute to human well-being and preservation of the environment;
20. in this process, recognises the essential role of local and regional authorities, which are strongly mobilised through initiatives and networks such as the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), ARLEM (the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly) and the Mediterranean Cooperation Alliance (MedCoopAlliance) as well as the Inter-Mediterranean Commission of the Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions (CPMR);
21. points out that all challenges the Mediterranean area is facing (climate change, erosion, desertification, plastic pollution, migration, excess tourism, etc.) are concentrated in archipelagos and islands, and, for this reason, they represent ideal pilot territories for the implementation of integrated sustainable development policies in the Mediterranean and urges the European Commission to move forward with a basin-adjusted island strategy;
22. agrees with the European Commission that the objectives of the European Green Deal should be reflected in close cooperation with neighbouring countries facing the same climate and environmental challenges;

23. points out that local and regional authorities on the three shores, which play a major role in addressing climate change effects, have called for a "Mediterranean Green Deal"<sup>5</sup>;
24. acknowledges the key role that local authorities (must) play as allies to regions and countries in the implementation of global and regional agendas;
25. stresses also that a macro-regional strategy, promoting the strengthening of political dialogue, is essential for the implementation of the new Agenda for the Mediterranean, as set out in the European Commission's communication of February 2021 *For a renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood*<sup>6</sup>;

*Towards an integrated strategy for the entire Mediterranean basin*

26. welcomes the positive results and increased cooperation made possible by the commitment of stakeholders in the Mediterranean, and in particular local and regional authorities; calls these stakeholders, in particular local and regional authorities, to increase this cooperation in order to prepare the ground for the creation of a macro-regional strategy in the Mediterranean;
27. appreciates the great progress made towards integration in the Mediterranean through the Adriatic-Ionian Macro-Regional Strategy (EUSAIR) and the WestMED Sea Basin Strategy;
28. calls on the European Commission to progress further with the WestMED initiative as a matter of urgency, equipping it with resources, a solid structure and a long-term consolidation strategy, facilitating macro-regional integration in the western Mediterranean;
29. stresses that the existing cooperation initiatives programmes and key players across the scale of multilevel governance must be better coordinated so as not to dilute their efforts and impact. It is therefore necessary for Mediterranean territories to finally have an operational instrument enabling them to develop and implement an integrated strategy, a concrete action plan, and joint projects, in response to common priorities identified in existing institutional frameworks for cooperation such as the UfM, ARLEM and initiatives as the MedCoop Alliance or BLUEMED among others;
30. considers that the macro-regional strategy for the Mediterranean will address these challenges not by replacing existing strategies but by complementing their actions and thus maximising their impact, finding answers to common challenges, such as those that arise from the fight against climate change and from the digital transition, transforming them into great opportunities for sustainable development, thus contributing to a just and inclusive green transition by taking advantage of shared opportunities, paying special attention to the human

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<sup>5</sup> [Plenary meeting of the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly \(ARLEM\), 23 January 2020](#)

<sup>6</sup> JOIN(2021) 2 final. See also [the CoR opinion on Renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood. A new Agenda for the Mediterranean](#), July 2021.

dimension and to opportunities for young people, thus unlocking the economic potential of the region for the benefit of citizens;

31. stresses that a macro-regional strategy, to provide meaningful solutions to shared challenges, must necessarily be designed at Mediterranean basin level and cover the three sub-basins: Western, Eastern and Adriatic-Ionian. It must therefore be open to all from its inception and ultimately aim to cover the entire Mediterranean basin on the three shores;
32. calls for the Mediterranean macro-regional strategy, like any maritime macro-regional strategy, to pay particular attention to island territories in accordance with Article 174 TFEU; calls for the specific characteristics and vulnerabilities of these territories to be effectively taken into account by establishing a stronger partnership, with concrete and coordinated actions between these territories, the Member States and the European Union;
33. points out that this regional integration should proceed incrementally, on the basis of a voluntary approach by Mediterranean national, regional, and local authorities, given the challenges posed by certain unstable security, political, and diplomatic situations;

*Key principles of multilevel governance at Mediterranean level*

34. proposes that the governance of a future macro-regional strategy in the Mediterranean fully reflect the principle of multi-level governance, involving European, national, regional, and local authorities as well as their respective associations and euroregions;
35. considers that, in order to be operational, a Mediterranean macro-regional strategy must be based on a solid and representative governance scheme with: (i) a general assembly at political level, involving European, national and regional authorities, (ii) an executive board bringing together one national coordination member (from regional or national level) of each country represented in the strategy, and promoting inclusion of regional and local authorities in the decision-making process, as well as observers from networks of regional and local authorities, their respective associations and Euroregions, and (iii) thematic action groups to develop and implement concrete cooperation projects, which will mobilise public and private socio-economic actors, the academia and the civil society;
36. proposes that, building from the good practice of WestMED, an annual rotating co-presidency be established, held in a duet by countries from EU and Partner countries and collaborating with the close support of representative organisations of regional and local authorities. The presidency should evolve considering past, current and future presiding countries and maintaining a balance between EU and Partner countries represented in the strategy, while the support from the representative organisation of regional and local authorities would also rotate in the same basis. These dynamics are essential to ensure that the various governance bodies of the macro-regional strategy are considered and linked to provide strategic guidance for the macro-region's action, through annual work programmes. A technical secretariat (Mediterranean Macro-Regional Strategy Secretariat, MRSS) should coordinate and support the strategy;

37. proposes that, in order to ensure compatibility with existing initiatives, representatives of key international and Euro-Mediterranean institutions, bodies and initiatives, such as the UfM, ARLEM and MedCoopAlliance, be involved in the implementation of the strategy, as well as representatives of the EUSAIR and WestMED; the EGTCs also provide useful prospects, as "laboratories" for multi-level governance, to support the objectives of the new Agenda for the Mediterranean;

*A macro-regional strategy focusing on priority challenges*

38. considers that a macro-regional strategy in the Mediterranean should target a limited number of shared challenges, which will be addressed gradually over time; underlines that the green and digital transformation are key challenges, which should be addressed as a matter of priority;
39. calls, as a first step, for efforts to focus on key challenges - climate change, digital transformation, the environment and humanitarian crisis, as well as the necessary green transition. The following priorities urgently call for coordinated action at Mediterranean level: the future of archipelagos and islands, coastal and urban areas, marine pollution (especially microplastics and wastewater), biodiversity conservation, agroecology, the circular economy, management and prevention of natural hazards, and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and, climate adaptation and a response to the humanitarian crisis by ensuring fundamental human rights;
40. proposes that, in the short term, the European Commission should support, through the Interreg Euro-MED or other relevant existing programmes (given the fact that macro-regional strategies obey the rule of the 3 "no": no new legislation, no new funding, no new institution), the emergence in 2024 of a pilot project on zero marine pollution in the Mediterranean, also thematically contributing to the EU Mission Ocean<sup>7</sup>. The aim will be to engage in joint work between countries and territories wishing to develop a Mediterranean macro-regional strategy and thus to test its key principles around a concrete objective;
41. efforts could then be extended to include the following challenges, in connection with the new Agenda for the Mediterranean:
- (a) promoting balanced and sustainable economic development through joint projects aimed at strengthening research, innovation and the sustainable use of natural resources, as well as interconnected entrepreneurship;
  - (b) integrating the blue economy;
  - (c) promoting human development, including culture and heritage, tourism, education, health, employment, youth development, social inclusion of marginalized groups and aid for refugees, as well as meeting the needs arising from the presence of migratory flows, particularly in the external frontiers of the EU;
  - (d) strengthening connectivity through the transport and digital infrastructure;

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<sup>7</sup> EU Mission: Restore our Ocean and Waters.



- (e) enhancing food and energy autonomy in the Mediterranean considering the consequences of climate change and war in Ukraine caused by Russia;
- (f) strengthen the tools and capacities of public and private institutions in order to mitigate the causes of climate change and the loss of biodiversity;

*An operational action plan building on existing funding*

- 42. considers that a Mediterranean macro-regional strategy must necessarily be based on an operational action plan to translate priorities into concrete action at Mediterranean level. In order to ensure that the subnational dimension is properly included in the plan (helping not only to achieve a shared vision of better, cohesive and sustainable development in the Mediterranean basin, but also to involve civil society from the three sides of the Mediterranean), local and regional authorities – which are closest to the citizens – will be involved in drafting the plan;
- 43. points out that a large amount of funding can be mobilised to support Mediterranean projects, including EUR 7 billion mobilised by the European Commission under the European Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI). The European Territorial Cooperation programmes active in the Mediterranean (Next-MED, EUROMED, ADRION, MARITTIMO) also represent a major opportunity to facilitate projects capable of contributing to the objectives of a macro-regional strategy;
- 44. points out that many programmes implemented directly by the European Commission, such as Horizon Europe, LIFE or Erasmus +, are open to the participation of third countries and are therefore an interesting source of additional funding. Further, programmes such as the Partnership for Research Innovation in the Mediterranean (PRIMA) or the bilateral instruments set up by the European Union in the neighbourhood countries directly support cooperation in the Mediterranean;
- 45. points out that donors such as the World Bank or the European Investment Bank, and institutions such as the Anna Lindh Foundation, are also active in the Mediterranean and can facilitate the emergence of joint projects;
- 46. points out, finally, that many countries, regions, and cities are implementing decentralised cooperation programmes which can also contribute to the implementation of larger cooperation projects in the Mediterranean;
- 47. stresses, moreover, that the implementation of the 2021-2027 European territorial cooperation programmes will be accompanied by the development of governance mechanisms to facilitate coordination of European funding available in the area. The Committee believes that this can make a practical contribution to the emergence of a Mediterranean macro-regional strategy;

*Conclusions*

- 48. welcomes the new impetus given to Mediterranean cooperation at the Mediterranean World Forum organised under the French Presidency;

49. looks forward to the next Presidency of the European Union held by a Mediterranean country, namely Spain, in 2023, with the hope to bring the focus back on the Mediterranean governance and potentialities for its renewed governance and cooperation macro-regional framework;
50. encourages the European Commission and the EU Member States to support the development of a macro-regional strategy for the Mediterranean and other needed new macro-regional strategies;
51. likewise, invites the European Parliament and the European Economic and Social Committee to support the incentive towards a macro-regional Strategy for the whole Mediterranean, for a better, integrated, and cohesive Mediterranean;
52. calls on the European Council to refer the matter to the European Commission in 2022 to draw up a Mediterranean macro-regional strategy accompanied by an action plan, with a view to approval by the Council and the European Parliament under the Spanish Presidency in the second half of 2023.

Brussels, 11 October 2022

The President  
of the European Committee of the Regions

Vasco Alves Cordeiro

The Secretary-General  
of the European Committee of the Regions

Petr Bližkovský

## II. PROCEDURE

<b>Title</b>	Towards a macro-regional strategy in the Mediterranean
<b>References</b>	N/A
<b>Legal basis</b>	Article 307 (4) TFEU
<b>Procedural basis</b>	Article 41 (b) (ii)
<b>Date of Council/EP referral/Date of Commission letter</b>	N/A
<b>Date of Bureau/President's decision</b>	4 May 2021
<b>Commission responsible</b>	COTER Commission
<b>Rapporteur</b>	Nikola Dobrosravić (HR/EPP)
<b>Analysis</b>	20 September 2021
<b>Discussed in commission</b>	12 July 2022
<b>Date adopted by commission</b>	12 July 2022
<b>Result of the vote in commission (majority, unanimity)</b>	Majority
<b>Date adopted in plenary</b>	11 October 2022
<b>Previous Committee opinions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Opinion <i>Renewed partnership with the meridional neighbourhood – A new agenda for the Mediterranean (CIVEX-VII/010)</i>.</li><li>– Opinion <i>Towards a sustainable use of natural resources in the Mediterranean island context (NAT VII-004)</i>.</li><li>– Opinion <i>Macro-Regional Strategy for the Carpathians (COTER VI-057)</i>.</li><li>– Opinion <i>Macro-regional strategies, such as the Danube: a framework for promoting transnational clusters (COTER VI-051)</i>.</li></ul>
<b>Date of subsidiarity monitoring consultation</b>	N/A