



## **MEDITERRANEAN ACTION PLAN AT 30**

**George Souflias**  
*Most Achieved*

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**Efthimios E. Mitropoulos**  
*Shipping Solutions*

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**Stavros Dimas**  
*Process of Partnership*

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**Stjepan Keckes**  
*Acting in Concert*

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**Serge Antoine**  
*How it All Began*

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**Michael Scoullos**  
*Strengths and Weaknesses*

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**Mostafa Tolba**  
*Saving the Sea*



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**KLAUS TOEPFER**  
United Nations  
Under-Secretary-  
General and  
Executive Director,  
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**T**hirty years ago the Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP) was born, helping to foster a UNEP Regional Seas Programme that now encompasses 18 regions and over 140 coastal states and territories.

One of the programme's pillars is the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Sources of Pollution (UNEP/GPA), which aims to cut pollution of the world's oceans and seas from the land. For while the seas and oceans cover just over 70 per cent of the globe, it is the nearly 30 per cent of the earth's surface where humans live that are the main threat to their health and well-being.

Some 80 per cent of all marine pollution comes from the land. There are now estimated to be 150 dead zones in the world's oceans and seas, mainly resulting from the run-off of agricultural and other wastes, and emissions from land-based factories and vehicles.

This is the situation facing the Mediterranean, as it is with the other regional seas. So I am delighted that in this 30th MAP anniversary year, I can truly say that our Regional Seas Programme and the GPA are back in business and stronger and more focused than for a long time.

Strengthening the Regional Seas Programme will greatly help to deliver the Millennium Development Goals, whose five year review was undertaken by heads of state in New York in September: water and sanitation, for example, link directly to the marine environment. It is also crucial for meeting the World Summit on Sustainable Development's Plan of Implementation as it relates to such issues as health, fisheries and marine protected areas.

The Mediterranean is one of the world's most culturally diverse and populous regions. Its rich and favourable climate has made it a magnet for settlement, while just under one third of international tourism focuses on it.

It is also a special sea with unique

challenges. Its average depth is just 1,500 metres.

Mediterranean Waters take over a century to be renewed through the Strait of Gibraltar and relatively high evaporation rates make it saltier than the Atlantic. It joins the coastlines of countries in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, making it politically, economically and geographically complex as well as environmentally special and diverse.

MAP's initiatives have been a beacon and agenda-setter for many other regional seas.

It has played a key role in establishing more than 120 protected areas and in creating four action plans to protect endangered species including the monk seal, dolphins, porpoises and turtles.

Strong links have been developed with other regional bodies including the UN Economic Commission for Europe, the UN Economic and Social Commission for West Asia, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean.

In praising the MAP – and the Barcelona Convention that gives its work legal authority – we also acknowledge that much of its activities would not have been possible without financial investment from the multi-billion dollar Global Environment Facility (GEF).

I sincerely hope that governments back a full and secure replenishment of the GEF for the sake of the Mediterranean, regional seas generally – and the whole global environment.

Existing and planned GEF projects in the region include the Lake Ohrid project; the Lake Manzala wetlands scheme, the El Kala National Park and Wetlands management project, and the Gulf of Gabes marine and coastal resources protection initiative. Wider ranging ones cover such issues as oil pollution, shared waters and their management, identifying and eliminating regional pollution 'hot spots', and conserving biologically important sites throughout the Mediterranean.

The GEF has also helped MAP to join hands not just with environment ministries, but with other relevant ministries and actors in the region and helped promote national ownership of both it and the Barcelona Convention. Such ownership is vital for the long term success of regional seas everywhere ■

Greece belongs to the first group of countries to sign and adopt the Barcelona Convention and the Mediterranean Action Plan back in 1975. Recognizing the importance of this institution from the beginning, my country submitted its candidature, together with other countries, in 1979 for hosting the MAP Coordinating Unit. In 1982 the final decision was taken, the Host Agreement was signed and the Coordinating Unit moved from its temporary premises in Geneva to its permanent ones in Athens.

Today, after 30 years of life, the Barcelona Convention and MAP are more active than ever. Its Contracting Parties, 22 in total, are all the Mediterranean countries and the European Union. The list of activities, initiatives and programme undertaken during those 30 years is quite impressive. To mention a few:

- The MEDPOL programme launched in 1976 was the first regional effort to assess the status of pollution in the Mediterranean on a regional scale and in a coordinated manner, and for years it formed the 'heart' of activities within the Convention. Today MEDPOL has of course evolved and MEDPOL Phase IV is on its way.

- A number of thematic legally binding instruments (Protocols) have been elaborated and adopted, and six Regional Activity Centers have been established in various Mediterranean countries.

- In 1995, the Contracting Parties adopted the amended Barcelona Convention which has extended its geographical coverage into the coastal zone and the hydrological basin and which is more 'action oriented' than its predecessor.

- A number of new or amended Protocols have also been added since 1995. The six Protocols and the amended Convention constitute the legal framework of the Mediterranean Action Plan.

- In 1996 the Contracting Parties established the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development (MCSDD), a 'think-tank' for MAP. Its members are representatives of the Contracting Parties and representatives of Civil Society, environmental NGO's, local authorities and socio-economic actors. The MCSDD is the only regional UN body (besides the CSD in New York) dealing with issues of sustainable development.

- Very recently, in June 2005, the MCSDD finalized the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development, a framework non-binding document which will serve as the basis for future activities. It also adopted the 'Athens Charter' as its preamble.

All these, together with hundreds of meetings, workshops, activities and programmes – such as the Coastal Area Management Plans (CAMP's), and the recent SAPMED and SAPBIO programmes – constitute the vast number of activities undertaken in those years in the framework of MAP.

## Most Achieved

**George Souflias**  
assesses the progress of the  
Mediterranean countries in  
protecting their common sea

Much has been achieved in the Mediterranean during these years thanks to MAP and the Barcelona Convention, but they are more – much more – than the mere sum of their instruments and activities.

It is the strong ties established through the common routes and civilizations around the Mediterranean for centuries, or even thousands of years, that make countries and people of various religions, social and economic status feel that they belong to a common 'Mediterranean family'. It is the spirit of camaraderie forged through the knowledge that we, Mediterraneans, are tied together through a common destiny. It is the fact that in MAP, all countries – developing or developed, large or small – sit around the table on an equal 'footing' and work together for a better Mediterranean environment for the present generation and generations to come. This is the 'beauty' of MAP and we should all work hard to preserve it and enhance it in the future.

Protecting the environment is now embedded in the broader context of sustainable development and constitutes one of its three pillars, together with economic and social growth. Prosperity in a global context – for today's generations as well as for future ones – cannot be achieved without a simultaneous and coordinated effort on all three. The old perceptions that protecting the environment is isolated from the general notion of development or, even worse, is an obstacle to development and prosperity, are totally obsolete and outdated. On the contrary, we know today that protecting the environment constitutes an important element and vehicle of development and prosperity. This is even more obvious in such an area as the Mediterranean in which one of our basic economic resources, tourism, depends heavily on the quality of the marine environment and its coastal zone.

Has MAP been successful? Is the assessment of those 30 years positive? In our view the answer is very positive. MAP has created a full set of legal instruments, programmes and recommendations which have been adopted by the Contracting

Parties and have greatly contributed to protecting the environment in the Mediterranean area. In some cases, there have been criticisms regarding a slow pace or degree of implementation. If this is so, this concerns the Contracting Parties rather than MAP which, after all, is only a facilitator to the Mediterranean countries. It is our duty as Contracting Parties to ensure the maximum degree of implementation of the decisions we, ourselves, adopt within the MAP system.

During all these years Greece has played an important role within the MAP system. The fact that it has the privilege and honour of being the Host Country increases its responsibility within MAP and assigns it a special role. Greece has actively participated in all MAP activities. It has also taken a number of initiatives, of which I only mention two:

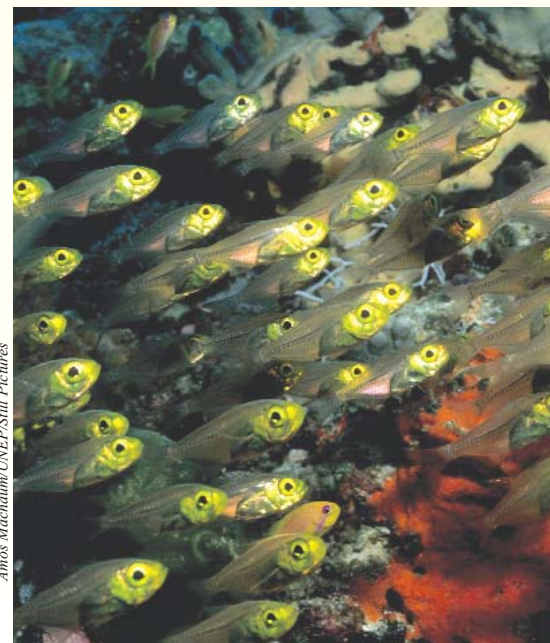
- Greece took the initiative of organising an extraordinary meeting in Athens, in July 2002, of the Ministers of Environment of the Euromediterranean Initiative. During it a special relation between MAP and Euromed was officially adopted and this was reflected in the decisions of the meeting (The Athens Declaration).

- Greece, in the framework of the EU Water Initiative – a very important political initiative of the EU for water – has undertaken the responsibility of its Mediterranean Component and will coordinate all its activities for all countries in the region.

I wish to congratulate MAP and the Barcelona Convention on their 30th Anniversary and reiterate our commitment to working with all the Contracting Parties for the protection of our common sea, the Mediterranean.

My final words go to the Coordinator and all the staff of the Coordinating Unit of MAP, whom I wish to assure that they can count on our continuous, active and friendly support ■

*George Souflias is Minister of the Environment, Physical Planning and Public Works, Greece.*





*Pim Schalkarijk/Still Pictures*

# Shipping

## Solutions

**Efthimios E. Mitropoulos** describes decades of support for the Mediterranean Action Plan in maritime safety and pollution prevention

**T**he Mediterranean is a vital artery for merchant shipping, which transports 90 per cent of the world's goods. At any one time, 2,000 merchant ships are crossing its waters. Some 30 per cent of international sea-borne trade volume originates or is directed to its ports and 28 per cent of the world's sea-borne oil traffic transits the Mediterranean with some 200,000 crossings per year.

The vast majority of these voyages are completed safely, efficiently and without harm to the marine environment. Shipping has always been a safe, secure and environmentally-friendly form of transport and its performance has improved notably in the last three decades. This can largely be

attributed to the work of flag, port and coastal states in implementing measures adopted by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), including conventions, protocols, codes, guidelines and recommended practices covering such matters as: the design, construction and equipment of ships; the competence of seafarers; safety management; protecting the marine environment and compensating victims of pollution incidents; and adopting a comprehensive maritime security regime for ships, companies and port facilities.

IMO's work to prevent and reduce marine pollution by ships has made it a natural partner for UNEP in protecting the world's oceans in the context of the Regional Seas

Programme. The 21 countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea – which participate in the Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP), and are contracting parties to the Barcelona Convention – are also all Member States of IMO. All but one are also contracting parties to IMO's International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, all but three to the marine pollution prevention convention, MARPOL 73/78.

Shipping is, by its nature, an international industry requiring internationally agreed standards and rules. Regional co-operation and collaboration are important for implementing these standards and are key objectives of IMO's global technical co-operation programme. IMO is wholly supportive of the Regional Seas Programme and proud to have been involved since its inception.

IMO has been directly responsible for the technical and administrative management of the Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean Sea (REMPEC) since it was established – initially as the Regional Oil Combating Centre for the Mediterranean Sea – in Malta in December 1976.

The first such regional centre in

the world under the UNEP Regional Seas Programme, its original mission was to assist Mediterranean coastal states in implementing the Barcelona Convention's Protocol concerning Co-operation in Combating Pollution of the Mediterranean Sea by Oil and Other Harmful Substances in Cases of Emergency. Some elements of this protocol have since been reflected in IMO's International Convention on Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response and Co-operation, adopted in 1990, which stipulates that parties should try to conclude bilateral and regional agreements to enhance their capacity to respond to major incidents.

Financed by the Mediterranean Trust Fund, REMPEC has developed its activities along four main lines: disseminating information; training personnel; assisting the preparation of contingency plans; and facilitating co-operation in cases of emergency.

When it began its work, only a few Mediterranean countries were considered to have the means for oil spill response. Now the sea is well prepared to deal with pollution incidents, particularly oil spills. Sub-regional contingency plans have been established between neighbouring countries, including the RAMOGEPOL Plan for the Ligurian Sea (France, Monaco and Italy), the Lyon Plan for the Gulf of Lyon (Spain and France) and a plan for the southeast Mediterranean (Cyprus, Egypt and Israel). Another, for the southwest Mediterranean (Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia).

REMPEC's objectives and functions were modified in November 2001 to reflect its new role as envisaged by the Protocol concerning Co-operation in Preventing Pollution from Ships and, in Cases of Emergency, Combating Pollution of the Mediterranean Sea adopted in January 2002. Its future activities will expand to focus on providing, establishing and operating port reception facilities within the Mediterranean; promoting regional co-operation in port State control and monitoring marine pollution from ships, and more rigorously enforcing the provisions of MARPOL 73/7. The focus at national level will be on assisting States in establishing and operating port reception facilities to receive waste produced by ships and helping those that face difficulties in ratifying, implementing and enforcing relevant IMO conventions.

It is a broad and ambitious role, but one that reflects the aims of the wider maritime community and all IMO Member States in achieving the IMO objectives of safer, more secure and efficient shipping on clean oceans, with specific emphasis on the Mediterranean. As MAP celebrates its 30th anniversary, we can build on the excellent regional co-operation that has developed and look forward to translating the new Protocol into practical actions that will significantly reduce pollution from maritime-transport-related activities ■

*Admiral Efthimios E. Mitropoulos is Secretary-General, International Maritime Organisation.*

*Reinhard Janke/Still Pictures*





Juan M. Pineda/UNEP/Still Pictures

# Process of *Partnership*

**Stavros Dimas** describes how, after thirty years of regional cooperation, the EU is more committed than ever to sustainable development in the Mediterranean region

**T**he countries surrounding the Mediterranean Basin have always been united in a common destiny by their common sea. The unique environmental characteristics of this largest European sea – with its rich biodiversity, regular mild climatic conditions, and specific coastal biotopes and landscapes – have had an essential role in shaping European history. Thanks to it, the Mediterranean region is one of the world's most valuable, but also most vulnerable, regions.

Three Mediterranean countries – Cyprus, Malta and Slovenia – were among the ten new Member States that joined the European Union (EU) last year. In a bid to create a true “ring of friends” around its new external frontiers, the enlarged EU launched a new European Neighbourhood Policy, which can build on existing close cooperation in the Mediterranean region.

The 1975 Barcelona Convention has become one of the world's most successful regional environmental conventions – especially now that it fully incorporates the concept of sustainable development. Another major achievement, the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development is due to be adopted soon. In bilateral and multilateral fora, the EU consistently encourages our partner countries in the region to ratify and implement the Convention and its main Protocols.

Twenty years later the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership was signed, also in Barcelona. Often called ‘the Barcelona Process’ it forms a wide framework of political, economic and social relations between EU Member States and partners of the Southern Mediterranean. Within it, the Union has supported actions to improve the Mediterranean environment, including regional projects financed under the Short and Medium Term Environmental Action Programme, the common basis for environmental policy orientation and funding.

Considerable funding has been invested in the water sector and related urban and regional projects through the national programmes of MEDA, the Partnership's main financial instrument, which committed a total of 5,458 million euros in co-operation programmes, projects and other supporting activities from 1995 to 2003. Many environmental projects have also benefited from low-interest loans from the European Investment Bank, which has created the fast expanding regional financial network, the Facility for Euro-Mediterranean Investment and Partnership.

Despite the achievements of the past decade, considerable challenges must still be tackled to ensure the environmental protection of the Mediterranean Sea and the sustainable development of the countries around its shores. Its coastal areas and wildlife are threatened by uncontrolled tourist development and pollution, such as from unprocessed sewage, oil and toxic discharges. Biodiversity is threatened by invasive species and the scraping of the sea beds. Wildlife is also endangered by uncontrolled fisheries in many countries.

An extraordinary summit of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership in November will take stock of what has so far been achieved in the context of the Barcelona Process, and agree priorities for the future. The European Commission has proposed an ambitious new undertaking for the de-pollution of the Mediterranean Sea by the year 2020.

Under the European Neighbourhood Policy, the EU has recently bilaterally negotiated national action plans with many of its Mediterranean partner countries including cooperation in environmental governance, improving environmental legislation and its implementation, and promoting global and regional environmental cooperation. The plans state that sustainable development principles should be taken into account in developing cooperation with other sectors of the partner countries' economies. Implementing these bilateral plans will make an important contribution towards improving the environment in the Mediterranean.

Action is also required on a regional scale, and the Commission looks towards the MAP as an important partner in this. They are establishing a joint work programme, as recommended by the last conference of the parties to the Barcelona Convention, which places increased emphasis on actually implementing the Convention, in collaboration with the European Commission.

Under the joint work programme, the MAP will cooperate in implementing those aspects of the European Union's 6th Environmental Action Programme 2002-2010 that have special importance or relevance to the Mediterranean region. This includes the Commission's global thematic strategy for the marine environment, expanding technical cooperation in such areas as preventing emergencies at sea, and applying the EU habitats and birds directives in the marine environment.

The European Union is more committed than ever to promoting more sustainable development in the Mediterranean. In that respect, the Mediterranean Action Plan will continue to be the cornerstone of its partnership with the countries of the region ■

*Stavros Dimas is European Commissioner for the Environment.*

# Acting in CONCERT

**Stjepan Keckes** looks back thirty years to describe how the Mediterranean countries set about addressing the problems of their common sea, creating as precedent for the world to follow

**W**e have witnessed – and caused greater change in the Mediterranean environment in the lifetimes of most people now alive than occurred during several past centuries. The change was, at the beginning, quite gradual, almost imperceptible and seemingly benign, but in late 1960s it became obvious that the pace of it was accelerating, with some undesirable consequences.

Previously pristine beaches were soiled by discarded and floating trash. Oil slicks and tar balls appeared ever more frequently. Growing amounts of untreated industrial wastes and sewage released into the sea offended the senses and threatened human health and marine life. Diminishing fishermen's catches were ascribed to pollution. Coastal industrial, urban and tourist development was spreading and altering the traditional Mediterranean coastal landscape. Several people talked about the poisoned Mediterranean Sea – and some even predicted its death in a few decades.

It did not take long before scientists, politicians and the general public realised that these problems would have to be countered without much delay so as to forestall further decay of the Mediterranean environment and to remedy the damage already done. It also became clear that concerted action by all Mediterranean countries would be needed to tackle most of the identified problems.

France, Italy and Malta, with considerable support from the Food and Agriculture Organisation, played a major role in laying the ground for a Mediterranean-wide environmental action. Starting from the early 1970s, numerous informal and formal consultations and meetings were held to prepare it.

Scientists, technicians and managers tried to find out how bad the situation actually was, what were

the causes of the main problems, and what might be their most tractable solutions. The task was not easy, mainly due to paucity of reliable information, data, and expertise in most Mediterranean countries.

The task of the politicians was no less daunting. First, they had to dispel the initial fear of less developed countries that an agreement on a common policy to protect the Mediterranean environment was intended to put a break on their development plans.

Agreeing on the prospective participants in the common endeavour to protect the Mediterranean was another major stumbling block. One of the main problems was to decide whether to include the Black Sea in the planned action. The other was to convince all the Mediterranean coastal states to participate, regardless of their ideological and political differences.

The 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment and the advent of UNEP – established at its heels – gave additional momentum to the preparations for action. UNEP joined the efforts of the Mediterranean countries in its first major programme, extending its full political, technical and financial support to the preparations, and soon became the focal institutional mechanism leading and coordinating the action.

Through the consultations that followed the Stockholm Conference, agreement was reached to limit the geographic scope of the planned action to the Mediterranean proper, with all the region's coastal states agreeing to take part. Agreement was also reached about the substantive scope of the action, which was to be structured along the lines recommended by the Stockholm Conference for the Global Action Plan it adopted.

By early 1975, the time was ripe to formalise the results of these consultations and UNEP was asked

to organise a high level inter-governmental conference to do so. It took place in Barcelona. The government representatives attending it adopted an open-ended regional Action Plan consisting of three main "chapters" – environmental assessment, environmental management, and supporting measures – and invited UNEP to coordinate its implementation.

A year later, in the same city, these countries adopted a legally binding regional agreement – commonly known as the Barcelona Convention – which provided the legal framework for the Action Plan. It entered into force within two years – a remarkable achievement by any standards, signifying the resolve of the Mediterranean countries to protect their sea.

The success of the Mediterranean initiative soon became widely known and was followed, as a useful model for regional cooperation, by a series of similar initiatives in semi-enclosed seas or seas in regions with distinct problems which require regional cooperation for their solution ■

*Stjepan Keckes was the first co-ordinator of the Mediterranean Action Plan and served as the director of UNEP's Oceans and Coastal Areas Programme until his retirement in 1990.*



# Monitoring *the Mediterranean*

**Joan Albaiges and Eva Garnacho** assess what is known about the state of chemical pollution in the Mediterranean Sea and identify gaps in knowledge to be filled

The Mediterranean Sea is under considerable pressure from human activities taking place in its basin. Urbanisation of coastal zones, industrial activities, intensive agriculture, ports and shipping have been recognised to be the main driving forces behind marine pollution, risking the impairment of natural resources. Since the Barcelona Convention and the Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP) were adopted, action has been taken to improve knowledge of the sources and fate of pollutants in the sea.

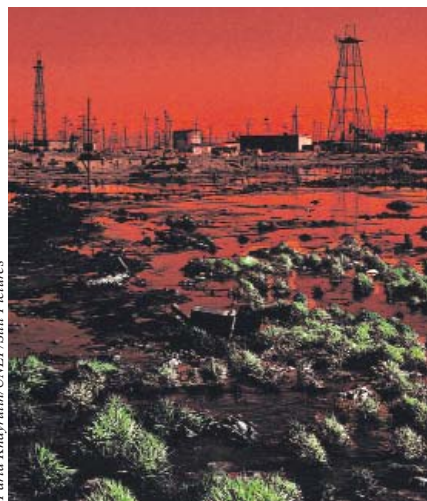
Monitoring of sources, environmental concentrations and effects of pollutants in the Mediterranean has been a cornerstone of the MEDPOL programme, the MAP's environmental assessment component. MEDPOL monitoring has covered heavy metals (mainly mercury and cadmium) and halogenated hydrocarbons (mainly PCBs and DDTs) in marine biota, and petroleum hydrocarbons in seawater. It has produced a database, populated with more than 50,000 data and over 100 technical reports, to assess the state of pollution from different compounds (such as trace metals, petroleum hydrocarbons, organo-halogen, organotin and organo-mercury compounds, etc. The technical reports both assessed environmental concentrations and biological effects and identified hot spots and sensitive areas – providing diagnostic tools and a valuable source of information.

On the basis of available data, chemical pollution seems localised at the Mediterranean coast and associated with urban, industrial and riverine discharges, being especially critical in harbours and coastal lagoons. However, chemical pollution also exists on a basin-wide scale and can be associated with atmospheric deposition of contaminants (such as mercury and zinc) and inputs from maritime transport (such as oil).

Decreasing trends of organochlorinated pesticides (such as DDT and lindane) have been generally observed in the biotic and abiotic marine compartments over the last

20 years, and this is consistent with regulatory restrictions on their production and use. Conversely, PCBs and PAHs levels remain more or less constant in many places, indicating that they have a steady source in the region, and that their inputs need to be better managed.

Mercury, copper, lead, and zinc are the principal inorganic pollutants reaching the Mediterranean Sea. Loads are generally higher than in other European seas, but in some cases arise from natural processes in the region and do not exhibit definite trends over time.



Farid Khan/In/UNEP/Sill Pictures

Monitoring of biota (invertebrates, vertebrates and seabirds) has been undertaken in all basins, with special emphasis on the northern ones. The results show bioaccumulation of the pollutants studied. Furthermore, biomarker responses studies in bivalves and benthic fish in certain coastal areas show an impact which could be related to a wide range of contaminants. Imposix in molluscs has also been widely observed, indicating impacts from tributyltin (TBT).

The monitoring activities have been in place for a long time, but we have not yet achieved comprehensive knowledge of the state of pollution in the Mediterranean. There are significant geographical data gaps, particularly in the South and South-

eastern basins, and lack of consistent temporal trends. Data on emerging pollutants and endocrine disruptors are also very limited.

Linking monitoring with policy decisions is still in its infancy. Any environmental monitoring and data gathering programme aims to provide reliable, relevant and updated information in a consistent way to support assessments and inform environmental managers and policy makers.

Implementing an ecosystem-based approach for managing the Mediterranean Sea requires assessing environmental quality and analysing the environmental pressures. Such analysis needs to consider human activities that lead to pressures on the environment. Indicators of these pressures are: direct and indirect inputs; disposal of industrial and domestic wastes; riverine discharges; operational and accidental discharges from shipping activities; atmospheric emissions and deposition; and diffuse inputs (such as leaching from cultivated land).

Many uncertainties remain regarding the loads received from rivers, the atmosphere, and diffuse sources – and how these have changed over recent years. As a result, changes in the state of the environment that may lead to impacts cannot be related back to the origin of the problem. Indicators for assessing environmental quality – such as environmental quality standards (EQS), background / reference concentrations (BRC), ecotoxicological assessment criteria (EAC), and ecological reference indices (ERI) – are necessary and still have to be developed for the Mediterranean.

The coastal regions of Mediterranean countries are one of their most precious present and future assets; so Contracting Parties should make every effort to ensure their sustainable and sound management. This implies enforcing an effective monitoring system in the region to maintain the health of the marine ecosystem, alongside appropriate human use, for the benefit of current and future generations ■

*Joan Albaiges is Environmental Chemist at Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Barcelona, Spain and Eva Garnacho is Senior Scientist at the Environmental Quality Science Area of the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science, UK.*



# Strengths

## and Weaknesses

**Michael Scoullos** assesses UNEP-MAP from an NGO perspective

**U**NEP/MAP, with the Barcelona Convention, is the creation of the vision, enthusiasm, commitment and drive of the generation of the early 70s, which put the environment onto local, national and international political agendas. A second wave of euphoria – of sustainable development – resulted in the revised Barcelona Convention of 1995 with an enlarged scope, new Protocols and the Mediterranean Commission of Sustainable Development (MCSDD), a body with both an essential advisory role and a strong symbolic political importance.

The third, current phase, which started with the Johannesburg Summit, is marked by fundamental political and economic changes in the region, mostly linked with attempts at economic development and general geopolitical orientations. Three more Mediterranean countries have recently joined the European Union (EU), increasing the Convention's EU Contracting Parties to eight.

So it is useful to examine the organisation's strengths and weakness to find ways of improving its performance and of making it more effective and sustainable.

### Strengths and potential

1. UNEP/MAP fills a gap. It is the only Mediterranean Convention bringing together North, East and South and all the region's countries. It does so on the two most uniting themes: environment and sustainable development.
2. It has a balanced distribution of regional centers covering issues reflecting the countries' and stakeholders' particular interests.
3. NGO collaboration, and the Civil Society partnership within it, is very well developed.
4. Its MCSDD is an innovative and clever scheme, covering the need for a regional CSD and corresponding to the UN Millennium Development Goals etc., under the Barcelona Convention framework.
5. Its EU connection and provisions, and the genuine efforts for collaboration and involvement of UNEP/MAP in EU programs and processes, with funds partly secured.
6. The membership of economically strong Contracting Parties (CPs) that could substantially support the Secretariat and Regional Centers.
7. Providing an important platform for understanding major environmental and sustainable development issues in a positive spirit in the region.

### Weaknesses and challenges

1. Like all UN Conventions, it is based on voluntary compliance without sanctions and penalties for those who don't observe it and don't fulfill their commitments.
2. Weakness in CPs in infrastructures and in available means and human resources are reflected in the slow progress and lack

of achievements in some aspects of the Convention and its Protocols.

3. Weaknesses in the operation of Civil Society in many Mediterranean countries - resulting from democratic deficit, lack of NGO culture and lack of basic means – reduces pressure on governments to implement the Barcelona Convention commitments.
4. Difficult and abstract issues within its agenda attract a low level of public interest and press coverage.
5. Deficits in education and information remain at both country and local levels.
6. There are Secretariat difficulties in effectively channeling regular and interesting information, resulting in relatively low visibility.
7. The dependence of the Barcelona Convention on contacting governments exclusively through Environment Ministries – with some input from Ministries of Foreign Affairs, but no others – reduces its political weight.
8. The dominance of the MCSDD by countries – with the same people being frequently the focal points for the Convention and its Protocols – reduces it to a Working Party, restricting its potential.
9. The EU and its members – plus several more CPs which hope to join and others which have special bilateral links with it – shift its overall weight towards observing EU legislation and norms. Meanwhile progress may be slower in areas where the EU does not yet have its own legislation. So there is a dynamic relationship between EU countries' priorities and the level of implementation in the entire region.
10. Often NGO reactions similarly follow northern priorities, though this is less visible in Federations such as MIO-ECSDE.
11. Practical problems inevitably arise from the vast range of UNEP/MAP competence to be covered (particularly with Sustainable Development in the agenda) without adequate means or sufficient support by non-environmental parts of governments and other specialized UN agencies.
12. The fact that the Mediterranean region is not a UN region adds to the difficulties.

The challenge is to turn most of the apparent weaknesses into advantages. NGOs could greatly help in this because of their flexibility, wide and vertical distribution and continuity in actions. The EU experience, resources and strength should be properly and effectively used by UNEP/MAP, the CPs and the Partners of the Barcelona Convention without losing its independence and character.

The ability of Civil Society, particularly NGOs, to act must be strengthened with institutional and material support. If strong, they will promote the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development and the implementation of the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols, though training and monitoring and through spreading the optimistic message of productive and innovative decision making, in cooperation with authorities and Civil Society throughout the region ■

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# How it All *Began*

**Serge Antoine** describes the origins of the Barcelona convention and traces the 30 years of cooperation in the Mediterranean that have ensued

**T**hirty years already! It seems like only yesterday. The 1972 Stockholm Conference – the first World Summit on the environment – had just taken place. Hardly had it ended, than its secretary-general, Maurice Strong, then launching the United Nations Environment Programme, asked me what initiatives should be taken. I replied without hesitation: the Mediterranean, linking environment, development and planning. Until then the vast region of 20 coastal countries had been split by international institutions between Europe, Africa and Asia – though a few pioneering voices, such as those of Jacques Yves Cousteau or Elisabeth Mann Borgese were calling attention to it as a precious resource whose seas and common heritage were fragile and at risk

In 1974, Strong's deputy, Peter Thacher, met with me to put the idea into action. A plenipotentiary Conference was called in Barcelona in 1975, followed by another in 1976 attended by the states themselves. The countries on the Mediterranean coastline got on so well there that Portugal (on the Atlantic) and the Soviet Union (on the Black Sea) knocked on the community's door. They and the United States were observers at the meeting, but that is where their participation ended: the Mediterranean countries decided to keep it in the family.

Fortunately, the Commission of the European Communities was both present and active accepting, for the first time in its history, to sign an international convention. I represented France with Olivier Manet, then ambassador. Before the meeting, we had to convince our ministers that our country had a role to play in the Mediterranean – by virtue of its southern coastline and Corsica, by virtue of its historical position and by virtue of its national wealth which then represented 45 per cent of the GDP of all the Mediterranean countries put together.

The Barcelona Convention received the blessing both of the UN (UNEP launched its Regional Seas Programme there) and of governments. Today, there are 21 participating states, each eager, and rightly so, to reinforce its national identity. Out of this consensus, they extract maritime cooperation and environmental schemes focusing on a coastline 47 000 km long, its hinterland, and the territory as a whole – particularly important for countries with multiple coasts, like Morocco, Spain, France, Turkey and Egypt.

The Mediterranean Action Plan's (MAP) first years saw Algeria and Albania joining the countries that had already



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signed the Barcelona Convention. In 1978, the Blue Plan to explore the future of the Mediterranean – which I had initiated – was confirmed, thanks to the action of Ismaïl Sabri Abdalla. In 1982, during a meeting of the Parties in Montpellier, Athens was chosen for MAP's headquarters: Split, Tunis, and Malta, were chosen to host MAP Centers. In 1985 in Genoa, Mostafa Tolba, then Executive Director of UNEP, led the adoption, after a decade of work, of the 10 great directions of MAP for 1985-1995.

In 1989, the Blue Plan published a reference book – *“Le Tableau de la Méditerranée à l'horizon 2010”*, by Michel Batisse, its president since 1983, and Michel Grenon – where it detailed required plans of action for the region, with 450 million people, to enable it to avoid disaster and develop its assets in an increasingly competitive world. In the aftermath of the Rio Summit, Tunisia proposed further expanding MAP, which already linked environment and “sustainable development”. This was done in 1994, especially through the creation of the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development and the official entry of the Civil Society of local government, associations and private companies.

In 1943, Charles de Gaulle said: “A day will come when peace will bring together peoples from the Bosphorus to Hercules's Column. They have thousands of reasons as old as history that command them to group together in order to complement one another”■

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Last year's announcement by Spain – the Depository Government – of the entry into force of the revised Barcelona convention, as amended in 1995, marks the beginning of a new era in the protection of the Mediterranean marine environment, and its effective contribution to sustainable development in the region.

As the framework convention of the so-called “Barcelona Convention System” – laying down the normative “umbrella” to be implemented through specific protocols – the Convention, in its extensively amended version, contains significant innovations that give effect to the objective of sustainable development. Now entitled “Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean”, it contains the following new elements:

- Its geographical coverage is extended to include the coastal areas as defined by each Contracting Party within its own territory.
- It implements the sustainable development of the Mediterranean Sea Area at the level of general obligations, by incorporating the precautionary principle, the polluter pays principle and the procedural principle of environmental impact assessment for activities at the national level – and also, through cooperation, for activities that are likely to have transboundary effects or effects to areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction, promoting the integrated management of coastal zones, adopting implementing programmes and measures containing time limits for their completion, using the best available techniques and best environmental practices, and promoting environmentally sound technology, including clean production technologies.
- Under it, the Contracting Parties formally pledge themselves to implement the Mediterranean Action Plan and to take fully into account the recommendations of the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development, a new body established within the Plan's framework.
- It expands the material scope of the framework obligations of the Contracting Parties concerning dealing with the sources of pollution and



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# New Era

## Evangelos Raftopoulos

outlines the effects of the entry into force of the amended Barcelona Convention

conserving the marine environment, to be implemented through the development of specific protocols. Thus, they undertake not just to prevent, control and combat marine pollution from various sources but to eliminate it to the fullest possible extent. Simultaneously, these framework obligations are updated (such as those regarding pollution caused by dumping from ships and aircraft or by incineration at sea, and concerning the conservation of biological diversity) and expanded to new areas (such as the one on pollution resulting from the transboundary movements of hazardous wastes and their disposal).

- It provides for the public's right to have appropriate access to information on the environmental state of the Mediterranean and to participate in the decision-making process relevant to the field of application of the Barcelona Convention System
- It provides for the possibility of the Secretariat assisting a requesting

Contracting Party in drafting its environmental legislation.

- It formalizes the function of the Bureau in the institutional structure laid down by the Convention, including the participation of observers
- Finally, it makes a significant step forward in the effective operation and implementation of the whole Barcelona Convention System by providing that the reports of the Contracting Parties refer to the internal implementation and effectiveness not just of the Convention and its Protocols but also of the recommendations adopted by their meetings. Correspondingly, the compliance control of the meetings of the Contracting Parties covers the Convention, and its Protocols, as well as the measures and recommendations ■

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# Saving the Sea

**Mostafa K. Tolba** outlines the lessons learned from the successful negotiation of the Mediterranean Action Plan and calls for a huge multidisciplinary assessment of its effects

**A** miniature ocean bordered by 120 cities with a population totaling at least 100 million – the virtually enclosed waters of the Mediterranean Sea have been the crossroads of European, Asian, and African civilizations for at least 4,000 years.

But by the early 1970s the Mediterranean was so heavily polluted that many feared it might die. Once a symbol of the seas' benefits to man, it had become a symbol of man's destructive impact on the seas. Efforts to save it began with an assessment of its condition, carried out by a team of technicians from all the relevant UN organisations. Their prognosis was bleak.

The question then was: in the midst of wars, political antagonisms, and national feuds, to what extent would countries around the Mediterranean be willing to enter into an environmental agreement that would benefit them all? This was a time when all the Arab states were at war with Israel; when Turkey and Greece were disputing ownership of Cyprus; when Algeria and Morocco were at odds over the Sahara; and when the Cold War was still shaping international relations.

In spite of these difficulties, and in the face of the belief that the Mediterranean was beyond rescue, UNEP decided to go forward. Spain offered to host meetings to negotiate regional cooperation to save it and – to the astonishment of many – almost all of the basin states both attended the negotiating sessions, and succeeded, in 1975, in adopting a joint action plan that would slow and ultimately reverse the threat.

Negotiating the Barcelona Convention and the Mediterranean Action Plan yielded useful lessons. One was that governments listen when science speaks with authority. Scientific reports identifying the cause of the Mediterranean's ills spurred the countries surrounding it to action. Subsequent action plans and agreements have been preceded by scientific assessment of the regional sea in question.

Others were that Governments showed themselves to be willing to put aside political differences and address a common threat, but that such negotiations succeed only when they share certain features: there must be strong leadership by at least one of the parties; the sponsoring UN organisation must take an active, objective role in the meetings; and the negotiating delegations must be made up of government representatives whose strong personalities lead them to make imaginative, effective decisions.

Similarly, dealing with shared environmental problems has

inevitably led to an erosion of the old doctrine of absolute sovereignty, as governments have become willing both to give and to accept instructions on how to modify pollution-causing activities. But the resulting treaties are not, in themselves, enough. Implementation is the key. Any successful treaty must provide for sufficient financial and technical resources to countries that need help in enforcing the terms of the treaty inside their own borders.

Lastly, the importance of public awareness and sensitivity cannot be overemphasized. The public outcry that followed media coverage of Jacques Cousteau's warnings about the Mediterranean, and coverage of further scientific findings, prompted the region's governments to act in concert to avert the environmental calamity. The same pattern saved the waters in the region covered by the Kuwait, the Caribbean, the West and Central African and other Conventions.

At the fifteenth anniversary meeting of the Barcelona Convention in 1991, I called attention to the basic issue of all environmental treaties:

*"A very basic question we have to answer is how far has the Mediterranean benefited from the Barcelona Convention, its various protocols, and its action plan. We are all saying the Mediterranean would have been worse without them. We need the proof for this. We need to know exactly where we were and how far did we go. This is essential to identify the next concrete steps. My question is, how far are the contracting parties ready to support such an exercise financially and with human resources? Such an effort will be a huge multidisciplinary effort involving marine scientists, ecologists, economists, technologists, social scientists, and several others."*

I raise the same issue today ■

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