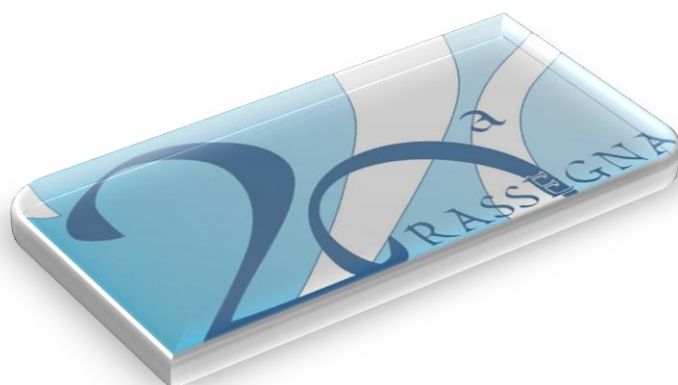


The Mediterranean pollution reduction programme of UNEP: from an idea to concrete action

The Mediterranean marine environment has for long been subjected to considerable stress as a result of pollution caused by human activities. The greatest part of this pollution, around 80%, originates on land and is linked primarily to population pressures, urban growth, industrial and agricultural activities. Aware of that, in 1975 the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) supported the creation of a specific programme for the Mediterranean region, the Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP), aiming at the reduction of marine pollution. The programme was one year later (1976) fully supported by the bordering countries and the European Union and a number of legal texts were signed to make the programme more effective. The texts included the Barcelona Convention and six Protocols, among which the Protocol on Land-based Sources of Pollution to regulate all the pollution activities on land. Since then, the major sources of pollution have been identified and gradual measures have been taken. One of the major recent MAP achievements in the struggle against pollution from land-based sources was the formulation and adoption by the Contracting Parties of a Strategic Action Programme (SAP) to address pollution from land-based activities. The SAP, prepared by the MED POL Programme, that is the pollution reduction component of MAP, is the basis for the implementation of the Land-Based Sources (LBS) Protocol by the Mediterranean countries in the next two decades. It is an action-oriented initiative identifying priority target categories of substances and activities to be eliminated or controlled by the Mediterranean countries within a set time frame. The reduction and phasing out targets are formulated in harmony with related regional and international Conventions and programmes, such as the EU Directives, policies and strategies and the Stockholm and Basel Conventions. The key land-based activities addressed in the SAP are linked to the reduction of municipal and industrial pollution. Concerning municipal pollution, the central and direct role of the Governments in the mitigation of this type of pollution (i.e. through the construction of sewage treatment plants) was recognized when planning the activities, while the SAP's contribution was expected in terms of technical assistance such as guidelines for the construction of treatment plants, capacity building for their operation and maintenance. Regarding the reduction of industrial pollution, with the effective involvement of government experts and other stakeholders, an inventory of all emissions and releases of pollution sources and substances, known as the "national baseline budget of emissions and releases", with 2003 as the base year, was prepared, tested and developed. This inventory, updated in 2008, now represents the starting point from which the reduction in terms of percentage of pollutant inputs will have to be achieved according to the targets and timetable of the SAP. After the adoption of the SAP, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) approved a Mediterranean Project (2001-2005) entailing a contribution of six million US dollars for the implementation of a number of activities on the ground. The project attracted other donors such as the Fond français pour l'environnement mondial (FFEM), providing for an overall budget of 12 million US dollars. The major contribution of the project was the preparation of National Action Plans (NAPs) to address land-based pollution by all the bordering countries. The NAPs, formally endorsed by the 13th Meeting of the Contracting Parties held in November 2005 in Portoroz, describe the policy and the actions/interventions by each country to reduce pollution in line with SAP targets, including technical and financial means and deadlines. The countries made use of all the background work



carried out in the framework of MED POL (guidelines, technical and policy documents, capacity building programmes), as well as of all the data and information gathered during the process such as the data and figures of the baseline budget of emissions and releases. An innovative approach used in process has been the full involvement of all stakeholders. In each country, the national and local authorities, the industrial sector and NGOs sat for the first time around the same table discussing priorities, possible measures and opportunities for investments. During the consultative work carried out, it became very clear that the NAP implementation process, with its embedded mechanisms for exchange of information, promotion of use of cleaner technology, transfer of technology, public participation and sustainable financing, will enhance economic, technological and social development at the local level, thus making a concrete contribution towards sustainable development. For this reason, the successful process of preparation of the NAPs has again attracted the attention of the international donors and, as a result, a new GEF Strategic Partnership including a large number of International Organizations as well as the World Bank has been launched to support the long-term implementation of NAPs. Very positive prospects also lie in the expected synergy with the new EC “Horizon 2020” initiative with very similar pollution reduction objectives and targets for the Mediterranean region. In fact, the pollution reduction component of the Horizon 2020 takes into full consideration the NAPs and the findings of MED POL and, as a result, has launched a full programme in cooperation with the European Investment Bank (EIB) for the financing of a number of priority pollution reduction interventions directly deriving from the NAPs. About 44 pollution reduction interventions have been selected for loans and grants that, when implemented, will result in a concrete and measurable reduction of the pollution in the Mediterranean. In conclusion, the efforts of the United Nations Environment Programme are resulting in an effective programme of pollution reduction in harmony with the European Union objectives and regulations and in cooperation with the large international financial institutions such as the GEF, the World Bank and the European Investment Bank. That means that the initial idea of UNEP of putting together countries of different levels of development, of different cultures, religion and traditions, around a common table to discuss and act on a shared issue, i.e. the marine environment and its conservation, was finally valid and is giving now its positive results for the benefit of all Mediterranean populations.

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