

Preliminary proposal

Convening a UfM Ministerial on Environment and Climate Change

Background, Rationale and Main Topics for Discussion

After discussion at the SOM in Malaga in June 2011 and as instructed by the Co-presidencies, the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean and the European Commission have jointly prepared this document.

Background

A UfM Ministerial Meeting on Environment and Climate Change is overdue. The last Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on the Environment was held in Cairo on 20 November 2006, where the “Horizon 2020 Initiative for the De-pollution of the Mediterranean” was established and the timetable of its first phase was endorsed, while the Ministers agreed to periodically review its implementation.

Two attempts at holding a Ministerial in Croatia (November 2009 and April 2010) did not come to fruition due to external factors.

Rationale

1. The first phase of the H2020 Initiative (2007-2013) is coming to an end. Four complementary and coordinated technical assessments of results to date are currently on-going (conducted by UNEP-MAP, EIB, EEA and UfMS), together with evaluations of specific project implementation. The outcome of this work, expected by October, will flow into a wider mid-term review encompassing technical, institutional and strategic aspects. With the involvement of all partner countries, the mid-term review will culminate in recommendations for the implementation of the second phase of the Horizon 2020 Initiative. These recommendations need to be submitted to Ministers for further guidance.
2. The adverse effects of climate change are increasingly deteriorating the living conditions in the Mediterranean region, which is considered by experts to be a major climate change hotspot. Most countries are already experiencing a rise in temperatures and increases in fresh water scarcity, frequency of droughts and forest fires, and growing rates of desertification. At the same time, important opportunities for sustainable development exist in the region, in particular in terms of low carbon development. Accordingly, climate change should receive increasing attention in the region. Although several initiatives and projects are taking place addressing mainly adaptation issues, no coordinated line of action at Euro-Mediterranean level encompasses the current and future needs. Additionally, coherence is required across the actions and/or initiatives, based on a better understanding of the links between climate change mitigation and adaptation to its adverse effects. Strategic direction from a Ministerial Meeting is therefore needed.
3. The commitment to switch towards a green and low carbon economy/growth, underlined by the Rio+20 meeting held last year (attended by most UfM countries), should be reiterated and made more visible in the region. Ministers in charge of Environment and Climate Change should take the lead and closely collaborate with their counterparts in ministries of economy, agriculture, industry, tourism, transport, etc. to include the elements of Sustainable and Low Carbon Growth in their respective agendas.

Main Topics

The main topics for discussion may include the following items:

(1) H2020 Initiative to de-pollute the Mediterranean: review of the timetable for its first phase (2007-2013) and renewed political support for the implementation of the second phase (2014-2020), in the form of clear strategic recommendations and possibly an operational timetable.

(2) Climate Change: a mechanism for exchange, consultation and soft coordination on low carbon and climate resilient development actions could be useful, if duplication of existing efforts is avoided, and if there is a concomitant political commitment of the concerned countries.

(3) Green and Low Carbon Growth/Green and Low Carbon Economy: Reaffirming the importance (and the need) of switching to Green/Low carbon modalities of consumption and production based on the Rio+20 Declaration of 2012. Ministers will be asked to support the on-going process of preparing a regional SCP roadmap and action plan under the Barcelona Convention.

(4) Presentation/link/endorsement of the relevant outcomes emerging from:

- The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development - or Rio+20 – and its political outcome document “The Future We Want”;
- the CoP of the Barcelona Convention, planned for the 3rd-6th of December 2013 in Istanbul, Turkey;
- the UfM Ministerial on Energy, to be held on the 11th of December 2013 in Brussels;
- the UfM Ministerial on Transport, to be held in November 2013, where IMP and related implementation tools may be touched upon;
- the elaboration of the global development agenda beyond 2015, with sustainable development at its core (including a direct link to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), building on the Millennium Development Goals), and post-Hyogo Framework for Action for disaster risk reduction.

Output

The main output will be a ministerial declaration. Following the successful example of the 2006 ministerial and in line with the UfM philosophy the declaration should:

- be short and focused;
- provide orientations for future cooperation on points (1)-(3) above, and on point (4), where appropriate;
- give prominence to concrete priority actions with clear ownership, outcomes and deadlines for completion.

The Declaration could include:

- strategic recommendations and, if considered appropriate, the launch of a timetable for the second phase of the H2020 Initiative for the de-pollution of the Mediterranean Sea on the basis of the outcomes of the Mid Term review;
- commitment to strengthening cooperation in the area of climate change, including in the form of a regional Climate Change Working Group, which would regularly bring together the Mediterranean countries to create synergies among current initiatives, provide input to future actions, exchange information, views and/or best practices

related to low emission and climate resilient development (LECRD), including funding possibilities;

- Orientations on Sustainable Consumption and Production, including the support to the Barcelona Convention SCP road map and action plan;
- Reference to other key topics (such as biodiversity, integrated coastal zone management, integrated maritime policy, environmental mainstreaming, education for sustainable development, etc.);
- Reference to a regular regional environment consultation mechanism of high level experts/officials, in order to follow up on priorities and provide input on emerging issues (*this possible regional consultation mechanism would build on and integrate existing mechanisms*).

Ongoing or planned priority projects in these areas are also expected to be identified and communicated during the preparatory process to the Ministerial, with the support of the UFM Secretariat.

Date and venue

The suggested date for this Ministerial Meeting would be the first half of 2014 (tentatively in May), i.e. during the Greek Presidency of the EU. The venue would be agreed through the UfM Senior Officials Meetings. Possible venues may be expressed by UfM countries wishing to host the event.

Preparatory steps for the Ministerial Meeting on Environment and Climate Change

- AD HOC SOM meeting
 - AD-HOC Meeting on Environment and Climate Change, January/February 2014;
 - AD-HOC Meeting on Environment and Climate Change, April 2014.

- Technical meetings

H2020 Initiative for the De-pollution of the Mediterranean Sea

- Steering Committee Meeting of the H2020 Initiative for the De-pollution of the Mediterranean Sea – Second half of November 2013;
- Conference of the Parties of the Barcelona Convention, 3-6 December 2013;
- Steering Committee Meeting of the H2020 Initiative for the De-pollution of the Mediterranean Sea – February 2014.

Climate Change

- Steering Committee Meeting of the CLIMA South Project, 11-12 September 2013;
- UfM Ministerial on Transport, to be held on the 14th of November 2013;
- Conference of the Parties of the Barcelona Convention, 4-6 December 2013;
- UfM Ministerial on Energy, to be held on the 11th of December 2013 in Brussels, and the FEMIP conference on energy efficiency (12th December 2013, tbc).

Green and low carbon growth/Sustainable Consumption and Production

- (First) Steering Committee Meeting of the SWITCH MED Programme, October/November 2013 (tbc) ;
- UfM Ministerial on Transport, to be held on the 14th of November 2013;
- Conference of the Parties of the Barcelona Convention, 4-6 December 2013;
- UfM Ministerial on Energy, to be held on the 11th of December 2013 in Brussels.