

Horizon 2020 Steering Group meeting

Opening session – 19th November 2014

CCAB – 14.30hrs – 15.30hrs

Opening remarks by Michael Koehler, Director F, DG DEVCO

Dear Partners and colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have in the Mediterranean region an asset which is shared by all countries, on which we have built our civilisations, that we have been using to transport goods and people, that has been providing us with economic resources and that is still at the basis of many livelihoods.

This common asset is the Mediterranean Sea and unfortunately it is confronted with many threats.

Among these is the level of pollution which has reached a critical stage and, as population is growing fast on its shores, will get worse if we do not step up our efforts to seriously address, and ultimately reduce, it.

Acting on sea pollution is not only a matter of preserving biodiversity, it is also at least equally about recognizing that a degraded marine environment impedes human development.

In 2006, the Environment Ministers from the European Union and Mediterranean countries agreed to launch the Horizon 2020 initiative. It was undoubtedly a welcome decision aiming at federating and stimulating efforts to reduce the main sources of pollution in the Mediterranean Sea, which are, as we all know, generated by human on-

shore activities: industries but also simply human settlements that generate ever increasing volumes of municipal waste and urban waste water.

I wish to underline here that H2020 is not an EU-led initiative. It was conceived as, and it is indeed, a truly collective Euro-Mediterranean endeavour, that requires the efforts and commitments of all around the Mediterranean, what I would call our common responsibilities.

As the Ministerial declaration rightly put in 2006, *“the environmental needs of the region are beyond the means of any one country or organisation to deal with and require a regional approach and increased cooperation as well as all sources of finance to be fully mobilised and exploited”*.

At the same time, it has been necessary to take into account, quoting again the Ministerial declaration, *“the differentiated capabilities between the Euro-Mediterranean partners”*, and this is what the EU has tried to do in directly supporting its Southern neighbours in the context of H2020.

Last, it is worth recalling that the H2020 initiative has been supporting and complementing what was being done in the framework of the Mediterranean Action Programme and the Barcelona Convention. These instruments are still relevant and must be kept, as they are the only structured and well-established environmental governance framework in the Mediterranean region.

The EU has positively responded to the H2020 initiative by mobilising significant financial resources from its financial instrument devoted to development assistance for its neighbourhood, to ensure the effective launch of priority actions under each of the H2020 pillars.

This includes:

- A comprehensive set of trainings and capacity building activities, on how to abate pollution from land-based sources, but also on how to mainstream environment in sector policies;
- A facility, managed by the European Investment Bank, to establish and maintain a pipeline of de-pollution investment projects, and to undertake detailed preparatory studies for four of them. I am pleased to note that studies have been completed for one of them, which has been recently labelled by the UfM: the Lake Bizerte de-pollution project;
- Using the expertise of the European Environment Agency, the establishment of environmental information systems that would ensure efficient data collection and effective data sharing.

In addition, I would like to mention that there are also a number of EU-funded research programmes in the Mediterranean, some of them with the participation of Southern Mediterranean countries.

This meeting will be an excellent opportunity for you to have a full overview of the state-of-play of these EU-sponsored actions, and of the results they have achieved so far.

However, the EU cannot fix the problem alone. What the EU can do is to catalyse initiatives from Mediterranean countries and regional players, and stimulate more efforts leading to pollution reduction. In that respect, ownership and strong commitments from all are crucial to really achieve concrete de-pollution results. It is in particular the responsibility of each individual country around the Mediterranean Sea to set up an appropriate legislative and regulatory framework, to ensure it is enforced and complied with, and to offer a conducive environment that attracts private investments in projects that will contribute to reducing sea pollution.

When EuroMed environment ministers launched the H2020 initiative, they also endorsed a clear timetable of actions to be taken in a first phase, up to 2013.

This first phase of H2020 is ending now. There is a need to take stock of what has been done until now under H2020, first in terms of achievements but also we should not hide shortcomings, difficulties, and simultaneously we have to identify the needs still to be addressed and next actions to be taken.

This exercise, this mid-term review, will enable us to define the way forward until 2020: what has to be done, and above all how we should do it.

Several studies were launched in 2013, on all aspects of H2020, and by various players, namely the EC, the UfM secretariat, the European Investment Bank and the European Environment Agency. Their respective findings will inform this mid-term review and it is indeed highly welcome that these findings are presented and discussed between Euromed partners during this meeting.

It is intended to complete the H2020 mid-term review with a UfM Ministerial on environment and climate change in the spring 2014. On that occasion, a political endorsement is expected on the orientations and strategic priorities for the 2nd phase of H2020.

The principle of such a Ministerial meeting has been recently agreed upon by UfM Member States and now we have to work actively on its preparation, to make it a success so that it gives a fresh impetus to regional cooperation around environment issues. The Ministerial will

more specifically deal with topics which, in my view, are central for the development of the Mediterranean region:

- De-pollution of the Mediterranean Sea, as this sea is our shared, and threatened, asset;
- Climate change, indeed a major challenge for the entire world, and even more so for the Mediterranean region which has been identified as a hot spot in all scenarios. At the same time, we can maybe see climate change as an opportunity to build more resilient societies – eg better capable to cope with droughts – and, in relation with mitigation, more resource efficient economic models and more diversified energy sources.
- Sustainable consumption and production, where resource efficiency is used as a lever to enhance the competitiveness of the economy and as a result to create jobs and wealth.

Again, I hope this UfM Ministerial will be a success, both in terms of attendance and for its concrete outcome. This will be important for the environment, but, beyond that, such a success will strengthen and legitimize the political momentum created by the series of Ministerial meetings currently being organised in the UfM framework.

You can count on the EC's support For this to be a success.

Coming back to the H2020 initiative, of course I cannot pre-empt the outcome of the H2020 mid-term review, but I would like to insist on the principles that should be followed in the process:

- It must be an informed and documented process, based on factual information and evidence-based decisions. In that respect, the various

assessment studies whose results will be presented today and tomorrow will be certainly instrumental;

- Having a participatory process is of the essence, a process that will be genuinely involving all Euromed partners until the planned UfM Ministerial next year;

- One has to recognize that de-polluting the Mediterranean Sea is a long-term and challenging objective, that will require sustained efforts and commitments from all. It is unlikely that the H2020 initiative has directly led to tangible pollution reductions yet, or then it would be difficult to measure this, when it comes for instance to capacity building. Therefore, it will be actually more important to assess whether H2020 has been able to do the right preparatory work for future reductions of the pollutant loads, thanks to what H2020 did to strengthen institutional capacity, to identify and prepare de-pollution investment projects and to monitor the state of the environment.

Let me end now with a short word about the future of the EU's financial support to the second phase of H2020, with two main messages:

- The EU neighbourhood will remain a political priority, and also a priority for our development assistance in the coming years,

- Even though a formal decision will only be made in the first semester 2014, it is likely that the EC will keep the environment in its future portfolio of regional projects in the Mediterranean region.

I can assure you that the outcome of the Horizon 2020 mid-term review will be a key determinant in defining our support in the field of environment in the Mediterranean region.

I thank you for your attention.