

# The role of Cohesion Policy in addressing multidimensional environmental challenges in the Mediterranean basin

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The Committee on Regional Development adopted an own-initiative report by François ALFONSI (Greens/EFA, FR) on the role of cohesion policy in addressing multidimensional environmental challenges in the Mediterranean basin.

## *The Mediterranean: a challenge for Europe*

Members recalled that the territory of the EU covers half of the Mediterranean basin and the European Union cannot remain passive in the face of the multiple political, social, economic, demographic and environmental challenges confronting the Mediterranean basin.

**Cohesion policy** still has further potential for action to provide appropriate responses to the challenges facing 110 million Europeans. Members believe that the measures provided for under cohesion policy must be coordinated with and complementary to measures under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, the National Recovery and Resilience Plan and other national policies.

Members deplored the **continuous degradation of the environment** in the Mediterranean basin, the loss of biodiversity and the increasing air and marine pollution. They are also concerned about the increasing pollution by plastic and domestic waste and called for a historic effort to limit and manage them by promoting the circular economy. They called for sustainable water security measures and for a more sustainable approach to be taken to adapting Mediterranean agriculture to the scarcity of water.

The report called for a **more efficient and coordinated use of existing funding instruments** to address the challenges in the Mediterranean basin. Noting that expenditure for the EU's southern and eastern neighbourhoods has been increased by EUR 280 million in the 2023 budget, Members called for this financial allocation to be used, inter alia, to support ambitious environmental measures in the Mediterranean.

## *The Mediterranean: potential and problems*

The report stressed the potential of all the Mediterranean regions for the development of onshore and offshore **renewable energy sources** and for a just and inclusive ecological transition. Members considered that it is highly uncertain whether higher demand for green energy can be supplied from within the EU unless further investments are made to secure these supplies in the region, as well as accelerating and simplifying procedures for renewable energy projects.

Recalling that **overfishing** and destructive fishing practices still threaten the survival of many species, the report calls on the Commission to (i) monitor stock data and carry out impact assessments in order to take decisions on fishing quotas; (ii) promote digital transformation and the use of new technologies in the areas of monitoring, reporting and environmental assessment, as well as in governance issues.

Highlighting both the social and environmental effects of **tourism** due to its seasonality and uncontrolled development, Members called on Member States and regions to develop sustainable tourism action plans.

Members regretted that most EU Member States bordering the Mediterranean have not adopted maritime spatial planning programmes. They called on the Commission to follow up on these Member States to ensure the rapid adoption of such programmes.

***The Mediterranean: a common space to be structured***

The Mediterranean is a cohesive geographical area facing similar risks of natural disasters such as fires, floods, earthquakes, drought and increasing scarcity of water resources. Therefore, Members called on the Commission to study the **possibility of tailoring the EU civil protection mechanism** better to the Mediterranean basin and to put forward a proposal for a strengthened Solidarity Fund. They called on Member States to adopt measures to mitigate the effects of heatwaves and droughts in coastal areas.

The Commission is invited to support, in particular through the Interreg programmes, the networks of marine protected areas in the Mediterranean.

Lastly, the report asked the Commission to support a **macro-regional strategy in the Mediterranean**. The diversity and size of the territory concerned also requires the implementation of three different but coordinated strategies, namely for the Western Mediterranean, for the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, and for the Eastern Mediterranean.

Such a macro-regional strategy for the Mediterranean, which would entail substantial and active involvement of the regional and local authorities concerned, has considerable potential for addressing the multidimensional environmental challenges of the whole basin.