

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

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The European Parliament adopted by 564 votes to 14, with 47 abstentions, a resolution on the role of cohesion policy in addressing multidimensional environmental challenges in the Mediterranean basin.

The countries of the Mediterranean basin, which include EU Member States, candidate countries and third countries, are home to 250 million inhabitants, half of whom live in the EU and one third of whom live in coastal areas.

Strengthening cooperation within and outside the EU is essential to find solutions to common problems such as environmental deterioration, pollution and climate change, rising water temperatures, increasing extreme weather events, water scarcity, biodiversity loss and food insecurity.

The Mediterranean: a challenge for Europe

Stressing that the European Union cannot remain passive in the face of the **multiple political, social, economic, demographic and environmental challenges** facing the Mediterranean basin, Parliament stressed the importance of direct and diversified cooperation for regional peace, particularly in the Eastern Mediterranean.

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.

Parliament called for a historic effort to **limit and manage the increasing pollution from plastics and household waste** by promoting the circular economy. It suggested planning to use cohesion funds to invest in technologies and infrastructure specifically designed to recover materials from residual waste. It called for the creation of a pilot project to achieve zero marine pollution in the Mediterranean.

Members also called for measures to ensure water security in a sustainable way and for a more sustainable approach to adapting Mediterranean agriculture to water scarcity.

Parliament called for a more effective and coordinated use of existing funding instruments to address the challenges in the Mediterranean basin, including measures to improve marine biodiversity and to restore and protect marine habitats and species. Noting that spending for the EU's southern and eastern neighbourhood has been increased by around EUR 280 million in the 2023 budget, Members called for this funding to be used inter alia to support ambitious environmental measures in the Mediterranean.

The Mediterranean: potential and problems

The resolution 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 drew attention to the increasing density of maritime traffic and the danger of oil spills and the risks these activities present for marine ecosystems and particularly sea mammals. They also 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.

Parliament asked the Commission to support a **macro-regional strategy in the 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.

Lastly, Members believe that "ad hoc" forms of aid and financial support are needed for small-scale fishermen and for the most vulnerable.