Basic information

2011/0304(NLE) NLE - Non-legislative enactments Decision	Procedure completed
Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against pollution resulting from exploration and exploitation of the continental shelf and the seabed and its subsoil. Accession to the Offshore Protocol of the Barcelona Convention **Subject** 3.70.01 Protection of natural resources: fauna, flora, nature, wildlife, countryside; biodiversity 3.70.05 Marine and coastal pollution, pollution from ships, oil pollution 3.70.16 Law and environment, liability 3.70.18 International and regional environment protection measures and agreements **Geographical area** Mediterranean Sea area	

Key players

European Parliament

Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
ENVI Environment, Public Health and Food Safety	ROSBACH Anna (ECR)	06/01/2012
	Shadow rapporteur TATARELLA Salvatore (PPE) PERELLÓ RODRÍGUEZ Andrés (S&D) SKYLAKAKIS Theodoros (ALDE) CHRYSOGELOS Nikos (Verts/ALE) LIOTARD Kartika Tamara (GUE/NGL)	

Committee for opinion	Rapporteur for opinion	Appointed
ITRE Industry, Research and Energy	The committee decided not to give an opinion.	

Council of the European Union

Council configuration	Meetings	Date
Environment	3211	2012-12-17

European Commission	

Commission DG	Commissioner
Environment	POTOČNIK Janez

Key events

Date	Event	Reference	Summary
27/10/2011	Preparatory document	COM(2011)0690	Summary
31/05/2012	Legislative proposal published	09671/2012	Summary
14/06/2012	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
10/10/2012	Vote in committee		
15/10/2012	Committee report tabled for plenary, 1st reading/single reading	A7-0319/2012	Summary
20/11/2012	Decision by Parliament	T7-0415/2012	Summary
20/11/2012	Results of vote in Parliament		
17/12/2012	Act adopted by Council after consultation of Parliament		
17/12/2012	End of procedure in Parliament		
09/01/2013	Final act published in Official Journal		

Technical information

Procedure reference	2011/0304(NLE)
Procedure type	NLE - Non-legislative enactments
Procedure subtype	Consent by Parliament
Legislative instrument	Decision
Legal basis	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union TFEU 218-p6a Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union TFEU 192-p1
Other legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 165
Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	ENVI/7/07993

Documentation gateway

European Parliament

Document type	Committee	Reference	Date	Summary
Committee draft report		PE494.711	18/09/2012	
Committee report tabled for plenary, 1st reading/single reading		A7-0319/2012	15/10/2012	Summary

Text adopted by Parliament, 1st reading/single reading		T7-0415/2012	20/11/2012	Summary

Council of the EU

Document type	Reference	Date	Summary
Legislative proposal	09671/2012	31/05/2012	Summary

European Commission

Document type	Reference	Date	Summary
Preparatory document	COM(2011)0690	27/10/2011	Summary

National parliaments

Document type	Parliament /Chamber	Reference	Date	Summary
Contribution	PT_PARLIAMENT	COM(2011)0690	29/11/2012	

Additional information

Source	Document	Date
National parliaments	IPEX	
European Commission	EUR-Lex	

Final act

Decision 2013/0005
OJ L 004 09.01.2013, p. 0013 Summary

Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against pollution resulting from exploration and exploitation of the continental shelf and the seabed and its subsoil. Accession to the Offshore Protocol of the Barcelona Convention

2011/0304(NLE) - 27/10/2011

PURPOSE: to allow the European Union to accede to the Protocol for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against pollution resulting from exploration and exploitation of the continental shelf and the seabed and its subsoil.

PROPOSED ACT: Council Decision.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT: no impact assessment was undertaken.

BACKGROUND: the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean, also known as the "Barcelona Convention" came into force on 9 July 2004. The European Union is Contracting Party to the Convention, as are Italy, Greece, Spain,

France, Slovenia, Malta and Cyprus, together with 14 other Mediterranean countries which are not Member States of the European Union. Article 7 of the amended Convention specifically obliges Parties to take all appropriate measures to prevent, abate, combat and to the fullest possible extent eliminate pollution of the Mediterranean Sea Area resulting from exploration and exploitation of the continental shelf and the seabed and its subsoil.

One of the Protocols of the Barcelona Convention deals with Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against pollution resulting from exploration and exploitation of the continental shelf and the seabed and its subsoil (commonly referred to as the "**Offshore Protocol**"). However, the European Union has neither signed nor ratified the Offshore Protocol. The Commission proposed to the Council [COM(94)397 final] the signature of the Protocol prior to its adoption by the Conference of the Parties in October 1994. At that time, it was deemed more appropriate to work further on a Community regime for environmental liability rather than anticipate it through an international agreement.

The Offshore Protocol entered into force on 24 March 2011. Some Member States of the European Union that are Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention have already announced in the last months their intention to ratify the Protocol too.

To highlight the importance of this text, it should be remembered that there are more than **200 active offshore platforms** in the Mediterranean and more installations are under consideration. Due to the semi-closed nature and special hydrodynamics of the Mediterranean Sea, an accident of the kind of the Gulf of Mexico in 2010 could have immediate adverse transboundary consequences on the Mediterranean economy and fragile marine and coastal ecosystems. Failure to address effectively the risks emanating from such activities could gravely compromise the efforts of several Member States to achieve and maintain good environmental status in their marine waters.

A recent Commission communication on offshore safety develops the areas where action is needed to maintain the safety and environmental credentials of the European Union and proposes concrete actions. One of the areas identified is **international cooperation to promote offshore safety and response capabilities worldwide** and one of the related actions is the exploration of the potential of regional conventions. In particular, the Communication recommends the re-launch in close collaboration with the Member States concerned, of the process towards bringing into force the Offshore Protocol. For its part, the European Parliament, in its resolution of 13 September 2011, stressed the importance of bringing fully into force the un-ratified 1994 Mediterranean Offshore Protocol

In relation to the Offshore Protocol, it is particularly important to bear in mind the strong probability of transboundary environmental effects in case of accidents in a semi-enclosed sea such as the Mediterranean Sea. It is therefore appropriate for the European Union to take all necessary actions in support of safety of offshore exploration and exploitation activities and for the protection of the marine environment in the Mediterranean Sea.

This is why the Commission is now calling for the EU's accession to the Protocol.

LEGAL BASIS: Article 192 (1), in conjunction with Article 218(6)(a) of the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union (TFEU). It should be noted that the Offshore Protocol concerns a field in large measure covered by Union law. This includes, for instance, elements such as the protection of the marine environment, environmental impact assessment and environmental liability. Subject to the final decision of legislators on this matter, the Offshore Protocol is furthermore consistent with the objectives of the proposed Regulation on safety of offshore oil and gas prospection, exploration and production activities, including on authorisation, environmental impact assessment and technical and financial capacity of operators.

CONTENT: with this Decision, it is proposed that the Union's accession to the Protocol for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against pollution resulting from exploration and exploitation of the continental shelf and the seabed and its subsoil be approved on behalf of the Union.

Main objectives of the Protocol: the Offshore Protocol covers a wide range of exploration and exploitation activities, permit requirements, removal of abandoned or disused installations, use and removal of harmful substances, liability and compensation requirements and coordination with other Parties of the Barcelona Convention at regional level.

Basic principles: from a technical point of view, the Parties to the Protocol shall take, individually or through bilateral or multilateral cooperation, all appropriate measures to **prevent, abate, combat and control pollution in the Protocol Area resulting from activities**, *inter alia* by ensuring that the best available techniques, environmentally effective and economically appropriate, are used for this purpose.

With a view to the application of these basic general principles, the Protocol provides for the following:

- all activities in the Protocol Area, including erection on site of installations, shall be subject to the prior written authorization for exploration or exploitation from the competent authority;
- the strict respect of the highest environmental standards and requirements by operators and of international standards regarding waste, as well as the use, the storage and the disposal of harmful or noxious substances and materials in order to reduce to a minimum the risk of pollution;
- **the application of safety measures**: to ensure that activities undertaken observe the highest possible safety standards with regard to the design, construction, placement, equipment, marking, operation and maintenance of installations;
- the operator has to ensure on the installations adequate equipment and devices, maintained in good working order, for protecting human life, preventing and combating accidental pollution and facilitating prompt response to an emergency;
- the drawing up of contingency plans ensuring that the parties can cooperate in combating accidental pollution in the Mediterranean by oil and other harmful substances and provide mutual assistance in cases of emergency;
- the undertaking of scientific and technological research for the purpose of developing new methods to reduce the risk of pollution in the Mediterranean;
- measures for liability and compensation in the event of damage to the marine environment.

Area covered: the geographical coverage of the Protocol is the Mediterranean Sea area as defined in the Barcelona Convention, including the continental shelf, the seabed and its subsoil.

Implementation: the provisions of the Offshore Protocol will need to be implemented by different levels of administration and economic operators. The Member States and their relevant competent authorities will be responsible for the design and implementation of certain detailed measures laid down in

the Offshore Protocol, such as the establishment of a national monitoring system and the adoption and enforcement of appropriate rules and procedures for the determination of liability and compensation for damage.

BUDGETARY IMPLICATION: the proposal has no impact on the EU's budget.

Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against pollution resulting from exploration and exploitation of the continental shelf and the seabed and its subsoil. Accession to the Offshore Protocol of the Barcelona Convention

2011/0304(NLE) - 27/10/2011 - Preparatory document

PURPOSE: to allow the European Union to accede to the Protocol for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against pollution resulting from exploration and exploitation of the continental shelf and the seabed and its subsoil.

PROPOSED ACT: Council Decision.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT: no impact assessment was undertaken.

BACKGROUND: the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean, also known as the "Barcelona Convention" came into force on 9 July 2004. The European Union is Contracting Party to the Convention, as are Italy, Greece, Spain, France, Slovenia, Malta and Cyprus, together with 14 other Mediterranean countries which are not Member States of the European Union. Article 7 of the amended Convention specifically obliges Parties to take all appropriate measures to prevent, abate, combat and to the fullest possible extent eliminate pollution of the Mediterranean Sea Area resulting from exploration and exploitation of the continental shelf and the seabed and its subsoil.

One of the Protocols of the Barcelona Convention deals with Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against pollution resulting from exploration and exploitation of the continental shelf and the seabed and its subsoil (commonly referred to as the "**Offshore Protocol**"). However, the European Union has neither signed nor ratified the Offshore Protocol. The Commission proposed to the Council [COM(94)397 final] the signature of the Protocol prior to its adoption by the Conference of the Parties in October 1994. At that time, it was deemed more appropriate to work further on a Community regime for environmental liability rather than anticipate it through an international agreement.

The Offshore Protocol entered into force on 24 March 2011. Some Member States of the European Union that are Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention have already announced in the last months their intention to ratify the Protocol too.

To highlight the importance of this text, it should be remembered that there are more than **200 active offshore platforms** in the Mediterranean and more installations are under consideration. Due to the semi-closed nature and special hydrodynamics of the Mediterranean Sea, an accident of the kind of the Gulf of Mexico in 2010 could have immediate adverse transboundary consequences on the Mediterranean economy and fragile marine and coastal ecosystems. Failure to address effectively the risks emanating from such activities could gravely compromise the efforts of several Member States to achieve and maintain good environmental status in their marine waters.

A recent Commission communication on offshore safety develops the areas where action is needed to maintain the safety and environmental credentials of the European Union and proposes concrete actions. One of the areas identified is **international cooperation to promote offshore safety and response capabilities worldwide** and one of the related actions is the exploration of the potential of regional conventions. In particular, the Communication recommends the re-launch in close collaboration with the Member States concerned, of the process towards bringing into force the Offshore Protocol. For its part, the European Parliament, in its resolution of 13 September 2011, stressed the importance of bringing fully into force the un-ratified 1994 Mediterranean Offshore Protocol

In relation to the Offshore Protocol, it is particularly important to bear in mind the strong probability of transboundary environmental effects in case of accidents in a semi-enclosed sea such as the Mediterranean Sea. It is therefore appropriate for the European Union to take all necessary actions in support of safety of offshore exploration and exploitation activities and for the protection of the marine environment in the Mediterranean Sea.

This is why the Commission is now calling for the EU's accession to the Protocol.

LEGAL BASIS: Article 192 (1), in conjunction with Article 218(6)(a) of the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union (TFEU). It should be noted that the Offshore Protocol concerns a field in large measure covered by Union law. This includes, for instance, elements such as the protection of the marine environment, environmental impact assessment and environmental liability. Subject to the final decision of legislators on this matter, the Offshore Protocol is furthermore consistent with the objectives of the proposed Regulation on safety of offshore oil and gas prospection, exploration and production activities, including on authorisation, environmental impact assessment and technical and financial capacity of operators.

CONTENT: with this Decision, it is proposed that the Union's accession to the Protocol for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against pollution resulting from exploration and exploitation of the continental shelf and the seabed and its subsoil be approved on behalf of the Union.

Main objectives of the Protocol: the Offshore Protocol covers a wide range of exploration and exploitation activities, permit requirements, removal of abandoned or disused installations, use and removal of harmful substances, liability and compensation requirements and coordination with other Parties of the Barcelona Convention at regional level.

Basic principles: from a technical point of view, the Parties to the Protocol shall take, individually or through bilateral or multilateral cooperation, all appropriate measures to **prevent, abate, combat and control pollution in the Protocol Area resulting from activities**, *inter alia* by ensuring that the best available techniques, environmentally effective and economically appropriate, are used for this purpose.

With a view to the application of these basic general principles, the Protocol provides for the following:

- all activities in the Protocol Area, including erection on site of installations, shall be subject to the prior written authorization for exploration or exploitation from the competent authority;
- the strict respect of the highest environmental standards and requirements by operators and of international standards regarding waste, as well as the use, the storage and the disposal of harmful or noxious substances and materials in order to reduce to a minimum the risk of pollution;
- **the application of safety measures**: to ensure that activities undertaken observe the highest possible safety standards with regard to the design, construction, placement, equipment, marking, operation and maintenance of installations;
- the operator has to ensure on the installations adequate equipment and devices, maintained in good working order, for protecting human life, preventing and combating accidental pollution and facilitating prompt response to an emergency;
- the drawing up of contingency plans ensuring that the parties can cooperate in combating accidental pollution in the Mediterranean by oil and other harmful substances and provide mutual assistance in cases of emergency;
- the undertaking of scientific and technological research for the purpose of developing new methods to reduce the risk of pollution in the Mediterranean;
- measures for liability and compensation in the event of damage to the marine environment.

Area covered: the geographical coverage of the Protocol is the Mediterranean Sea area as defined in the Barcelona Convention, including the continental shelf, the seabed and its subsoil.

Implementation: the provisions of the Offshore Protocol will need to be implemented by different levels of administration and economic operators. The Member States and their relevant competent authorities will be responsible for the design and implementation of certain detailed measures laid down in the Offshore Protocol, such as the establishment of a national monitoring system and the adoption and enforcement of appropriate rules and procedures for the determination of liability and compensation for damage.

BUDGETARY IMPLICATION: the proposal has no impact on the EU's budget.

Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against pollution resulting from exploration and exploitation of the continental shelf and the seabed and its subsoil. Accession to the Offshore Protocol of the Barcelona Convention

2011/0304(NLE) - 31/05/2012 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE: to allow the European Union to accede to the Protocol for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against pollution resulting from exploration and exploitation of the continental shelf and the seabed and its subsoil.

PROPOSED ACT: Council Decision.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT: no impact assessment was undertaken.

BACKGROUND: the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean, also known as the "Barcelona Convention" came into force on 9 July 2004. The European Union is Contracting Party to the Convention, as are Italy, Greece, Spain, France, Slovenia, Malta and Cyprus, together with 14 other Mediterranean countries which are not Member States of the European Union. Article 7 of the amended Convention specifically obliges Parties to take all appropriate measures to prevent, abate, combat and to the fullest possible extent eliminate pollution of the Mediterranean Sea Area resulting from exploration and exploitation of the continental shelf and the seabed and its subsoil.

One of the Protocols of the Barcelona Convention deals with Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against pollution resulting from exploration and exploitation of the continental shelf and the seabed and its subsoil (commonly referred to as the "**Offshore Protocol**"). However, the European Union has neither signed nor ratified the Offshore Protocol. The Commission proposed to the Council [COM(94)397 final] the signature of the Protocol prior to its adoption by the Conference of the Parties in October 1994. At that time, it was deemed more appropriate to work further on a Community regime for environmental liability rather than anticipate it through an international agreement.

The Offshore Protocol entered into force on 24 March 2011. Some Member States of the European Union that are Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention have already announced in the last months their intention to ratify the Protocol too.

A recent Commission communication on offshore safety develops the areas where action is needed to maintain the safety and environmental credentials of the European Union and proposes concrete actions. One of the areas identified is **international cooperation to promote offshore safety and response capabilities worldwide** and one of the related actions is the exploration of the potential of regional conventions. In particular, the Communication recommends the re-launch in close collaboration with the Member States concerned, of the process towards bringing into force the Offshore Protocol. For its part, the European Parliament, in itsresolution of 13 September 2011, stressed the importance of bringing fully into force the un-ratified 1994 Mediterranean Offshore Protocol.

To highlight the importance of this text, it should be remembered that there are more than **200 active offshore platforms** in the Mediterranean and more installations are under consideration. Due to the semi-closed nature and special hydrodynamics of the Mediterranean Sea, an accident of the kind of the Gulf of Mexico in 2010 could have immediate adverse transboundary consequences on the Mediterranean economy and fragile marine and coastal ecosystems. Failure to address effectively the risks emanating from such activities could gravely compromise the efforts of several Member States to achieve and maintain good environmental status in their marine waters as required by Directive 2008/56/EC of the European Parliament and of the

Council establishing a framework for community action in the field of marine environmental policy (Marine Strategy Framework Directive). In addition, taking the necessary action would contribute to meeting the commitments and respecting the obligations into which Greece, Spain, France, Italy, Cyprus, Malta, Slovenia and the Union itself have entered as Contracting Parties of the Barcelona Convention.

In relation to the **Offshore Protocol**, it is particularly important to bear in mind the strong probability of transboundary environmental effects in case of accidents in a semi-enclosed sea such as the Mediterranean Sea. It is therefore appropriate for the European Union to take all necessary actions in support of safety of offshore exploration and exploitation activities and for the protection of the marine environment in the Mediterranean Sea.

It is essential to ensure close cooperation between the Member States and the institutions of the Union, both in the process of negotiation and conclusion and in the fulfillment of the commitments entered into. That obligation to cooperate flows from the requirement of unity in the international representation of the Union. Therefore, those Member States that are Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention and that have not yet done so should take the necessary steps to finalise the procedures to ratify or accede to the Offshore Protocol.

It is proposed that the EU should now accede to the Offshore Protocol.

LEGAL BASIS: Article 192 (1), in conjunction with Article 218(6)(a) of the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union (TFEU). It should be noted that the Offshore Protocol concerns a field in large measure covered by Union law. This includes, for instance, elements such as the protection of the marine environment, environmental impact assessment and environmental liability. Subject to the final decision of legislators on this matter, the Offshore Protocol is furthermore consistent with the objectives of the proposed Regulation on safety of offshore oil and gas prospection, exploration and production activities, including on authorisation, environmental impact assessment and technical and financial capacity of operators.

CONTENT: with this Decision, it is proposed that the Union's accession to the Protocol for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against pollution resulting from exploration and exploitation of the continental shelf and the seabed and its subsoil be approved on behalf of the Union.

Main objectives of the Protocol: the Offshore Protocol covers a wide range of exploration and exploitation activities, permit requirements, removal of abandoned or disused installations, use and removal of harmful substances, liability and compensation requirements and coordination with other Parties of the Barcelona Convention at regional level.

Basic principles: from a technical point of view, the Parties to the Protocol shall take, individually or through bilateral or multilateral cooperation, all appropriate measures to **prevent, abate, combat and control pollution in the Protocol Area resulting from activities**, *inter alia* by ensuring that the best available techniques, environmentally effective and economically appropriate, are used for this purpose.

With a view to the application of these basic general principles, the Protocol provides for the following:

- all activities in the Protocol Area, including erection on site of installations, shall be subject to the prior written authorization for exploration or exploitation from the competent authority;
- the strict respect of the highest environmental standards and requirements by operators and of international standards regarding waste, as well as the use, the storage and the disposal of harmful or noxious substances and materials in order to reduce to a minimum the risk of pollution;
- **the application of safety measures**: to ensure that activities undertaken observe the highest possible safety standards with regard to the design, construction, placement, equipment, marking, operation and maintenance of installations;
- the operator has to ensure on the installations adequate equipment and devices, maintained in good working order, for protecting human life, preventing and combating accidental pollution and facilitating prompt response to an emergency;
- the drawing up of contingency plans ensuring that the parties can cooperate in combating accidental pollution in the Mediterranean by oil and other harmful substances and provide mutual assistance in cases of emergency;
- the undertaking of scientific and technological research for the purpose of developing new methods to reduce the risk of pollution in the Mediterranean;
- measures for liability and compensation in the event of damage to the marine environment.

Area covered: the geographical coverage of the Protocol is the Mediterranean Sea area as defined in the Barcelona Convention, including the continental shelf, the seabed and its subsoil.

Implementation: the provisions of the Offshore Protocol will need to be implemented by different levels of administration and economic operators. The Member States and their relevant competent authorities will be responsible for the design and implementation of certain detailed measures laid down in the Offshore Protocol, such as the establishment of a national monitoring system and the adoption and enforcement of appropriate rules and procedures for the determination of liability and compensation for damage.

BUDGETARY IMPLICATION: the proposal has no impact on the EU's budget.

Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against pollution resulting from exploration and exploitation of the continental shelf and the seabed and its subsoil. Accession to the Offshore Protocol of the Barcelona Convention

2011/0304(NLE) - 15/10/2012 - Committee report tabled for plenary, 1st reading/single reading

The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety unanimously adopted the report by Anna ROSBACH (ECR, DK) recommending that the European Parliament gives its consent to the conclusion, on behalf of the European Union, of the Protocol for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against pollution resulting from exploration and exploitation of the continental shelf and the seabed and its subsoil.

Members consider that the ratification of the Protocol would constitute a major step forward in the international cooperation to improve offshore safety and response capability in the Mediterranean.

Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against pollution resulting from exploration and exploitation of the continental shelf and the seabed and its subsoil. Accession to the Offshore Protocol of the Barcelona Convention

2011/0304(NLE) - 20/11/2012 - Text adopted by Parliament, 1st reading/single reading

The European Parliament adopted a legislative resolution on the draft Council decision on the accession of the European Union to the Protocol for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against pollution resulting from exploration and exploitation of the continental shelf and the seabed and its subsoil.

Parliament gives its consents to accession to the Protocol.

Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against pollution resulting from exploration and exploitation of the continental shelf and the seabed and its subsoil. Accession to the Offshore Protocol of the Barcelona Convention

2011/0304(NLE) - 17/12/2012 - Final act

PURPOSE: to allow the European Union to accede to the Protocol for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against pollution resulting from exploration and exploitation of the continental shelf and the seabed and its subsoil.

NON-LEGISLATIVE ACT: Council Decision 2013/5/EU on the accession of the European Union to the Protocol for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against pollution resulting from exploration and exploitation of the continental shelf and the seabed and its subsoil.

BACKGROUND: the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean, also known as the "Barcelona Convention" came into force on 9 July 2004. The European Union is Contracting Party to the Convention, as are Italy, Greece, Spain, France, Slovenia, Malta and Cyprus, together with 14 other Mediterranean countries which are not Member States of the European Union. Article 7 of the amended Convention specifically obliges Parties to take all appropriate measures to **prevent, abate, combat and to the fullest possible extent eliminate pollution of the Mediterranean Sea Area** resulting from exploration and exploitation of the continental shelf and the seabed and its subsoil.

One of the Protocols to the Barcelona Convention deals with protection of the Mediterranean Sea against pollution resulting from exploration and exploitation of the continental shelf and the seabed and its subsoil (the "**Offshore Protocol**"). It entered into force on 24 March 2011. To date, Albania, Cyprus, Libya, Morocco, Syria and Tunisia have ratified it. In addition to Cyprus, some other Member States that are Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention have announced recently their intention to also ratify the Protocol.

It is estimated that there are more than 200 active offshore platforms in the Mediterranean and more installations are under consideration. Hydrocarbon exploration and exploitation activities are expected to increase after the discovery of large fossil fuels reserves in the Mediterranean. Due to the semi-enclosed nature and special hydrodynamics of the Mediterranean Sea, an accident of the kind that occurred in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010 could have immediate adverse transboundary consequences on the Mediterranean economy and fragile marine and coastal ecosystems. It is likely that in the medium term other mineral resources contained in the deep sea, seabed and subsoil will be the subject of exploration and exploitation activities.

Failure to address effectively the risks emanating from such activities could gravely compromise the efforts of all the Member States having the obligation to take the necessary measures to achieve and maintain good environmental status in their marine waters in the Mediterranean, as required by the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. In addition, taking the necessary action would contribute to meeting the commitments and respecting the obligations into which Greece, Spain, France, Italy, Cyprus, Malta, Slovenia and the Union itself have entered as Contracting Parties of the Barcelona Convention.

The Council in its Conclusions on safety of offshore oil and gas activities, adopted on 3 December 2010, stated that the Union and its Member States should continue to play a prominent role in striving for the highest safety standards in the framework of international initiatives and fora and regional cooperation such as in the Mediterranean.

The European Parliament, in its resolution of 13 September 2011, stressed the importance of bringing fully into force the unratified Offshore Protocol, targeting protection against pollution resulting from exploration and exploitation

The Union should therefore accede to the Offshore Protocol as provided for in this Decision.

CONTENT: with this Decision, the accession of the European Union to the Protocol for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against pollution resulting from exploration and exploitation of the continental shelf and the seabed and its subsoil is hereby approved on behalf of the Union.

Main objectives of the Protocol: the Offshore Protocol covers a wide range of exploration and exploitation activities, permit requirements, removal of abandoned or disused installations, use and removal of harmful substances, liability and compensation requirements and coordination with other Parties of the Barcelona Convention at regional level.

Basic principles: from a technical point of view, the Parties to the Protocol shall take, individually or through bilateral or multilateral cooperation, all appropriate measures to **prevent, abate, combat and control pollution in the Protocol Area resulting from activities**, inter alia by ensuring that the best available techniques, environmentally effective and economically appropriate, are used for this purpose.

With a view to the application of these basic general principles, the Protocol provides for the following:

- all activities in the Protocol Area, including erection on site of installations, shall be subject to the prior written authorization for exploration or exploitation from the competent authority;
- the strict respect of the highest environmental standards and requirements by operators and of international standards regarding waste, as well as the use, the storage and the disposal of harmful or noxious substances and materials in order to reduce to a minimum the risk of pollution;
- **the application of safety measures**: to ensure that activities undertaken observe the highest possible safety standards with regard to the design, construction, placement, equipment, marking, operation and maintenance of installations;
- the operator has to ensure on the installations adequate equipment and devices, maintained in good working order, for protecting human life, preventing and combating accidental pollution and facilitating prompt response to an emergency;
- the drawing up of contingency plans ensuring that the parties can cooperate in combating accidental pollution in the Mediterranean by oil and other harmful substances and provide mutual assistance in cases of emergency;
- the undertaking of scientific and technological research for the purpose of developing new methods to reduce the risk of pollution in the Mediterranean;
- measures for liability and compensation in the event of damage to the marine environment.

Area covered: the geographical coverage of the Protocol is the Mediterranean Sea area as defined in the Barcelona Convention, including the continental shelf, the seabed and its subsoil.

Implementation: the provisions of the Offshore Protocol will need to be implemented by different levels of administration and economic operators. The Member States and their relevant competent authorities will be responsible for the design and implementation of certain detailed measures laid down in the Offshore Protocol, such as the establishment of a national monitoring system and the adoption and enforcement of appropriate rules and procedures for the determination of liability and compensation for damage.

ENTRY INTO FORCE: the Decision shall enter into force on 17 December 2012. The date of entry into force of the Offshore Protocol will be published in the Official Journal of the European Union by the General Secretariat of the Council.