



**DECLARATION OF THE MEETING OF THE MINISTERS OF THE COUNTRIES PARTICIPATING IN THE INITIATIVE FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE BLUE ECONOMY IN THE WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN**

Malta, 23 June 2023

We, the representatives of Algeria, France, Italy, Libya, Malta, Mauritania, Morocco, Portugal, Spain and Tunisia, in the presence of the Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries of the European Commission (EC) and the Secretary General of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) or their representatives:

**RECALLING**

1. the UN 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), in particular **SDG 13 (CLIMATE ACTION)** to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts, **SGD 14 (LIFE BELOW WATER)** to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development and **SDG 17 (PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS)** to strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development;
2. the **Paris Agreement** under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) as well as **the outcomes of the 27th UNFCCC Conference of the Parties, the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-5) Resolution 5/14 with the aim to conclude an ambitious international legally binding agreement to end plastic pollution, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity** targeting by 2030 to an effective conservation and management of at least 30% of the world's coastal and marine areas as well as to ensure at least 30% of degraded coastal and marine ecosystems are under effective restoration and the final conclusion on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2023 on an implementing agreement of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction;
3. other UN instruments aimed at protecting and restoring the marine environment in the Mediterranean such as the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (Barcelona Convention) with its Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development 2016-2025, the **Mediterranean Sea Emission Control Area for Sulphur Oxides and Particulate Matter (Med SOx ECA)**, adopted in the 79th session

of the International Maritime Organization's (IMO) Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC 79) on 15 December 2022, to further limit air pollution from ships, pursuant to Annex VI to the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL), the progress on exploring the possible designation of the Mediterranean Sea, as a whole, as an Emission Control Area for NO<sub>x</sub> as well as the **General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) 2030 Strategy for sustainable fisheries and aquaculture in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea;**

4. the **UfM Ministerial Declaration on the Blue Economy adopted in Brussels on 17 November 2015**, which invited participating countries to explore the added value and feasibility of appropriate maritime strategies, including at subregional level, and build on existing multilateral processes such as the 5+5 Dialogue and relevant UfM ministerial declarations;
5. the **2nd UfM Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Blue Economy adopted on 2 February 2021 and its related Roadmap for implementation**, which provides a renewed political commitment towards the sustainable management of the Mediterranean together with their efforts to recover from the Covid-19 crisis and to tackle the serious impacts of climate change and environmental degradation and reinforce the regional cooperation in the UFM region on Sustainable Blue Economy; as well as the agreed implementation roadmap as a concrete tool to achieve the Declaration's objectives<sup>1</sup>;
6. the relevant **UfM Ministerial Declarations on environment and climate** (4 October 2021) **and transport** (9 February 2023);
7. the will of the EU expressed and declared in the various communications of the European Commission relating to the preservation of the environment and to address global challenges related to climate change, with the aim of using diplomacy, trade and development cooperation to advance climate actions, and at establishing environment, energy and climate partnerships between the northern and southern countries of the Western Mediterranean, to help to advance and diversify their sustainable blue economies. Considering particularly the examples of the international dimension of the:
  - **European Green Deal** launched by the European Commission in 2019, including particularly the EU's Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and the Farm to Fork Strategy launched in 2020;
  - the **Joint Communication on the New Agenda for the Mediterranean**, adopted on 9 **February 2021**, which states that *the EU and its partners will work together to benefit from the growth in the green and digital transition, in line with the objectives set by the UfM sectoral dialogues, and integrating coherently the blue economy's potential in economic development planning*;<sup>2</sup>
  - the **EC Communication on a new approach for a Sustainable Blue Economy in the EU**, adopted on 17 May 2021, which aligns the Integrated maritime policy to the European Green Deal, and explicitly refers that the Commission will assist non-EU

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<sup>1</sup> [UfM Ministerial Declaration on SBE \(Feb 2021\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Joint Declaration Feb 2021](#)

- countries in advancing and diversifying their sustainable, inclusive and equitable blue economies;<sup>3</sup>
- the **Joint Communication on the EU's International Ocean Governance agenda** adopted on 24 June 2022, which promotes the EU partnerships and alliances with third countries, multilateral and regional organisations;
  - the **EC Communication on energy transition for the fisheries and aquaculture sectors** adopted on 21 February 2023, which promotes the energy transition in fisheries and aquaculture, in bilateral and multilateral cooperation with non-EU countries, including in the regional fisheries-management organisations;
  - the **Joint Communication on the updated of the EU Maritime Security Strategy and its Action Plan**, adopted on 10 March 2023, in particular actions dedicated to the Mediterranean sea-basin such as promoting and expanding regional maritime capacity-building activities, as well as enhancing the capabilities of like-minded Mediterranean partner countries developing training courses and facilitating the exchange of information, expertise and best practices to tackle illicit activities at sea (notably through the European Coast Guard Functions Forum (ECGFF)), and increasing coordination and synergies between existing operations in the Mediterranean.
  - the **EU Mission Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030**, and the launch of its Mediterranean Lighthouse, focused on actions to prevent, minimise and remediate litter and plastic pollution as well the **EU Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change and the EU Mission on Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities** for their relevant actions relating to coastal resilience and coastal cities, which can offer basin-wide effective solutions to shared and cross-border challenges through encouraging coordinated implementation and enhanced regional cooperation between Mediterranean riparian countries and coastal regions;
  - the European Council conclusions ECOFIN.2.A 14481/22 which underline on point 29) “the opportunities arising from the embedding of cooperation and cooperation actions into Investment for Jobs and Growth goal programs, together with the contribution of cohesion policy to the embedding of macro-regional and sea-basin strategies”;
8. the **WestMed Ministerial Declaration** adopted by the 10 participating Western Mediterranean countries on **30 November 2017 in Naples (Italy)** approving the governance and management structure for the implementation of the initiative for the sustainable development of the blue economy in the Western Mediterranean;
9. the **WestMed Ministerial Declaration** adopted by the 10 participating Western Mediterranean countries on 4 December **2018 in Algiers (Algeria)** adopting a roadmap with an identification of six joint priorities for action;<sup>4</sup>
10. the impacts of the general **geopolitical situation**, the resilience of maritime sectors, both for the recovery **post covid**, as well for the adaptation towards the accelerated decarbonization of the blue economy;

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<sup>3</sup> [SBE Communication May 2021](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Declaration-of-Algiers-04.12.2018-EN.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

11. the **EC REPORT on the implementation of the WestMed Initiative, adopted on 5 January 2023**, as per the EC Communication from April 2017 establishing the WestMed Framework for Action, and based on countries' reporting and the **Review Study** conducted for this purpose in 2022, which recommends:
  - reinforcing the communication, dissemination, and visibility of the initiative,
  - setting a clear system of performance indicators to better monitor and measure its achievements,
  - updating and streamlining the priorities;

## **TAKING INTO ACCOUNT**

the adverse and increasing impacts and socio-economic consequences of climate change on the Mediterranean Sea, marine life, human activities and coastal communities around the basin, including marine heatwaves, sea-level rise and extreme sea level events, combined with the geopolitical issues and their detrimental effect on energy and food supply and maritime security;

## **REAFFIRMING**

12. the WestMed initiative focuses on the Western Mediterranean region; following the cooperation under the Dialogue 5+5, in order to address the needs and priorities identified by consensus and shared by participating countries;
13. the initiative's actions will remain open to the interest of the whole Mediterranean Sea Basin, in synergy with the work of the UfM working group on Blue Economy, while acknowledging the need to take into account the priorities, needs and specific circumstances of each participating country and after prior agreement of the States parties to the initiative;
14. the Initiative's success depends on a collective effort on the part of participating countries and actors across the scale of multi-level governance as regional and local authorities, with technical and financial support from the European Commission and the contribution of the UfM Secretariat and other relevant regional organizations, networks and processes in the Mediterranean and the WestMED initiative;
15. the Initiative's need to coordinate policies and funds at national level, with local, regional, international and European funding and financial instruments, to support the implementation of the initiative and the achievement of its objectives.

## **WELCOMING**

16. the **successful role of the successive co-presidencies** of the WestMed Initiative (namely Algeria, France, Morocco, Italy, Libya, Malta, and Mauritania) as a solid foundation for regular cooperation between Western Mediterranean countries on developing a sustainable blue economy;
17. the **efforts and achievements** of the WestMed Steering Committee during the five years of deployment and development of this Initiative as a model of regional cooperation and soft diplomacy, and thanking the European Commission and the UfM Secretariat for their support;

18. the advancements in the WestMed countries on the elaboration of **national blue economy strategies and the use of maritime spatial planning (MSP) as well as the development of national maritime clusters**;
19. **the contribution of the various observers and stakeholders** to the work of the WestMed Steering Committee: FAO, UNEP Mediterranean Action Plan - MAP, Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission – IOC, UNESCO, European Economic and Social Committee, European Committee of the Regions, Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions – CPMR and its Inter-Mediterranean Commission; Association of the Mediterranean Chambers of Commerce and Industry – ASCAME (with which an MoU has been signed);
20. the efforts made by managing authorities of cross-border and transnational **INTERREG programmes, as well as territorial and regional development programmes**, in order to embed WestMed priorities in those of their programming for the period 2021-2027,
21. the European Parliament resolution of 9 May 2023 on the role of cohesion policy in addressing multidimensional environmental challenges in the Mediterranean basin, welcoming the WestMed Initiative as a good example of direct and diversified cooperation, including at regional level, with shared objectives
22. the **work conducted by the WestMed Assistance Mechanism** (both at a central level and through the national hubs deployed in the participating countries);
23. The deployment and development of:
  - i. a **Technical Group on Green Shipping** in 2020, to support the adaptation of vessels and their transitioning towards fully sustainable sources of fuel/energy, and the transformation of green ports into “circular hubs” for sustainable energy production and consumption;
  - ii. a **Technical Group on aquaculture** – Aquawest – in 2021, to support the adoption of innovative, eco-compatible sustainable and restorative aquaculture practices, and the needs and opportunities of the Southern countries to benefit from it;
  - iii. an **Alliance of Maritime Clusters**, in 2021, to accelerate cooperation and joint actions under intersectoral dialogue, to boost the development of southern clusters (according to the Malta roadmap adopted in 2022), to upgrade management skills, and to provide a platform for investments in innovative SMEs through initiatives such as the MedBAN project;
  - iv. a **Community of Practice on Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) in the MED**, in 2023, to establish a permanent dialogue across borders between experts on MSP, and to exchange knowledge and relevant experiences in the region;
24. the **progress on cooperation on sustainable Coastal Tourism** as a shared priority sector and a cross-cutting matter, as the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) calls for flagship projects on Tourism.
25. the **discussions on Blue Skills** as a common and cross-cutting topic for collaboration, following the hackathons for project development, stakeholder conferences and dedicated events.

26. the share of expertise and best practices within the E-fishmed project, coordinated by the European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA) and building on the inspection and control training, on the fight against Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing and through the creation of a North-South training network under the Fight against IUU Fishing Regional Academy (FIUUFRA) project;
27. the outcomes of the thematic discussions in the **Stakeholder Conferences held in Rome in November 2021 and in Malta in June 2023,**
28. **The results of the Hackathons held in Palermo in 2019 and in Malta in 2022,** to facilitate the **exchange of ideas and proposals, with the aim to promote concrete projects development** among stakeholders in the region operating in the maritime sector;
29. the **achievements in terms of projects** as tangible results of cooperation for soft diplomacy, with 161 awarded projects aligned to the WestMed priorities gathering around 600 stakeholders/partners involved according to the Maritime Datahub, and 39 of them directly supported by the WestMed Assistance Mechanism, worth more than 50 million Euro from 2019 to 2023 with also the WestMED Project Awards created in 2021;
30. the efforts and achievements of the European Commission, UfM, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and European Investment Bank (EIB), to set up the “Blue Mediterranean Partnership” (BMP) launched at the CoP27 to leverage sustainable blue economy investments in the non-EU countries of the Mediterranean region, focusing on the Southern Neighbourhood

**JOINTLY COMMIT TO:**

streamlining the priorities stated in the WestMed Framework for Action, supported by the WestMED initiative, based on regional and international common challenges, in particular with regards to their contribution to develop sustainable, resilient, decarbonized and circular blue economy, to address climate change and to adapt to its effects as well as to halt and reverse marine biodiversity loss with:

- I. Continuing the development of the following activities:
  - a. **Sustainable production and consumption** and particularly through supporting:
    - i. The transition of **Maritime Transport, Green shipping, and Ports** towards carbon-neutrality and zero emission and ports as hubs for energy;
    - ii. Innovative and restorative **aquaculture and fisheries**
    - iii. Coastal and maritime eco-**Tourism**
  - b. **Maritime Clusters**
  - c. **Blue Skills and Jobs** with upskilling and reskilling of the workforce to meet the demands of new jobs and technologies, facilitating the process of mutual

recognition of qualifications to increase the cross-border mobility of workers in blue economy sectors as well as ensuring the promotion of maritime professions;

- d. **Ocean Literacy and Youth** with strengthening the involvement of the public, and in particular young people, in favour of the Mediterranean through education, knowledge development and awareness-raising actions on the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of resources;
  
- e. **Promoting Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP)** as a cross-cutting tool, including a key link with Integrated Coastal Zones Management (ICZM), built on an ecosystem-based management approach, to contribute to developing national blue economy strategies with sustainable Blue Economy Sectors, the sustainable use of marine resources and the conservation of healthy marine ecosystems and biodiversity, considering MSP main characteristics: ecosystem-based, area-based, integrated, adaptive, strategic and participatory; while supporting the achievement of conservation and restoration targets, mitigating and minimising the harmful impacts of human activities in coastal areas and offshore;

II. Also prioritising the work on:

- a) **Decarbonisation of the Blue Economy, and importantly Boosting the Marine Renewable Energy Sectors** in view of its critical contribution to meeting the reduction targets in greenhouse gas emissions and in combatting climate change and for which the sharing of best practices between the actors of the initiatives should be encouraged;
  
- b) **Stepping up efforts to tackle air and marine pollution**, with a specific focus on marine litter, including on macro and micro plastics;
  
- c) **Increasing ambition for preserving marine and coastal biodiversity in the Mediterranean** through, in particular, supporting a comprehensive and coherent network of well-managed and ecologically representative marine protected areas, including the transboundary dimension through cooperation experiences and good practices across countries, local and regional authorities and the integration into sectoral policies;
  
- d) **Promote training and technology transfer** in the initiative's fields of activity;
  
- e) **Developing coastal resilience solutions and early warning systems** to face and adapt to the climate change effects and mitigate maritime hazards by means of natural and nature-based solutions, which can become a new sector of the blue economy;
  
- f) **Maritime security and surveillance as a pre-condition for a prosperous and sustainable blue economy in the Mediterranean**, with the support of cooperation actions such as the Mediterranean Coast Guard Function Forum.



31. working with the WestMed Assistance Mechanism to develop these priorities, and particularly:

- I. raising awareness and enhancing visibility through a communication and branding strategy;
- II. refining performance metrics and defining measurable, achievable and relevant specific indicators to better monitor the implementation of the Initiative;
- III. further involve the regional and national levels in the implementation of WestMed cooperation projects;

32. considering as enablers or facilitators:

- I. **Research, innovation and smart digitalisation**, with reference to the initiatives under **Horizon Europe including the EU Mission Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030<sup>5</sup>, For Adaptation to Climate Change, Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030** and the **European Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership<sup>6</sup>**. Considering also that innovation is expected to be promoted all over the implementation period by all INTERREG programmes 2021-2027 re-using, adapting and taking stock of emerging results and consolidated outputs, also from the previous programming period; that inter-programme coordination is to be further promoted and extended to new policy areas and, finally, that reinforcing links amongst INTERREG programmes and with regional EU funded programmes can result in enlarging innovations' scope and impact;
- II. **Funding**
  - Considering the opportunities of the Blue Mediterranean Partnership launched by UfM and financial institutions (EBRD and EIB), with the support of the European Commission;
  - And taking into account the embedding process of WestMED priorities into the programming exercise: namely of the territorial cooperation INTERREG programmes, but also within the Neighbourhood Policy funds (Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), Regional and National NDICI (Multiannual Indicative for non-EU countries, considering Blue Economy beside green transition), or the dedicated Blue Economy project developed in Algeria. But also, the cohesion policy funds, and particularly the EMFAF, adding specific considerations for SBE beyond fisheries through the programming for EU Countries, but also financing actions on support to Southern countries, such as the recent calls for flagship projects or blue careers, the assistance mechanism in support of the Sea Basin Strategies; the E-fishmed project on a virtual academy on inspection and control for fisheries, managed by EFCA, or even the Sustainable Fisheries Partnerships Agreements with Morocco and Mauritania. The embedding of the WestMED priorities into INTERREG

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<sup>5</sup> [https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-09/ocean\\_and\\_waters\\_implementation\\_plan\\_for\\_publication.pdf](https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-09/ocean_and_waters_implementation_plan_for_publication.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> A Horizon Europe initiative co-funded by 25 among Member States and Associated Countries and the European Commission that together will mobilize 450 M€ investments over 7 years to support the implementation of transnational R&I



programmes is largely acknowledged as an added value for long term cooperation. It can be further developed by promoting international calls for proposals funded by EU national and regional authorities. In line with the EU regulations, these calls for proposals can address emerging WestMed cooperation areas extending synergies and complementarities among funding programmes.

33. Continuing and intensifying cooperation efforts for the implementation and success of the WestMed initiative, in partnership with the European Commission and the UfM Secretariat, alongside key territorial actors such as regional and local authorities or networks thereof, and the Mediterranean Cooperation Alliance (MedCoopAlliance), with a view to carrying out the projects identified under this Initiative and ensuring their added value and territorial impact;
34. Strengthening the link with regional and local authorities to keep building the initiative together, and reinforce its direct impacts on the ground activating the added value of multi-level governance, aligned with territorial needs;
35. Working assiduously to achieve the three goals of the WestMed initiative set in order to **1) provide a safer and more secure maritime space; 2) achieve a smarter and more resilient blue economy; 3) promote better governance of the sea**, while tackling climate change, biodiversity loss and reducing pollution aiming at improving the quality of life of people living in the WestMed region and beyond;
36. Ensuring the implementation of the priority actions<sup>7</sup>, through the various thematic work strands and identifying tangible and achievable projects and cooperative initiatives;
37. Coordinating the human and material resources required to carry out the actions defined and the projects identified;
38. Ensuring that all deliverables with current priority areas encompassing multi-stakeholder, transnational and cross-sectorial actions which will target all pillars of sustainable development.
39. Cooperate within the framework of the Barcelona Convention for the protection of the marine environment and coastal regions of the Mediterranean, and its Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development within the framework of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
40. Working towards the implementation of the Blue Mediterranean Partnership with the aim to maximize the participation in the Partnership of new stakeholders and to accelerate the preparation of bankable sustainable projects in the blue economy

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<sup>7</sup> ROADMAP FOR THE WESTMED INITIATIVE- 6 Common priorities for action to be developed in the framework of the WestMED initiative: *Maritime safety and the fight against marine pollution; Maritime cluster development; Skills development and circulation; Sustainable consumption and production; Biodiversity and marine habitat conservation and restoration; Development of coastal communities and sustainable fisheries and aquaculture*

**CALL FOR**

41. Synergies with other Sea Basin Strategies (namely the Atlantic Strategy and the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea), **welcoming the new approach for a coordinated technical assistance covering the three Sea Basin Strategies set up at the end of 2022;**
42. **Under the Mediterranean Sea Basin, reinforce the collaboration with UNEP/MAP Barcelona Convention and its Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD) as well as with EUSAIR,** as the macro regional strategy in the Adriatic-Ionian region with a strong maritime component through its pillars, especially Pillar 1 devoted to blue growth and Pillar 3, devoted to environmental quality;
43. Technical and technological support for the Southern shore countries for a transition towards a sustainable and viable maritime economy and the mastery of value chains;
44. Improved capacity building, in particular in terms of personnel working in the open sea, technologies and fishing techniques that respect marine ecosystems, maritime safety and trainers in marine and inland aquaculture.
45. **All stakeholders to engage on a voluntary basis with EU Missions Restore our Ocean and Waters and Adaptation for Climate Change, as well as the EU Mission on Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities** and join efforts to deliver on the Missions' objectives by joining with concrete actions to the Missions' Charters; and similarly, to participate in the recently launched Energy Transition Partnership for Fisheries and Aquaculture.
46. In addition to Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA), consider added value of cooperation with multilateral research and innovation partnerships, such as the European Biodiversity, European Sustainable Blue Economy and European Water4All co-funded partnerships under Horizon Europe.

**THANK** the Maltese-Mauritanian co-presidency for its hosting and excellent organization of the third ministerial meeting on the sustainable development of the blue economy in the Western Mediterranean.