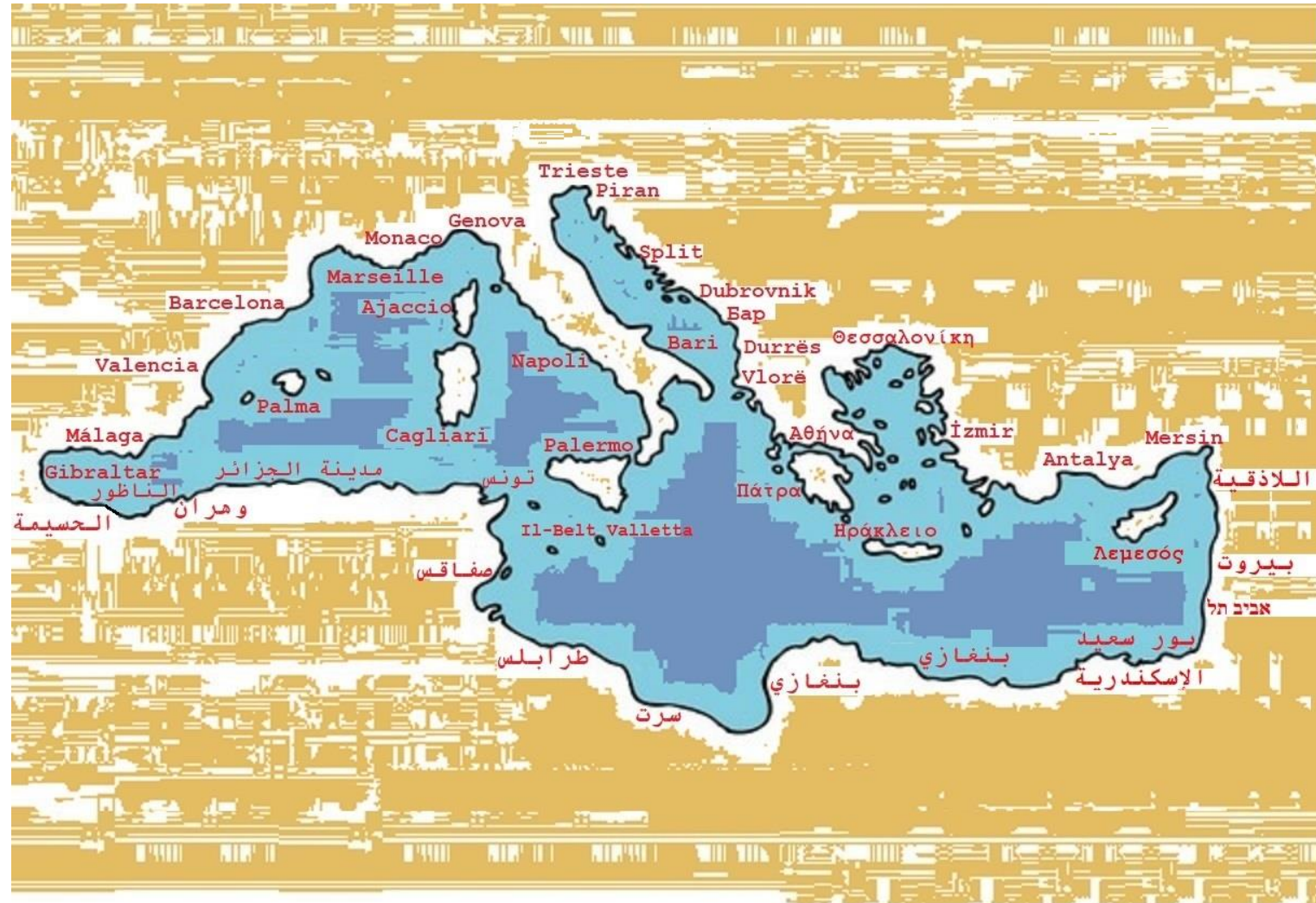


28 – 29 May 2024

ROME | BOTANICAL GARDEN

Mediterranean Sea

1st Subregional Meeting
on Environmental Assessments
in a Transboundary Context



Introduction

The joint Meetings of the Parties to the Espoo Convention and the Kyiv Protocol, with decision IX/2-V/2 (ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/2023/1), adopted on December 2023 the workplan for 2024–2026.

In the chapter III on *Promoting practical application of the Convention and the Protocol*, three subregional meetings on cooperation are foreseen in the Mediterranean region:

- (a) Italy (Rome, 2024);
- (b) Slovenia (Portoroz, 2025);
- (c) Greece (Athens, 2026).

The Mediterranean area represents a particularly fragile environment under global changes and environmental transformations. It is also a biodiversity hotspot. The importance and fragility of the Mediterranean area coexist with socio-economic transformations and interests, making the challenge of its preservation even harder.

Consequently, it is necessary to improve all tools and international cooperation to streamline environmental impact assessments in transboundary contexts.

The UNECE Espoo Convention and Kyiv Protocol are the most powerful instruments of International Environmental Law. There is a strong connection between different regions, which should be considered in environmental assessments, between neighbouring countries or functionally connected regions.

Meeting Goals

- Improve cooperation in the Mediterranean area with the aim of enhancing and streamlining environmental impact assessment (EIA) and strategic environmental assessment (SEA) capacity and effectiveness.
- Underline the importance of Marine environments and consequently of the marine spatial planning, even considering the ongoing climate changes effects as fundamental topics in the transboundary cooperation context.
- Exchange expertise among different countries for environmental protection, ensuring homogeneity of protocols to streamline environmental impact assessments and strategic environmental assessment.
- Encourage member states to share information and notifications before the approval of plans and projects to avoid unforeseen impacts and share responsibilities in environmental management.
- Build capacities and cooperation among Espoo focal points of Mediterranean countries and the representatives of other countries that are not yet Parties to the Espoo Convention and its Protocol.
- Enhance communication and efficiency through new channels and media: convey that, beyond the law, cooperation in environmental impact assessment and strategic environmental assessment involves real cases that directly affect our lives and territories.

Opening of the Meeting

Fabio Attorre, Director of the Botanical Garden, welcomed the guest and underline the importance of the management of transboundary protected areas, a challenge also to protect the biodiversity and establish link between different culture.

The Italian Minister of the Environment and Energy Security, Gilberto Pichetto Fratin introduced the meeting, welcoming all the participants and stressing the importance of this 1st sub-regional meeting for the Mediterranean area.

The Minister underlined the importance of discussing the Espoo Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context and its Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessments in collaboration with the Secretariat of the UNEP/MAP Barcelona Convention as powerful international tools to face the three major environmental crises in the Mediterranean area: climate, biodiversity and pollution.

The Minister enhanced the importance of transboundary consultations in environmental impact assessment to promote sustainable development, achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Welcoming remarks

Fabio Tancredi, Deputy Head of Cabinet of the Minister of the Environment and Energy Security, stated that the only possible response to three no border major environmental crises - climate, biodiversity and pollution - is a global response, based on effective cooperation and intense institutional dialogue. From this perspective, transboundary environmental assessments are key tools to ensure that projects, plans and programs can encourage innovation and economic development while protecting the environment.

Laura D'Aprile, Head of the Sustainable Development Department (DiSS), highlighted the importance to develop tools to face the consequences of the environmental crisis. The evaluations of plans, programmes and projects allow the integration of the various environmental aspects. The Mediterranean Sea is rich in biodiversity resources but particularly fragile with respect to the pressure that can influence the environment. For this reason, initiatives like today one allow to raise awareness of the available tools to promote sustainable development.

Welcoming remarks

Nicholas Bonvoisin, Chief of the Operational Activities & Review Section of UNECE, underlined the cross-sectorial provisions of the Convention and the Protocol: while the Convention applies at the project stage, the Protocol intervenes earlier in the decision-making process, targeting government plans and programmes and in some cases policies, strategies and legislation.

They apply to a broad range of activities that concern the sea. The offshore renewable energy, for instance, or the construction of pipelines and high-voltage powerlines. Or, in the field of plans and programmes, maritime spatial plans. The treaties offer provisions on protection of the marine environment and on cooperation in marine areas.

To promote practical application, the Convention and the Protocol provide a wealth of practical experience on environmental assessments in a transboundary context. Just to give an idea, between 2019 and 2021, based on the reviews of implementation of the treaties, there were 178 transboundary procedures carried out under the Espoo Convention and 136 transboundary procedures under the Protocol. This means that there is a wealth of insights, challenges and good practices, including from other seas, that countries can share. Examples can be very practical: how to arrange for translation practices or timeframes for consultations, for instance.

Welcoming remarks

Ilias Mavroiedis, UNEP/MAP – Secretariat of the Barcelona Convention, said that EIA is in the heart of Barcelona convention and that specific provision on environmental impact assessments are stipulated in protocols of the Barcelona Convention. Aspect of the EIA and SEA are also incorporated in the more specific plans that put into action the different protocols, for example:

- the Common Regional Framework for ICZM adopted by COP 21 (Naples, Italy, December 2019), whose guidelines on the procedures for notification for environmental assessment in a transboundary context, exchange of information and consultation among the Mediterranean States, have been prepared and are used for training purposes;
- the Conceptual Framework for Implementing Marine Spatial Planning in the Mediterranean adopted by COP 23 (Portoroz, Slovenia, December 2023), stressing that starting the MSP process includes initiating the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) process with iterative links to the following stages of the MSP process;
- the Offshore Protocol (Offshore exploration and exploitation) and its Guidelines on Environmental Impact Assessment for Offshore Activities, adopted by COP 22 of the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols (Antalya, Turkey, December 2021).

Agenda of the meeting

Anna Maria Maggiore, General Directorate for Impact Assessment – MASE and Vice Chair of the Espoo Convention Working Group, presented the agenda of the two days event.

Framing for the sub-regional meeting

Valentina Paderi, Secretariat of the Espoo Convention/SEA Protocol-UNECE. presented the latest activities on cooperation in marine regions and the focus areas for future cooperation with the implementation steps. Starting from the Decision of the Meetings of the Parties on cooperation in marine regions (December 2023), she described the future activities for 2024-2026, specifically for Baltic and Mediterranean regions. Enhancing the importance of synergies and coordination with relevant activities of regional sea conventions and bodies through the different governance levels, she described the possible instrument and she invited to strengthen links between Parties' relevant bilateral capacity-building, giving an example of assistance by Parties' environmental and development agencies in ECE region and beyond specific activities.

IAIA 25 Global Conference announcement

Giuseppe Magro, Chief of the International Association for Impact Assessment – Italy, announced the next IAIA conference “IMPACT ASSESSMENT IN THE AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE”, which will be held in Bologna in May 2025

Session 1

Cooperation in Marine Regions

Vesna Kolar Planinšič, Vice-Chair of the Espoo Convention Bureau, moderated the session underlining the importance of synergies between all the Conventions to reduce and mitigate the environmental impacts for new programmes and projects and to assess cumulative effects before the adoption of decisions in the Mediterranean area.

“The favorable state of Mediterranean and other seas is our common responsibility and therefore the cooperation of all Conventions is crucial to achieve this goal”, said Vesna. “We share the same aims, we are interlinked and synergistic conventions, using each different tools and responsibilities.”

The session compare four Convention: HELCOM, OSPAR, Bucharest and Teheran, two experience from the Secretariat of the Barcelona Convention and one of its focal point: INFO/RAC. The aim is to Explore possibilities to straighten further cooperation, the possibilities for synergies of actions, the current practice and good case implementation and to build capacities and cooperation between responsible bodies and implementation focal points.

Session 1

Cooperation in Marine Regions

Dorota Toryfter-Szumańska, Espoo/Kyiv National Focal Point of Poland, presented the achievements of the 20 years experience of the Baltic Sea Countries cooperation (all of them are party to the HELCOM Convention), but also the particular difficulties which persist in the Baltic Sea.

Among the challenges Dorota underlined the need to exchange of expertise among the different countries for the environmental protection, considering their different legal systems to streamline the environmental impact assessments.

Philip Stamp, Secretariat of the OSPAR Convention, exposed the achievements of the OSPAR Convention, underlining its role in supporting the realization of Environmental Assessments and giving high priority to understand cumulative effects especially in the contexts of priority interventions, such as the renewable energies projects.

Iryna Makarenko, Secretariat of the BUCHAREST Convention, presented the achievements of the Bucharest Convention, emphasizing the particular attention which must be dedicated to the Black Sea environment, endangered even due to the actual political conflicts. She underlined the strong environmental and geographical connection.

Session 1

Cooperation in Marine Regions

Kristina Russik, Secretariat of the TEHERAN Convention, presented the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea giving an overview of the EIA Protocol that shall be applied to the marine environment, taking into account its water level fluctuations and pollution from land-based sources.

Ilias Mavroiedis, presented the achievements of the Barcelona Convention, focusing on the feasibility study of the application of EIA/SEA in the context of the Convention and its Protocols, proposing a methodology for the adoption of the transboundary EIA/SEA by all Mediterranean countries. Moreover, he presented the good practice of the pilot transboundary CAMP Otranto project between Italy and Albania.

A. Pasquale and A. Minelli, UNEP/MAP - INFO/RAC, highlighted the importance of collecting, harmonising and sharing environmental data to support the decision-makers in the environmental authorisations, providing some advices to streamline the data availability.

Session 1

Follow up action

- Enhance synergies and coordination with relevant activities of regional sea conventions and other administrative levels, such as national and bilateral rules and agreements.
- Take advantage of experiences and good practices from other sea protocols to empower Mediterranean subgroup actions.
- Create dedicated webpages on the Espoo Convention, linking to regional sea conventions and other cooperation information and rules in marine regions.
- Improve legislative assistance and capacity-building support to Mediterranean countries to align legislation and practice with the Espoo Convention and other protocols.
- Assess the potential roles of Artificial Intelligence in society, particularly in Environmental Impact Assessment, across different phases of data collection and analysis.
- Provide new data from research and produce datasets through thematic assessments of different environmental components, culminating in a synthesis report on the state of the Mediterranean area and the impacts of plans and programmes and projects. Emphasize the importance of data sharing reuse, and accessibility in the context of the Barcelona and Espoo Conventions, especially at the subgroup levels.

Session 1

Follow up action

- Create a Mediterranean family of Espoo countries, following the good practices of other sub-groups.
- Enhance cooperation among research institutes, researchers, and technicians in neighbouring countries within the Mediterranean Sea framework.
- Update the “Draft Guidelines for Environmental Assessment in Transboundary Contexts” on procedures for notification, exchange of information, and consultation among Mediterranean States, referring to the existing legal framework.
- Enhance the role of the Barcelona and Espoo Conventions in marine spatial planning, especially for wind energy, a relatively new topic in the Mediterranean area.
- Develop new solutions to minimize the potential cumulative impacts of plans, programs, and projects. One ongoing example is the sharing of data internationally through the *Kmap* platform.
- Involve transboundary cooperation even among non-Espoo countries in the Mediterranean area.

Final remarks and wrap up

Gianluigi Nocco, General Director of Environmental Assessment Directorate (DVA), joined in the thanks that the Minister wanted to give at the start of the meeting to all those who collaborated for its success.

Initiatives such as those presented, which have made it possible to favor or improve cooperation between countries bordering the same sea, help us to achieve the objectives of environmental protection and sustainable development as communities living together in the same region.

Our Ministry has always placed the promotion of environmental issues and public awareness at the center. We have developed an advanced, easily accessible, and user-friendly Environmental Assessments and Authorizations Portal where all the documentation related to the different stages of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is published.

After the Portal, the Charter of Principles for Transparency and Participation in Environmental Assessments was developed. Finally, we pay special attention to transparency and communication with the public. Hence, several explanatory videos on Environmental assessments processes were produced and made available on Youtube.

Session 2

Examples of sub-regional cooperation

Dorota Toryfter-Szumańska, Chair of the Espoo Convention Working Group, moderated the session focused on practical arrangements and practical implementation of the Espoo Convention and its Protocol. Just as we differs from each other, so do our legal framework, we need a common framework, procedures, bilateral arrangements or practical arrangement for our future cooperation. *“I see and I believe that we meet today as environmental enthusiasts who deep care about the future of our common good, common ecosystem: the sea.”*

Slavitza Dobрева De Schietere, European Commission - DG ENV, underlined the necessity of involving new strategic emergencies in the environmental assessment practises, such as renewable energies plans and projects, and Critical Raw Materials, in its distinctive productive phases. Regarding public involvement, a good practice could be the creation of access points dedicated to the people without available internet connections, extending by this way, the public consultation possibilities in the environmental assessments.

Session 2

Examples of sub-regional cooperation

M. Do Carmo Figueira, Espoo/Kyiv National Focal Point of Portugal, and V. Estevez Adan, Espoo/Kyiv National Focal Point of Spain, presented an example of cooperation between Portugal and Spain, evidencing the importance of notifying other countries, as soon as possible, to mitigate potential environmental impacts and strengthen interstate cohesion.

Ana Cristina Costa, General-Directorate for Natural Resources, Safety and Maritime Services of Portugal, presented examples of cooperation in The North-East Atlantic and Macaronesian Region for Marine Spatial Planning and the monitoring of Marine Biodiversity.

Ergis Tafalla, Espoo/Kyiv National Focal Point of Albania, presented a good practice of cooperation between Albania and Montenegro on the EIA applied to small hydropower plants. Brankica Cmiljanović, Espoo/Kyiv National Focal Point of Montenegro, exposed an example of cooperation between Montenegro and Albania, a non-Espoo case study.

Session 2

Follow-up Actions

- Reduce discrepancies and inefficiencies among neighbouring countries by incorporating EIA and SEA-related provisions into Regional Environmental Conventions or developing bilateral agreements.
- Improve the efficiency and sustainability of renewable energy plans and projects through specific environmental impact assessment frameworks and tools (e.g., regional working groups).
- Collaborate in assessing how to better consider climate change-related impacts in assessments. Countries are encouraged to follow European Commission guidance for large scale projects.
- Create access points for people without internet access, thus extending the accessibility to public consultations on environmental impact assessments.
- Make documents on transboundary environmental effects available in the languages of the interested parties to facilitate public participation.
- Promote scientific knowledge of offshore marine ecosystems.

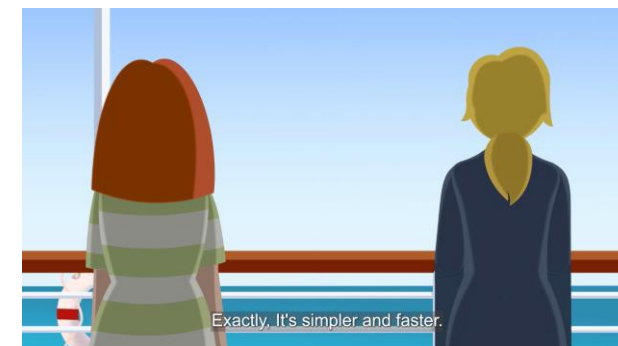
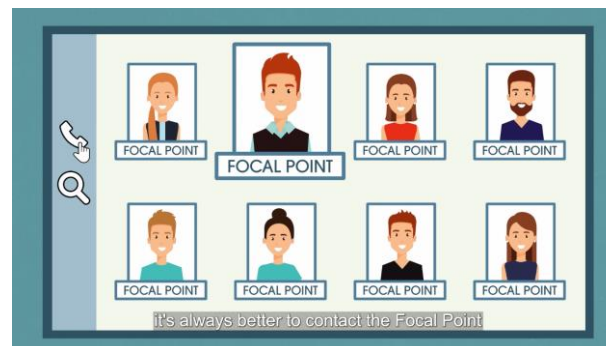
Session 3

EIA/SEA Case Studies

Anna Maria Maggiore, Vice-Chair of the Espoo Convention Working Group, moderated the session, stressing the importance of practical examples of cooperation in marine areas and in the Mediterranean region, which involves both Espoo and non-Espoo countries. She underlined that Italy has strongly supported the initiative of holding subregional meetings to exchange information and best practices on transboundary EIAs and SEAs in the Mediterranean Sea.

She also emphasizes the importance of transparency and participation, following the Aarhus Convention *Principia*, which should be ensured, even using new communication media.

For this purpose, an informative Video on EIA/SEA transboundary consultations, realized by the Italian General Directorate on Environmental Assessment was projected.



Session 3

EIA/SEA Case Studies

Christian Melis, OSCE - Economic and Environmental Activities, presented the role of the OSCE in the cooperation activities in support of EIA/SEA through:

- the realization of the “Espoo Convention and Protocol on SEA Selected elements in pictures”, an informative drawing set to explain the functioning and benefits of SEA and the realization of informative brochures and videos on the SEA process, to support the greening economies.
- The participation in consultative meetings and its support role in the application of EIA and SEA in the South-Eastern Europe countries.
- The establishment of the Aarhus Centre, coordinated by the OSCE, to promote and implement the Aarhus Convention, ensuring the participatory process for environment and energy.

Marta Truszevska, General Directorate for Environmental Protection – EIA Department of Poland, presented the achievements of the Polish Marine Spatial Plan, focusing on the assessment of offshore wind farm projects. This incorporates different cumulative impacts, such as the effects on birdlife and provides effective mitigation measures.

Session 3

EIA/SEA Case Studies

Hassen Agrebi, Agence Nationale pour la Maîtrise de l'Energie of Tunisia, presented the case study of “ELMED”, a strategic project for electricity connection between Europe (Italy) and North Africa (Tunisia) to achieve an increasingly safe, sustainable and renewable energy. The project considered mitigation actions for different environmental components, such as for the *Posidonia* meadows.

Theodora Iannou, Espoo/Kyiv National Focal Point of Cyprus, presented several transboundary EIA/SEA Case studies from Cyprus marine areas in energy projects, an EIA scoping for the “EuroAfrica Interconnector”, and several impact assessments of the Fiber Optics Subsea Cables. She highlighted the importance of an Environmental Baseline Survey for all marine projects.

Vesna Kolar Planinšič, Espoo/Kyiv National Focal Point of Slovenia, exposed the transboundary SEA applied to the Maritime Spatial Plan in the Adriatic Sea as a good practice example of transboundary consultation between Slovenia, Italy and Croatia. The intervention highlights the necessity of cooperation in sea area planning, involving the public and reducing conflicts.

Leonora d'Amato, Espoo/Kyiv National Focal Point of Malta, presented the case study of the Malta-Italy pipeline EU PCI, a cooperation process that resulted in the adoption of stringent mitigation measures and pre-emptive safeguards.

Session 3

Follow-up Actions

- Find ways to enhance the application of the Barcelona and Espoo conventions, extending to new countries the participation.
- Incorporate the good practices and expertise of the marine spatial planning of the Baltic Sea in the Mediterranean area, especially as regards the wind farms, their cumulative effects on the biosphere and the possible mitigation actions.
- Expand the cases in which the EIA and SEA processes could be applied, to enhance the transparency and sustainability of plans and projects.
- Implement an Environmental Baseline Survey (EBS) in all marine projects, as a prerequisite to facilitate the monitoring of environmental impacts on sensitive species (such as marine mammals).
- Integrate the Do Not Significant Harms (DNSH) principles and the Climate Proofing in the EIA and SEA procedures.

Closing of the Meeting

Anna Maria Maggiore asks Alexandros Koulidis , Espoo National Focal Point of Greece, for starting giving some consideration that could conduct us toward the closing of the meeting.

Alexandros Koulidis summarize the opportunity that we have had to reflect on two level: long standing environmental challenges and more pressing recent issues.

We need to coordinate and streamline international organizations actions and procedures.

Marine environment is unify despite borders on maps: we need to build capacity where it is most needed and at the same time take action to raise awareness about the necessity and the benefits of sharing a well protected and properly managed marine environment.

Two aspects are the most challenging: marine spatial planning and climate change.

More efforts to enhance this type of cooperation between neighbouring countries: the tool are on the table but we have to find ways to better use it. Strengthen and expand the cases where EIA and SEA is necessary.

Requirements of Barcelona and Espoo/Kyiv Conventions are on the table and we should find the way to better utilize the synergy between these two Treaty and gain efficient, transparent and widely accepted assessments.

We can create conditions for win-win situations . Willingness to cooperate, confidence to the procedures and trust to our neighbours: these three ingredients are needed to promote in an efficient and in a mutually beneficial way the cooperation on our common sea.

Closing of the Meeting

Alice Giallombardo moderate a **round table** starting from the actions set out in the document at the base of the meeting and as follow up of the three sessions of the meeting guided by four questions:

1. Building on the set of follow-up actions agreed upon during last MOP, from which action implemented would your country benefit the most? What should the next subregional meeting focus on?
2. What kind of issues do you encounter more often when you take steps in setting up arrangements to implement the relevant provision of the Espoo Convention and its Protocol for transboundary EIAs and SEAs?
3. What kind of capacity building actions does your country need or is willing to offer to other (neighbouring) countries in the same marine region? How is your country taking steps to set up international cooperation in this regard?
4. What international, regional and intergovernmental organizations would you like to create synergies with in order to ensure projects, plans and programmes in all marine regions are environmentally sustainable? Which best practice can you share in this regard?

Closing of the Meeting

In the round table intervened:

Aysun Boşça from Turkey stressing the importance to deepen the issues of SEA and MSP;

Theodora Iohannou from Cyprus underlining the significance of transboundary assessment in the Mediterranean with no common legal basis;

Mehdi Khnissi from France asking to share documents on practical way to operate in agreements for transboundary consultations;

Hassen Agrebi from Tunisia calling for technical assistance on energy transition and offshore projects explain convergence between;

Anna Maria Maggiore from Italy suggesting sharing information on ways to integrate new type of assessment (DNSH, climate proofing) in EIA and SEA;

Farida Taous Moulai from Algeria requiring an in-depth analysis of the issues of public participation and the integration of sustainable development in environmental assessments.

Closing of the Meeting

Vesna Kolar Planinšič concluded the two days work summarizing the principal aspect emerged.

The fact that maritime environment is not limited by national borders but is a common space is a crucial reason that gives importance at the cooperation in marine region. There is a high potential for synergies among Espoo Convention, SEA Protocol as well as Maritime spatial planning, specifically with the Barcelona Convention Integrated Coastal Zone Management Protocol.

The method and the lesson learned, exchanging from other maritime convention are very useful, and we should further work on it. Also cooperation in marine regions, mostly in sub regional level is important and should be developed from local to regional and sub regional level. Sometimes information are missing but cooperating together we can strength our power. In this two day we have created also very interesting network among governments and organizations in applying SEA and EIA on concrete plans and project which are affecting the Mediterranean. We saw that:

- the quality is a challenge in SEA and EIA and it's essential for very effective procedures;
- good cooperation is needed to adverse transboundary effect to evaluate how to mitigate them and how to include them into the planning decision and final decision on willing.

Closing of the Meeting

Moreover we saw:

- a number of experienced organizations which are active on the field and that have a great potential to further work together in a coordinated approach, streamlining focused actions and procedures;
- the importance of encouraging this competent organizations and the challenge to combine their actions to achieve good result working further on this;
- that we have an effective network to build own capacity where there is most needed and take common actions to raise awareness, to share benefit, to protect and properly management marine environment;
- good understanding and willingness to cooperate and trust the main point. This is also why this event is very important. People know each other and understand knowledge and talk about the issues is the most important fact for the beginning.

Vesna invited all the participants at the next meeting 2025 on May in Portoroz.

1st Subregional Meeting on Environmental Assessments in a Transboundary Context

Mediterranean Sea

Key messages on the way forward

- Encourage regular information exchange between the competent authorities of concerned countries and facilitate the engagement of the public through consultations at the earliest stage possible and the timely translation of the relevant documentation.
- Promote capacity building activities and technical assistance for countries that are not yet Parties to the Espoo Convention and its Protocol, particularly in the context of energy transition.
- Strengthen international cooperation also by concluding Memoranda of Understanding between countries of the region that are interested in harmonizing their national legislations on EIAs and SEAs and simplify procedures for transboundary consultations.
- Elaborate new - and widely spread existing - guidelines on conducting transboundary EIAs and SEAs to limit technical issues and delays.
- Build on the synergies between the legal instruments available to harmonize the international legal framework that is relevant for EIAs and SEAs and their transboundary consultations in the Mediterranean region, hence the national legislations.
- Integrate new useful tools like the application of the DNSH principle and climate proofing to EIA and SEA procedures.
- Explore how to better integrate sustainable development considerations when conducting transboundary EIAs and SEAs.

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