

High-level on-line panel discussion on
“Climate Change: the rapidly increasing challenge for the Mediterranean”

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REPORT



On the 21st of September 2021, MIO-ECSDE organized a high-level on-line panel discussion on “*Climate Change: the rapidly increasing challenge for the Mediterranean*” providing an opportunity - at this “turning point” for climate action - for key Mediterranean actors to react to specific questions put to them and voice clear messages.

The 2-hour online event, moderated by Prof. Michael Scoullas, Chairperson of MIO-ECSDE, brought together 14 panelists, most of whom have also contributed to [the special 78th edition of the Sustainable Mediterranean journal devoted to climate change](#) published earlier this year. **More than 150 attendees from at least 20 countries** followed the discussion.

This mobilization of regional stakeholders by MIO-ECSDE, in response to the mandate given by its 133 Members NGOs from 28 countries, took place at a critical moment in the preparations of the forthcoming regional and global climate discussions and only days after the Heads of States and Governments of the Southern EU countries met at their 8th Summit to [declare](#) their strong conviction to effectively combat climate change in the Mediterranean (among other thematic areas).

HE Mr. Kostas Skrekas, Minister of Environment & Energy of Greece, launched the first round of the discussion by underlining the strong conviction of Croatia, Cyprus, France, Spain, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia and Greece, for urgent regional action established under the September 17th Athens Declaration on Climate Change and the Environment, while he emphasized that the Green Transition is the only option for a sustainable and resilient future, and citizens will play a key role in accelerating this transformation.



“The recent Athens Declaration on climate change and the environment in the Mediterranean is certainly a landmark for the mitigation of climate risk. The foundations have been laid to transform the Mediterranean into a model sea by 2030 with 19 coordinated actions.”

In view of the forthcoming Union for the Mediterranean 2nd Ministerial Meeting on Environment and Climate Action, under the shared Jordanian Co-Presidency with the EU (scheduled to take place on the 4th of October in Cairo, Egypt), **HE Mr. Nabil Masarweh, Minister of Environment of Jordan**, underscored the necessity to bring the voice of the

Mediterranean at a global level through an ambitious and strong Ministerial Declaration. The [2030 GreenerMed Agenda](#) and the Climate Action Work Plan 2021-2025 will be the two operational pillars of the 2021 Ministerial meeting and will advance mobilization and coordination of green private and public funds at regional and sub-regional levels that will foster matching between the financial availability and the economic needs of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries.

“The upcoming Ministerial Meeting and the new UfM Declaration of Environment and Climate Action to be adopted will mark a significant milestone in the efforts towards a greener and more sustainable Mediterranean region by fully integrating the climate change dimension.”



Further addressing the upcoming Ministerial meeting, **HE Ambassador Isidro González Afonso, Deputy Secretary General of the Union for the Mediterranean in charge of Water, Environment and Blue Economy**, underlined the pioneering role of the Mediterranean in putting into practice green tools for a new modality of green and circular development, a core action to fight climate change, by effectively linking regional policy to international commitments. As 9% of the global flows of finance in regards to tackling climate change are coming to the Mediterranean, the region could be a champion in putting into practice such innovative tools.



“The Mediterranean Sea, a climate change ‘hotspot’, has to move towards coordination and every country of the region should be part of this fight. This is a matter of survival.”

What lessons can be learned from the bold steps undertaken by some Mediterranean countries in the fight against climate change? Addressing on behalf of the **Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union** for the 2nd half of 2021, **HE Dr. Metka Gorišek, State Secretary of the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning of Slovenia**, highlighted the key activities of the Presidency related to the new climate and energy targets for 2030 in accordance with the long-term objective of climate neutrality by 2050. The latest affirmation of the EU’s determination to strengthen its strategic partnership with the region is the [New Agenda for the Mediterranean](#), approved by the Council in April this year, discussion of which is planned for the December 2021 and Green Transition is a key pillar of this discussion.

“The main priorities of the Slovenian Presidency in the field of energy is diversifying the energy mix in order to ensure energy security and minimize natural and human-made risks. Energy projects should aim at strengthening inter-connectivity in the region, also with other countries, and at contributing to decarbonisation of the economies, peace, and geopolitical stability.”



Mr. Bouzekri Razi, Director of Climate Change, Biodiversity and Green Economy of the Moroccan Ministry of Energy, Mining and Environment, shared some of the many noteworthy steps Morocco has undertaken, such as the Moroccan National Adaptation Plan, making the country Africa's leader in terms of efforts to combat the effects of climate change. Mr. Razi used this opportunity to raise some important questions, relevant to all Mediterranean countries.

“How can we really make climate change adaptation projects more attractive to the private sector? What are the barriers that we need to overcome and what will be the cost of resilience to a changing climate? These are some of the questions that Mediterranean countries need to ask.”



At this point, a question was raised by **Ms. Hajar Khamlichi, President of the Mediterranean Youth Climate Network (MYCN)**, on how the capacity of youth networks can be strengthened so that they can participate meaningfully in the achievement of climate change adaptation and mitigation actions. Mr. González Afonso from the Union for the Mediterranean, reminded that the UfM brings together many youth-led organizations and networks from the Euro-Mediterranean region providing an important youth-inclusive regional platform. He also stressed the central role of young people in spreading the right messages to governments and how they can help everyone understand the sacrifices that have to be made in order to change current unsustainable ways of consumption.

In the same spirit of joint concrete climate action in his recorded message, **HE Prof. Costas Kadis, Minister of Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment of Cyprus** introduced the [Cyprus Initiative](#) which is a very ambitious regional approach to address the climate related challenges in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle-East (EMME). The findings and proposed measures of the Initiative's scientific task forces will be presented to participating Governments of the EMME region, policy-makers, regional experts, scientists, and international organizations in the context of the [2nd International Conference “Climate Change in the Eastern Mediterranean & Middle East”](#) on the 13th and 14th of October this year. MIO-ECSDE is actively contributing to this initiative in the Education for Climate Change Task Force.



“Our vision is to look in the future with optimism. The climate change challenge can be an example of what countries can achieve when they work together.”

“How will the European Union strengthen the Mediterranean countries to act in synergy in the fight against climate change?” was the question put to **Ms. Silvia Crescimbeni**, from the **European Commission, DG CLIMA** who replied by explaining how the European Green Deal and the [Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood](#) will impact the non-EU Mediterranean countries. The 7 billion euros investment plan under the Neighbourhood and Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) will certainly be an important instrument to stimulate the economies of the region in this direction, including through flagship investments in energy transition, resource management, sustainable food systems,

green growth and climate. The [EU-Morocco Green Partnership](#) is a clear example of this kind of overarching engagement where we join efforts to manage common challenges and opportunities.

“The EU is a living example where decarbonization works, but this is not the only tool in our fight. Climate diplomacy, financial assistance, measures to attract investments, mechanisms to facilitate exchange of knowledge and expertise to support achievement in the ambitious climate targets are all crucial. The Mediterranean region has an incredible amount of assets to lead the transition towards sustainability.”



Closely following the discussions on the Green Deal, **Prof. Konstantinos Aravossis, Secretary General for Natural Environment and Water from the Ministry of Environment & Energy of Greece**, pointed out the progress of the major Greek plan that entails decommissioning of all lignite-powered electricity plants by 2028, making the country a pioneer in the Balkans and the Mediterranean on this issue, where this mineral plays a central role in the energy mix.




“Bold change, ambitious policies, innovative action, and above all, cooperation and synergy are required to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.”

Mitigating climate change and reversing biodiversity decline are two of the greatest challenges modern society faces. These two crises are deeply interlinked: climate change is a significant driver of biodiversity loss, and the loss of biodiversity exacerbates the impacts of the climate crisis. Nonetheless, the two existential crises are interrelated with many of the same causes, as well as solutions. How prominently, seems to depend on what will be agreed at COP 15 on Biological Diversity.

Representing the **Mediterranean Action Plan of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP/MAP)**, which provides the Secretariat of the Barcelona Convention and also the Mediterranean Commission for Sustainable Development, **Mr. Julien Le Tellier** shared the policy instruments and strategies with which the UNEP/MAP Program of Work aligns with the climate and biodiversity agendas by bringing nature-based solutions, coastal resilience, and climate-smart development to the forefront.

“Focusing on the triple environmental crisis of pollution, biodiversity loss and climate change, the regional assessments conducted by UNEP/MAP and MedECC indicate that our region is on a collision course with nature. We have the necessary tools to protect our environment, however we are running out of time.”





Climate finance and investment remain key challenges for most Mediterranean countries in comprehensively supporting mitigation and adaptation actions that will address climate change, a point brought up by most panelists during the discussion.

Dr. Mahmoud Fath-Allah, Director of the Department of Environmental & Meteorological Affairs at the Economic Sector of League of Arab States talked about the all-inclusive [Arab States Climate Finance and Access Strategy](#) which is being developed by the UNFCCC Technical Secretariat in collaboration with the Arab States. Dr. Fath-Allah emphasized how this initiative will employ country-driven approaches to develop a regional climate finance mobilization, particularly for adaptation projects with mitigation co-benefits.



“When discussing Climate Finance, we need to consider the peculiarities of each country in order to sufficiently support them. No one should be left behind in such discussions. Training, capacity building, technology transfer, and appropriate funding are key elements in climate change adaptation.”

We all know what climate change means for water: less availability, lower quality, more extreme phenomena, and higher risks for livelihoods and economic development. It is also undeniable that financing of sustainable use of water resources is considerably more difficult than other climate change-related projects.

Such issues were raised by **Dr. Anthi Brouma Deputy Regional Coordinator of the GWP-Med**, who asked the panelists what solutions lie outside water resources management to address the challenges of financing water projects. Mr. Le Tellier stated how the Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystem (WEFE) Nexus approach is an essential response to such difficulties.

The final round of interventions of the panel discussion started with the role of Parliamentarians. Mediterranean Parliaments are essential for the translation or transposition of international climate change commitments into country-level action, and as climate change is a global issue that transcends borders, strong inter-parliamentary cooperation is crucial for finding global solutions that ensure all countries are able to meet these unavoidable challenges.

Prof. Moh Rejdali, Chairman of the Circle of Mediterranean Parliamentarians for Sustainable Development (COMPSUD) underlined how regional Parliamentary diplomacy plays an important role in minimizing the gap between commitments being made in international fora and actions taken on the ground by advancing international thinking on climate change and by promoting openness and dialogue.

“What is really missing from the official agendas of the COP Meetings since 2015 and the Paris Agreement, is not only ambition but, more importantly, demonstrated concrete actions. Countries should raise their national ambitions and arrive with bold commitments on climate change mitigation.”



Post-pandemic recovery and rebuilding strategies provide an essential opportunity to advance green solutions to both national challenges and common international objectives that we cannot afford to miss. The agreed undertakings were addressed by **Mr. Bruno Coimbra, Chair of the Committee on Energy, Environment and Water of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean (PA-UfM)**, and **Member of the Portuguese Parliament** who talked about the inclusion of climate change issues into the ongoing sustainable post-COVID-19 recovery strategies for more just, resilient, and climate-neutral economies.



“Economic, social and health recovery requires transitioning to a new climate change sustainable economic model embracing circular economy, promoting renewable energy, prioritizing investment in environmental services, creating new jobs and adapting to climate change.”

The Mediterranean region is a great example where strong, particular, and specific warnings related to climate change are already loud and clear. This past summer has highlighted in grave and many ways just how urgently comprehensive climate action is needed in the Mediterranean. If the Mediterranean continues on the current path and pace, the natural “safety net” provided by ecosystem services and social fabric will be weakened to the extent that we will need to adapt to a scenario of collapse of everything that still provides us security.

Prof. Wolfgang Cramer, the MedECC Coordinator and Research Director at the Mediterranean Institute for Biodiversity and Ecology of CNRS shared his concerns about the level of optimism expressed earlier in the discussions. He pointed out that the wake-up call from science has not been heard yet by politicians and other decision-makers and much more substantial system transformation is needed, much faster.

Prof. Cramer also shared the worrying findings of the [latest UN Climate Change synthesis report of climate action plans](#) as communicated in countries’ Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). The available NDCs of all 191 Parties, taken together, imply a sizable increase in global GHG emissions in 2030 compared to 2010, of about 16%. According to the latest IPCC findings, such an increase, unless actions are taken immediately, may lead to a temperature rise of about 2.7°C by the end of the century, which is directly linked to human mortality due to heatwaves and loss of land due to sea-level rise, especially for climate change hotspots as the Mediterranean Sea.

“We cannot hope that just through technological innovations and green growth we can fight climate change. This is not possible, partly due to financial limitations, but also physical limitations. Sea level rise, heatwave intensity on land and in the ocean are already manifesting that we cannot simply adapt to these phenomena.”



Civil society is expected to play a key role in ensuring an inclusive transition as vehicles of change and fully contribute towards meaningful climate change advocacy. **Dr. Emad Adly, General Coordinator of the Arab Network for Environment and Development (RAED)** explained the main challenges that civil society faces, particularly in the Southern Mediterranean countries, in terms of their operations in delivering this imperative task.



“Our optimism in the fight against climate change is linked with the level of policy implementation, regional synergy, and good governance at the local level to optimize the work of civil society.”

The panel received one last question from **Ms. Louise Sarant, Middle East-based Environment and Science reporter and Communications Specialist at ICARDA (International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas)** regarding the basin-wide policies needed to help the agricultural sector improve its sustainability and productivity in the coming decades and turn around to become a net carbon sink.

Prof. Cramer took the floor to address the question: *“Adaptation will become insurmountable if we don’t do better on mitigation. The agricultural sector can be flexible and there are ways of adaptation that are not put into use by transformative actions. By broad application of agroecology we can enhance carbon storage and reduce carbon loss with many positive impacts on climate and productivity. Reduction of meat production to a sustainable level is also important.”*

Wrapping-up the event, Prof. Scoullos highlighted the political importance and relevance of such open public exchange of views of key government scientists and civil society actors and opinion leaders and the uniqueness of this opportunity for the Mediterranean region which is one of the most turbulent ones. *“With only some weeks left before COP 26, we all need to be ready at regional and national level to influence important decisions that will shape climate change policy and regulatory frameworks and will have impacts on all aspects of our lives and on the environment.”*

MIO-ECSDE would like to express its appreciation to all of the panelists that accepted the invitation, allowing it to **reaffirm its role as a catalyst in raising awareness on where the region stands in terms of preparedness to climate change at this critical moment.** Being an effective North-South channel for almost three decades, MIO-ECSDE has contributed to the introduction, promotion, and implementation of important regional policies and strategies, including on climate change. Through this specific event it aimed to draw the attention of all stakeholders and the wider public on difficult, yet pending questions regarding climate change in the Mediterranean that require urgent and serious consideration and transparent dialogue so as to be comprehensively addressed.

SOME MAIN TAKE-HOME MESSAGES FROM THE DISCUSSION:

- **Urgent global action is essential, so, by definition, we need regional and national plans**

It is undeniable that progress has been made at many levels in addressing the climate change crisis. Important policies are in place or in the pipeline and significant resources have been mobilized. However, it becomes clear that much more needs to be done than what we have already committed to, to accelerate a true system transformation. Many Mediterranean countries need to accelerate much more their activation on climate change adaptation and mitigation.

- **Science's wake-up call has not been heard yet!**

The scientific evidence on climate change impacts is not optimistic at all. Understandably, policy implementation has to sustain a level of optimism and we must encourage every step that is in the right direction. But things are not moving fast enough to avert collapse. Without involving civil society in this challenge, our fight is absolutely inadequate.

- **Adaptation to climate change is not enough; mitigation must be strengthened through synergy, cooperation, and solidarity**

Mediterranean countries have an important opportunity to act fast, also with the support of new EU Neighbourhood policies in place, and reform their economies through synergies and cooperation, innovative projects and programmes aiming for a Green Transition towards zero-emission solutions.

- **Civil society is now, more than ever, necessary to tackle the escalating climate and environmental crisis**

The Mediterranean basin will be one of the first victims of climate change globally. There is a gap in fully understanding the urgency, and civil society, as well as the media, are key players in minimizing this gap, maintaining momentum and boosting policies towards the right direction.

- **An integrated approach to reach climate neutrality is still missing**

Till today, key sectors for the Mediterranean economy and society, such as agriculture, tourism, transport and even the development of renewable energy require a lot more dialogue, work, and innovative open-minded approaches, in ways that are compatible with biodiversity protection. MIO-ECSDE and its members are striving towards this direction.



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