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HIGH LEVEL CONFERENCE OCEANS PACT 21/2/25 BRUXELLES
MEDAC Concept note

- **The key challenges facing the EU's Ocean governance model, and the priorities for addressing these challenges**.

The key challenges of a European oceans' governance model are pointed out to a large extent in the statements made in the presentation of the Pact, as well as in the frequently-recurring concept of the Blue Economy. It can, in fact, be noted that translating into practice certain principles, approaches, and key words – which, for that matter, are not even new – is still the main challenge to be faced in the endeavour to define a governance model and lines of action that are effective in achieving the established goals: fully sustainable management and conservation of oceans "in all their dimensions".
Aside from the theoretical considerations, the following are still missing from current policies as things stand:

1) a holistic approach capable of addressing the economic activities related to the sea and the consequent use of resources, marine spaces, their impacts, interactions, as well as the ecological restoration and environmental conservation measures which are necessary for all marine activities and uses of the seas;
2) real consideration of the three pillars of sustainability and trade-off , without forcibly ranking them into contrived priorities;
3) an ecosystem approach in scientific analysis and diagnosis, capable of assessing the transformations processes taking place in the environment, their origins and future projections, the changes in physical and chemical parameters, and their ecological consequences (on populations-the trophic chain-community-ecosystem) as well as the main impact drivers.

In this regard, it is undeniable that to date the bulk of marine policy continues to focus on a handful of activities (such as fisheries) and is based on scientific assessments that are undeniably partial (single stock) and not considered in relation to environmental changes, not even at macroscopic level.

- **The key measures needed to protect biodiversity and promote ecosystem-based management of the ocean, to sustain its climate function, health and productivity.**

It is not conceivable to proceed with the identification of key measures to protect biodiversity and foster ecosystem-based management without adopting and implementing the three points already highlighted, and these necessarily include a thorough assessment of the impacts resulting from all the uses of the sea:

- transport;
- shipbuilding;
- prospecting, exploration, and extraction (minerals, oil and gas);
- energy production on the surface (wind power);
- tourism (including yachting and diving);
- laying and maintenance of cables and pipelines;
- Stationary structures (offshore and inshore);

- ports and coastal constructions;
- fisheries (commercial, recreational and sport fishing);
- aquaculture;
- military operations.

Furthermore, due consideration must be given to all the inputs and runoff from the land and atmosphere which pollute the sea with various contaminants, as well as the relative regulations currently in force aiming at reducing contamination and their effects on primary productivity.
Additionally, the conservation policies adopted and implemented to date, and in particular MPAs and areas where one or more activities are prohibited, should be duly evaluated within this general framework, also in light of the goals of the 2030 agenda, as well as their contribution to restore and recover marine habitats, vulnerable species, and fish populations.
Needless to say, any such holistic, ecosystem-based approach is bound to identify different key measures that apply to the various activities and sources of impact. A non-exhaustive list would include:

- measures regarding vessel safety to prevent accidents at sea, especially for the transportation of hazardous materials (double hulls);
- establishing transport corridors (motorways of the sea) outsides key ecological areas and limiting traffic where it is excessive;
- restrictions on mineral and fossil fuel extraction and on exploration/prospecting activities (including a ban on air guns);
- improved spatial planning on wind farms ;
- checking the actual involvement of stakeholders in Member States' maritime spatial planning, and reframing or supplementing their participation if it proves to be insufficient;
- surveying and standardisation for compliance of the submarine cable and pipeline network, including its impacts;
- surveying and standardisation for compliance of offshore and inshore stationary structures;
- assessment of coastal constructions and their impact on currents and coastal erosion - standardisation to ensure compliance regarding dredging and shore nourishment activities;
- development of multiannual fisheries management plans with specific measures for each Mediterranean GSA that will ensure the environmental and socioeconomic sustainability of fishing activities. This means guaranteeing food production, profitability of business enterprises, sustained employment, renewability of stocks, and protection of biodiversity, which may also involve co-management practices;
- strengthening the fight against illegal fishing, stepping up controls and sanctions to ensure a level playing field within the EU and with Third Countries;
- dissemination of sustainable practices in aquaculture;
- review of recreational and sport fishing regulations and intensification of controls;
- the creation of buoy camps on all coasts for the purpose of anchoring yachts and pleasure craft, especially in the most popular tourist destinations, as a measure to protect marine phanerogams and other sensitive habitats;
- fighting pollution and campaigns against the use of plastic;
- monitoring the spread of alien species and mitigation/eradication measures.

Decisive action must be taken to address the issue of the jurisdiction of waters if these and other activities are to be put on the agenda of EU Member states, multilateral agencies, and the EU. This is especially critical for the Mediterranean, where there has been a significant increase in the number of unilateral declarations regarding exclusive economic zones or protection zones.

4) **The opportunities for sustainable growth and job creation in the EU's blue economy, and the role that the European Ocean Pact can play in promoting these opportunities.**

The adoption and implementation of the key measures listed in the previous point will automatically multiply opportunities for growth and create employment, provided that a robust policy regarding training and start-ups is launched at the same time in all sectors of the Blue Economy.

5) **An effective marine knowledge value chain that supports EU competitiveness in ocean technologies and solutions, translated into market innovation.**

The question of EU competitiveness in the current international climate could be significantly influenced by various factors regarding both market forces and policy choices concerning the definition of goals and the strategies to achieve them, as well as the technological developments related to production systems.
The environmental and employment policies adopted by the single states, and their respective national tax systems, market strategies (tariff policy especially), and the push for food sovereignty by certain states are "disrupting" the overall framework. This urges close reflection on competition where there is not a broad, shared knowledge value chain.

6) **The priorities for supporting the resilience and sustainability of coastal communities in the various sea basins of the EU**

Supporting the sustainability of coastal communities means, above all, supporting the growth of the local economy, the health of the natural ecosystems on which they strive and the development of services which influence the population's decision to remain in these areas (primarily jobs, healthcare facilities and schools), areas which in many cases have become marginal as a result of migration to large urban hubs and industrial regions of the countries.
Clearly, the term "local economies" is understood to mean a range of viable businesses (production of goods and services) that can sustain employment on a permanent basis, such as agriculture, fishing, aquaculture, tourism, energy production, food processing and distribution, stations within the transport network, and so forth.
When addressing the task of establishing which priorities will provide the right incentives and support the creation, start-up, and development of these business activities, as well as making appropriate resources and tools available to local communities, it is necessary to bear in mind the area's existing socioeconomic fabric, and its professional and manufacturing expertise and the potential for diversification. In the case of coastal zones, this normally consists of well-established maritime activities and related satellite companies, which are often small-scale rather than on an industrial level.
The situation varies from basin to basin, and from the north to the south of the EU, to a degree that needs to be considered when establishing priorities, as these are likely to vary significantly at a local basis. These priorities should, therefore, be formulated with a significant level of flexibility, so that they can be chosen using an approach that is tailored to the different regions or local circumstances.