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Role and development of the Barcelona System for better governance

by

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The Barcelona system is made up of the Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP), the Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against Pollution (Barcelona Convention) with its Protocols, and the Mediterranean Commission for Sustainable Development. The Convention's Secretariat is supplied by the UNEP via the MAP's Coordinating Unit, based in Athens and backed by Regional Activity Centres located in 6 Mediterranean countries. These elements dovetail and form an increasingly consistent overall system; this still has some weaknesses and requires constant revision to improve its efficiency and to adapt it to change at both national and international level. The most recent revision took place following the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit and led in 1995 to major amendments to the Convention and its Protocols and to the adoption of a new Protocol on protected areas and biological diversity. The 1995 amendments have not yet come into force, except the new SPA and Biodiversity Protocol, which came into force on 12 December 1999.

Since it was launched in 1995, the MAP had aims that were directly linked to improving **the governance of the marine environment**. Indeed, MAP aimed at helping governments in the region to control marine pollution by helping them to formulate their national policies, to improve their capacity to better identify alternative options for development models, and to make more rational choices for allocating resources.

At the beginning, the Barcelona system focused more on issues concerning the fight against marine pollution. But very quickly it became necessary to adopt a more comprehensive approach, integrating socio-economic aspects as well and the protection of natural resources.

Although the emphasis on the need to improve systems of environmental governance only became topical a few years ago, the Barcelona system, right from its creation, enabled the countries of the region to be helped to elaborate and refine their national policies. This was done in particular by **strengthening the national capacities** to assess the state of the environment and monitor its development. Thus, for example, through the MEDPOL programme, the MAP provided scientific equipment to national laboratories and helped them set up pollution monitoring programmes, by both training scientists and technicians and elaborating standard methodologies and undertaking intercalibration exercises. This assistance allowed many Mediterranean countries to have available the data necessary for **decision-making** as regards the fight against marine pollution.

As regards the **High Sea**, the main subject of the present workshop, the Barcelona system possesses legal tools that enable several measures to be introduced to protect and manage such marine areas in the Mediterranean. It should be noted here that the geographical coverage of the 'Offshore' Protocol and that of the SPA and Biodiversity

Protocol were extended, compared to that of the Convention, to also cover the seabed and its subsoil. Without this extension, it would have been impossible to act within the MAP framework to avoid the degradation of particularly important marine habitats (seamounts, sea vents, coralligenous, etc.) which often lie in areas located beyond the jurisdiction of states. However, although in advance compared to several other parts of the world, **the Mediterranean lacks practical experience in managing the High Sea.**

The list of Specially Protected Areas of Mediterranean Importance (SPAMI), set up within the framework of the SPA and Biodiversity Protocol, is an example of **international environmental governance**. It provides legal bases for introducing protection measures in areas that lie partially or totally in the High Sea. Obviously, the practical modalities of implementing in the High Sea measures advocated for a SPAMI are not simple, especially since only the Parties to the SPA and Biodiversity Protocol are bound to comply with the measures applicable to the SPAMIs. It is important therefore to find a way of gaining other states' recognition of the importance of the SPAMIs.

The Barcelona system has also helped promote the **participation of non-governmental and/or local bodies in the elaboration of environmental policies**. Several articles in the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols deal with this issue. Moreover, the Mediterranean Commission for Sustainable Development (MCSDD) is a most interesting example here, since among its members, as well as representatives from the states, are representatives from non-governmental bodies (NGOs, professional organisations, local authorities, etc.) acting not as observers but as full members.

At their Thirteenth Ordinary meeting (Catania, Italy, November 2003), the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention adopted a strategic action programme for the conservation of biological diversity in the Mediterranean Region (SAPBIO). SAPBIO stresses that **protecting biodiversity cannot be separated from promoting policies and governance practices** that can achieve the purposes of sustainable development. It recommends considering the following issues in developing conservation policies:

- Promoting governmental and political practices compatible with the protection of biodiversity
- Developing integrated management strategies, being aware of the importance of land/sea interactions, and of adequate management of territory
- Introducing the environment into the socio-economic issues for management strategies
- Promoting transboundary initiatives
- Promoting solidarity
- Improving and supporting activities and programmes of international conventions and initiatives

The SAPBIO attaches great importance to stepping up collaboration and coordination among the international organisations concerned by the conservation of the Mediterranean environment and advocates measures aimed at developing greater partnership and harmonization.