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Plenary Session III – Experience in maritime cooperation in the Mediterranean region

Synergies on cooperation in the Mediterranean region

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Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Please allow me to thank the hosts for the invitation to this important Preparatory Conference which can open up the next chapter for strengthening cooperation in the OSCE region. I would like to begin by thanking the conference hosts for the excellent organization and their hospitality.

Slovenia welcomes activities of the OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum.

For Slovenia as the most northern country of Mediterranean Sea, the dialog in the framework of OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum is crucial for effective/successful joint management of costal and marine resources in the Mediterranean.

Taking into account future challenges, it is essential for the OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum to play an important role in costal and marine resources management by ensuring peace and stability in this region.

The OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum constitutes a framework for dialogue and cooperation which can play the important role in addressing common challenges the Mediterranean region is faced with, such as economic and social development, climate change, energy issues... On this basis a dialog with a view to define common priorities and solutions and to enable the Mediterranean Sea to develop into an area of economic and financial prosperity is important.

Mediterranean Sea is a single ecoregion that is being shared by 21 coastal states and is also one of European Unions' priorities. Coastal and marine resources of our ecoregion are the foundation for national and cultural identity as well as economic and social development.

It is a well known fact that Mediterranean ecosystem is exposed to increasing number of threats, especially from ever increasing activities in the field of industry, tourism, fisheries, urbanisation and maritime activities.

Coastal as well as marine ecosystems do not recognise any political borders. For this reason sustainable management of coastal and marine resources is possible only with transboundary and regional cooperation.

The Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (Barcelona Convention); adopted on 16 of February 1976, and revised in Barcelona, Spain, 9-10 June 1995 as the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean with its protocols is of fundamental importance for the Mediterranean region.

After more than 30 years, the Barcelona Convention and Mediterranean Action Plan are more active than ever. There are now 22 Contracting Parties and they are determined to protect the Mediterranean marine and coastal environment while boosting regional and national plans to achieve sustainable development.

The Convention's main objectives are:

- to assess and control marine pollution
- to ensure sustainable management of natural marine and coastal resources;
- to integrate the environment in social and economic development;
- to protect the marine environment and coastal zones through prevention and reduction of pollution, and as far as possible, elimination of pollution, whether land or sea-based;
- to protect the natural and cultural heritage;
- to strengthen solidarity among Mediterranean coastal States;
- to contribute to improvement of the quality of life.

The development vision and strategy of the Barcelona Convention signatories is based on their obligation to implement the Mediterranean Strategy of Sustainable Development (MSSD), adopted at the 14th meeting of the contracting parties (COP) in November 2005 in Portorož in Slovenia.

The implementation of the MSSD in the region is the common goal of the Barcelona Convention, UNEP/MAP and the European Commission, as well as of other regional initiatives and programmes.

The Barcelona Convention implemented ecosystem approach and defined integrated coastal management in the Mediterranean region.

Slovenia took over the two-year presidency of the Barcelona Convention in 2005 with the strong desire to strengthen and promote cooperation between Mediterranean Process in the European Union and the Mediterranean Action Plan. During its presidency of the Barcelona Convention, Slovenia also managed to coordinate the adoption of the regional Protocol on Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM), which has been adopted in Madrid on 21 of January 2008. This is the seventh Protocol completing the set of legal instruments of the Barcelona Convention. This is a pioneering Protocol constituting an added value for the Barcelona Convention and the Mediterranean Action Plan. It is the first time that Integrated Coastal Zone Management is fully addressed by a legally-binding international instrument.

The objectives of integrated coastal zone management are to:

- (a) facilitate, through the rational planning of activities, the sustainable development of coastal zones by ensuring that the environment and landscapes are taken into account in harmony with economic, social and cultural development;
- (b) preserve coastal zones for the benefit of current and future generations;
- (c) ensure the sustainable use of natural resources, particularly with regard to water use;
- (d) ensure preservation of the integrity of coastal ecosystems, landscapes and geomorphology;

(e) prevent and/or reduce the effects of natural hazards and in particular of climate change, which can be induced by natural or human activities;

(f) achieve coherence between public and private initiatives and between all decisions by the public authorities, at the national, regional and local levels, which affect the use of the coastal zone.

In conformity with the objectives and principles of this Protocol, the Parties shall endeavor to ensure the sustainable use and management of coastal zones in order to preserve the coastal natural habitats, landscapes, natural resources and ecosystems, in compliance with international and regional legal instruments.

The importance of integrated coastal zone management and ecosystem approach has been recognised by the European Union. The European parliament adopted the Marine strategy framework directive on this basis in the 2007. This directive sets a legal base for ecoregional approach in future regional marine strategies.

A very important document addressing the Adriatic Sub-region is the Yugoslav-Italian Agreement on the Protection of the Waters of the Adriatic Sea and Coastal Waters against Pollution, signed in Belgrade on 14 of February 1974. On this basis the permanent Slovenian – Croatian – Italian commission for the protection of the Adriatic Sea waters and coastal areas against pollution was established.

The Commission main objectives are:

a) to study all problems related to the pollution of the Adriatic Sea waters and coastal areas,

b) to propose and recommend to the Governments what it believes is necessary regarding research,

c) to provide its opinion on bilateral programmes and be responsible for their harmonisation,

d) to propose to the Governments measures required to eliminate the current and to prevent the new causes of pollution,

e) to propose to the Governments the drafts of international regulations required to ensure cleanliness of the Adriatic Sea.

Following from these main objectives the following projects were established in the Adriatic Sea sub-region:

- the sub-regional agreement between Slovenia, Italy and Croatia on the prevention of accidents at sea and response to the consequences of pollution;
- preparation of the Ballast Waters Management Plan for the Adriatic;
- integrated coastal zone management.

Slovenia's vision as the Presidency of the Council of the European Union and chairman of the permanent Slovenian – Croatian – Italian commission for the protection of the Adriatic Sea waters and coastal areas against pollution is active cooperation in implementing the ecosystem approach and principles of integrated coastal zone management.

We don't should forget the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR) and The International Sava River Basin Commission (The Sava Commission) in the context with the Black Sea which are important legal instruments for cooperation and transboundary water management.

Our goal is efficient cooperation for sustainable development of Mediterranean region. We believe we must connect current and future initiatives with clear and common goals. Keeping this in mind the OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum is evermore important. We recognise that these goals can be achieved with financial contribution from European funds. These activities coincide with the implementation of the European marine and maritime policy, which is based on the consideration of biodiversity of Mediterranean Sea.

Biodiversity and climate change are priorities for the Slovenian EU Presidency. Projections show Mediterranean Sea is one of the most vulnerable regions to climate change in the world. We hope that we find common solutions and answers to this treats. We strongly believe OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum is a framework for achieving this.

Our vision is to increase the synergies among the institutions and programmes which contribute to a better quality of life on the shores of our common sea.