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## NOTE

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From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	AOB for the meeting of the Council (Environment) on 27 March 2025 Report on Barcelona Convention's regional ocean and seas governance efforts and recent outcomes - Information from Slovenia

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## Background

The UNEP/MAP–Barcelona Convention system is the comprehensive institutional, legal and implementation framework to fulfil the vision of a healthy Mediterranean Sea and Coast that underpins sustainable development in the region. Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention are the 21 countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea and the European Union.

The 23rd Meeting of the Contracting Parties (COP 23) took place in Portorož, Slovenia, in December 2023 and marked the beginning of the two-year Slovenian Presidency. A key outcome of the meeting was the adoption of the Portorož Ministerial Declaration, in which Contracting Parties reaffirmed their commitment to halting the degradation of marine and coastal biodiversity by implementing the Mediterranean region's post-2020 Biodiversity Framework (SAPBIO) in alignment with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. The Declaration also emphasised the need to advance decarbonisation, tackle marine plastic pollution, and ensure that by 2030, at least 30 % of coastal and marine areas are effectively conserved and managed. Additionally, it underscored the importance of strengthening youth involvement in environmental decision-making.

## **Key priorities and further necessary actions**

### **Biodiversity and marine protected areas**

The Mediterranean was the first regional sea to adopt a biodiversity conservation regional policy aligned with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. Further action is needed to implement and achieve this important biodiversity target by:

- accelerating work on marine protected areas through the application of marine spatial planning;
- ratifying the agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (the BBNJ Agreement);
- mobilising financial resources to support biodiversity efforts at national and regional levels.

### **Pollution control and prevention**

Despite significant progress, challenges in pollution control and prevention remain. Further actions are needed and can be achieved through:

- the entry into force and implementation of the Mediterranean Sea as an emission control area for sulphur oxides (Med SOX ECA) and the ratification of MARPOL Annex VI;
- further efforts and synergies in the context of ongoing global negotiations on a legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment;
- scaling up actions and implementation of regional plans on marine litter, wastewater management, sludge management, agriculture, aquaculture and urban stormwater management and related regulatory measures.

### **Regional and sub-regional cooperation**

Close collaboration has been initiated between several regional bodies, with good practices such as cooperation between UNEP/MAP-Barcelona Convention, ICPDR, and the Black Sea Commission. Further coordination and cooperation is necessary to achieve:

- stronger transboundary collaboration to further strengthen source-to-sea collaboration between transboundary river basins and large marine ecosystems;

- enhanced sub-regional collaboration to tackle climate adaptation and sustainable coastal management;
- the further alignment of the UNEP/MAP-Barcelona Convention framework with EU policies, especially regarding the Ecosystem Approach, and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, in order to achieve a good environmental status.

### **Maintaining momentum and next steps**

2025 marks the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Mediterranean Action Plan and the 30th anniversary of the Post-Rio Barcelona Convention. These major anniversaries highlight important achievements and contributions to the national, regional and global environmental agenda and add value to the enhanced ocean governance, in particular from a regional perspective. These anniversaries also coincide with the upcoming United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC-3) to be held in Nice, France from 9-13 June 2025, representing a unique opportunity to highlight the region's pioneering role in ocean protection.

Under the Slovenian Presidency of the Barcelona Convention, efforts are also underway to deliver several major mandates such as the updated Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD) for the period 2026-2035; the revised Ecosystem Approach Policy Roadmap and the upgraded Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme (IMAP); the Regional Climate Change Adaptation Framework for the Mediterranean Marine and Coastal Areas (RCCAF) for the period 2026-2035. The relevant strategic documents are expected to be adopted at the forthcoming 24th Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols (COP 24) that will take place in Cairo, Egypt, on 2-5 December 2025.

With key global milestones ahead, including UNOC-3 and Barcelona Convention COP 24, maintaining momentum on regional commitments is crucial in order to effectively align Mediterranean efforts with broader international goals. We must ensure that progress translates into concrete actions by strengthening regional cooperation and advancing the long-term health and sustainability of our oceans and seas.