

The Adriatic Sea Partnership

Commitments on Management of the Adriatic



Originally a Slovenian initiative in cooperation with the Regional Environmental Center, the Adriatic Sea Partnership (ASP) was launched at the Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP) sub-regional conference on the Sustainable Development Strategy for the Adriatic in Portoroz, Slovenia, June 5-6, 2006. Financial support for the first phase of ASP has been provided by the Italian Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea and the Slovenian Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning.

A MEDITERRANEAN TREASURE THREATENED BY DEVELOPMENT

The Adriatic Sea is the most endangered region in the Mediterranean Sea – a highly sensitive marine area facing serious environmental challenges. Home to some of the most significant treasures of world heritage, it is expected to be placed on the International Maritime Organisation's (IMO's) list of particularly sensitive sea areas. The Adriatic region is economically significant for tourism and recreation, a major transport hub for energy resources, and one of Europe's most highly developed industrial areas.

The six states on the Adriatic (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Italy, Slovenia, and Montenegro) include European Union member states, candidate countries and others. Their recent history has been marked by intensive and diverse development with increasing adverse impacts on the Adriatic Sea. Protection and joint management of this region require a new approach to reach stability and sustainable development; protect resources; meet existing commitments (e.g. requirements of the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development and the EU); and coordinate action on future priorities.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN PLACE

Through various international initiatives, the Adriatic countries have begun to make commitments for protection and management of the Adriatic Sea region. These include:

- the Contingency Plan for the Adriatic;
- the Ballast Waters Management Plan;
- the Integrated Coastal Zone Management; and
- action under the EU Marine Strategy and the EC Water Framework Directive

The first three of these were agreed at the 14th MAP Conference of Parties (COP) under the MSSD and accepted by the Trilateral Commission (Croatia, Italy, Slovenia). Moreover, Italy and Slovenia, as EU member states, have obligations towards the whole EU with respect to the Adriatic under the EU Marine Strategy and the forthcoming Marine Directive.

How will these commitments be met? Existing institutional arrangements include the MAP; the Trilateral Commission; and the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative (AII); as well as a large number of concrete scientific projects, such as the Regional Activity Centers (RACs) under MAP and the ADRICOSM Partnership. As a result, the Adriatic has potentially the largest and most complete set of information of any sea region in the hemisphere. Yet the existing institutional arrangements all have shortcomings, e.g., some apply to only part of the region or lack mechanisms for joint decision making with clear commitments and administrative structures. The ASP promotes the extension of the existing initiatives in partnership with new ones.

A NEW PARTNERSHIP FOR THE ADRIATIC

In order to reach these goals, Slovenia developed the ASP concept with the support of the Regional Environmental Center, based on the successful case of the Sava River Basin Initiative, where four countries joined together to establish new institutional arrangements including a river basin commission to ensure joint management and protection of the river basin leading towards sustainable development.

Through the ASP, the relevant countries and partners have begun to facilitate project preparation and implementation aimed at protection and sustainable development of the Adriatic region through a comprehensive umbrella partnership and a platform for joint action based on commitments by littoral states and stakeholders with appropriate institutional arrangements.

The ASP provides:

- an umbrella initiative as a focal point for sustainable development of the Adriatic;
- appropriate institutional arrangements based on international consensus possibly including support for extension of the Trilateral Commission to a larger part of the Adriatic;
- an interim secretariat to serve and facilitate processes related to the above;
- support to stakeholder involvement in the ASP;
- development of inventory of projects as a basis for drafting an Adriatic Management Plan; and
- a mechanism to ensure coordination of activities stemming from EU initiatives and the Barcelona Convention.

The first partnership meeting was held on April 3, 2007 in Sarajevo and a second partnership meeting is foreseen for the first half of 2008. As of the beginning of 2008, five out of six Adriatic countries are members of the partnership. There are a total of 12 partners including environmental ministries, international organisations and scientific partners. The entire list is available at <asp.rec.org>.

The ASP is open to all and is based on full cooperation with existing Adriatic initiatives and coordination with implementation of MAP and EU programmes.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

- On October 11, 2007 26 representatives from Croatia, Montenegro, Slovenia, IUCN, OSCE, EU DG ENVIRONMENT, MAP and the REC met in Belgrade at the Adriatic Sea Partnership side event to the Sixth Ministerial Conference Environment for Europe to discuss the development of the ASP initiative. Some parties expressed that a potential role for the ASP would be to boost the implementation and coordination of existing activities and commitments as well as to identify issues which are not sufficiently covered by the current international legislative and policy framework.
- Slovenia hosted a seminar on October 30, 2007 on possibilities for obtaining EU funding for ASP projects in the Adriatic region, particularly through the thematic priorities of Structural Funds and Community Programmes for the period 2007-2013. The workshop also covered the results of the working groups on Ballast Water Management, the Contingency Plan and Integrated Coastal Zone Management, including several concrete proposals for projects.
- The ASP initiative was presented and discussed at the NATO Advanced Research Workshop: Energy and Environmental Challenges to Security, which was held in Budapest November 21-23, in conjunction with the NATO Parliamentary Assembly Joint Sub-committee on Transatlantic Economic Relations and Science and Technology Committee. Of particular interest were the links between the ASP and the Sava process, which can be seen as a success story in international cooperation.
- During the ASP side event in Belgrade, the REC proposed to arrange for a flotilla of boats from the Adriatic Sea to ferry ASP partners to Barcelona in the context of the IUCN's World Conservation Congress. It is anticipated that over 150 boats, representing numerous regions of the world, will sail into Barcelona's harbour for the event, scheduled October 14-15, 2008. The idea is to provide a forum for discussions and concrete commitments on marine and coastal conservation.

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