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REPORT

on the role of cohesion policy in addressing multidimensional environmental challenges in the Mediterranean basin
(2022/2059(INI))

Committee on Regional Development

Rapporteur: François Alfonsi

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on the role of cohesion policy in addressing multidimensional environmental challenges in the Mediterranean basin (2022/2059(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union and Articles 174 to 178 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU),
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy¹ (Common Provisions Regulation),
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on the European Regional Development Fund and on the Cohesion Fund²,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/1056 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the Just Transition Fund³,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/1059 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on specific provisions for the European territorial cooperation goal (Interreg) supported by the European Regional Development Fund and external financing instruments⁴,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)⁵,
- having regard to Directive (EU) 2014/89 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 July 2014 establishing a framework for maritime spatial planning⁶,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 19 April 2021 on a renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood – A new agenda for the Mediterranean,

¹ [OJ L 231, 30.6.2021, p. 159.](#)

² [OJ L 231, 30.6.2021, p. 60.](#)

³ [OJ L 231, 30.6.2021, p. 1.](#)

⁴ [OJ L 231, 30.6.2021, p. 94.](#)

⁵ [OJ L 231, 30.6.2021, p. 21.](#)

⁶ [OJ L 257, 28.8.2014, p. 135.](#)

- having regard to the Commission communication of 4 February 2022 entitled ‘8th Cohesion Report: Cohesion in Europe towards 2050’ (COM(2022)0034),
- having regard to the Commission’s communication of 9 February 2021 entitled ‘Renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood’ (SWD(2021)0023),
- having regard to the Commission’s communication of 11 December 2019 on the European Green Deal (COM(2019)0640),
- having regard to the agreement adopted at the 21st Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP21) in Paris on 12 December 2015 (Paris Agreement)⁷,
- having regard to the opinion of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) of 29 October 2021 entitled ‘Renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood – A new Agenda for the Mediterranean’⁸,
- having regard to the CoR opinion of 14 October 2020 entitled ‘Towards sustainable use of Natural Resources within the Mediterranean insular context’⁹,
- having regard to the CoR opinion of 11 October 2022 entitled ‘Towards a macro-regional strategy in the Mediterranean’,
- having regard to its resolution of 15 September 2022 on Economic, social and territorial cohesion in the EU: the 8th Cohesion Report¹⁰,
- having regard to its resolution of 15 September 2022 on EU border regions: living labs of European integration¹¹,
- having regard to its resolution of 7 June 2022 on EU Islands and cohesion policy¹²,
- having regard to its resolution of 8 March 2022 on the role of cohesion policy in promoting innovative and smart transformation and regional ICT connectivity¹³,
- having regard to its resolution of 9 June 2021 on the gender dimension in cohesion policy¹⁴,
- having regard to its resolution of 20 May 2021 on reversing demographic trends in EU regions using cohesion policy instruments¹⁵,

⁷ [OJ L 282, 19.10.2016, p. 4](#)

⁸ [OJ C 440, 29.10.2021, p. 19.](#)

⁹ [OJ C 440, 18.12.2020, p. 114.](#)

¹⁰ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2022)0326.

¹¹ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2022)0327.

¹² [OJ C 493, 27.12.2022, p. 48.](#)

¹³ [OJ C 347, 9.9.2022, p. 37.](#)

¹⁴ [OJ C 67, 8.2.2022, p. 16.](#)

¹⁵ [OJ C 15, 12.1.2022, p. 125.](#)

- having regard to its resolution of 25 March 2021 on cohesion policy and regional environment strategies in the fight against climate change¹⁶,
- having regard to its resolution of 28 November 2019 on the climate and environment emergency¹⁷,
- having regard to its resolution of 15 January 2020 on the European Green Deal¹⁸,
- having regard to its resolution of 13 March 2018 on lagging regions in the EU¹⁹,
- having regard to its resolution of 13 June 2018 on cohesion policy and the circular economy²⁰,
- having regard to its resolution of 3 July 2012, entitled ‘Evolution of EU macro-regional strategies: present practice and future prospects, especially in the Mediterranean’²¹,
- having regard to the study conducted for its Committee on Regional Development entitled ‘Islands of the European Union: State of play and future challenges’, published in March 2021,
- having regard to the European Parliament Research Service study ‘Working towards a macro-regional strategy for the Mediterranean’, published in October 2021,
- having regard to the First Mediterranean Assessment Report on Climate and Environmental Change in the Mediterranean, released by the Mediterranean Experts on Climate and environmental Change (MedECC) in 2020,
- having regard to the 2021 Regional Progress Report on Gender Equality – Union for the Mediterranean Regional Dialogue on Women Empowerment in the Euro-Mediterranean region²²,
- having regard to the 2022 UN Report ‘Dimensions and examples of the gender-differentiated impacts of climate change, the role of women as agents of change and opportunities for women’,
- having regard to the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (the Barcelona Convention), adopted on 16 February 1976 by the Conference of Plenipotentiaries of the Coastal States of the Mediterranean Region for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea,
- having regard to the mission report of the Commission on Petitions following the fact-finding visit to the Mar Menor (Murcia), Spain, of 23-25 February 2022, in relation to the environmental deterioration of the Mar Menor,

¹⁶ [OJ C 494, 8.12.2021, p. 26.](#)

¹⁷ [OJ C 232, 16.6.2021, p. 28.](#)

¹⁸ [OJ C 270, 7.7.2021, p. 2.](#)

¹⁹ [OJ C 162, 10.5.2019, p. 24.](#)

²⁰ [OJ C 28, 27.1.2020, p. 40.](#)

²¹ [OJ C 349E, 29.11.2013, p. 1.](#)

²² [Union for the Mediterranean, 2021 Regional Progress Report on Gender Equality, Barcelona, 2022.](#)

- having regard to the European Court of Auditors’ Special Report No 09/2022 entitled ‘Climate spending in the 2014-2020 EU budget- Not as high as reported’,
 - having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the opinion of the Committee on Fisheries,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Regional Development (A9-0094/2023),
- A. whereas the countries of the Mediterranean basin, which include EU Member States, candidate and third countries, are home to 250 million inhabitants, half of whom live in the European Union and one third of whom live in coastal areas; whereas strengthening cooperation within and beyond the EU’s borders is crucial in order to address common challenges such as environmental deterioration, pollution and climate change, rising water temperatures, the proliferation of extreme weather events, water shortages, biodiversity loss and food insecurity;
 - B. whereas the Mediterranean basin is a cohesive geographical area whose inhabitants share a common historical, cultural and environmental heritage;
 - C. whereas the European Regional Development Fund is required to allocate 30 % of its funds to environmental and climate measures in the current programming period, 2021-2027, with the overarching objective of supporting the transition to a climate neutral economy;
 - D. whereas the Mediterranean is a semi-enclosed sea with a very slow exchange of its waters, a rich biodiversity and a high proportion of endemic species;
 - E. whereas the Mediterranean Sea is one of the most overfished basins in the world and there are still significant concerns over illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing; whereas increased pollution from human activities, habitat degradation, the introduction of non-indigenous species, and the impact of climate-driven changes on the marine environment and ecosystems are compromising the sustainability of Mediterranean fisheries;
 - F. whereas, in addition to the continuous growth of the populations living in the coastal areas, the Mediterranean also hosts 31 % of world tourism on less than 6 % of the world’s land area;
 - G. whereas water resources in the Mediterranean are becoming increasingly scarce, giving rise to conflicts between different water-use sectors (agriculture, tourism, industry and people living in the region, as well as biodiversity conservation);
 - H. whereas the quantity of waste has more than doubled over the past 30 years despite several EU-funded programme, such as H2020 Initiative for a Cleaner Mediterranean, as well as activities under the aegis of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM); whereas the improper management and treatment of waste from rivers and urban areas make the Mediterranean the area with the sixth largest accumulation of marine litter in the world; whereas the damaging impact of an estimated 730 tonnes of plastic waste, in particular,

that are dumped every day in the Mediterranean basin and of the municipal solid waste generation that has been increasing across the whole region since 2014 call for ambitious measures;

- I. whereas maritime transport in the Mediterranean, which carries 20 % of the world's trade in an area which makes up only 1 % of the world's ocean, generates between 100 000 and 200 000 tonnes per year of hydrocarbon discharges such as oil spills, necessitating a transition to greater sustainability; whereas industrial activities and intensive farming may result in run-off into rivers and contamination of groundwater, and contribute, along with offshore oil and gas refineries, to worsening sea pollution in the whole basin;
- J. whereas Mediterranean marine mammal numbers have declined by 41 % over the last 50 years and around 80 % of fish stocks are suffering from overfishing; whereas the objective of sustainable fishing is achievable, provided that Member States have the political will;
- K. whereas the Mediterranean basin is warming 20 % faster than the global average; whereas global warming will cause severe consequences that must be anticipated, particularly in terms of precipitation and the hydrological cycle, but also mean warming and heat extremes (in both the terrestrial and marine environment), sea level rise and sea water acidification, as described in the 2020 MedECC report; whereas sea levels could rise by up to 25 cm by 2040–2050; whereas meeting the Paris Agreement limit of 1.5 °C of warming will require the EU's energy demand to be halved by 2050 compared to 2015 levels, which means priority must be given to energy efficiency solutions and increased cooperation on sustainable energy projects with the other countries around the coast of the Mediterranean by using the region's untapped potential to help the EU reach both its energy and climate targets;
- L. whereas the EU is committed to spending at least 20 % of the 2014-2020 MFF on climate action; whereas the 2021-2027 EU budget includes an increased target of 30 % on climate action; whereas, the Mediterranean is more exposed to climate change than other regional seas, and its coastal zones face heightened disaster risks, including flooding and erosion, and the salinisation of river deltas and aquifers, which endanger food security and livelihoods;
- M. whereas several transnational and territorial cooperation frameworks and initiatives have been developed over the years in the Mediterranean, such as the UfM, the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly of the European Committee of the Regions (ARLEM), the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR), the EU Initiative for the Western Mediterranean (WestMED), Interreg and ENI CBC programmes (e.g. MED, EURO-MED, ENICBC Med, NEXT MED, ADRION, MARITTIMO), the Mediterranean Cooperation Alliance (MedCoopAlliance), the networks of Regions and Local administrations (CPMR and its Intermediterranean Commission, MedCities, Latin Arc), and Euro-regions (Adriatic-Ionian, Pyrenean-Mediterranean);
- N. whereas macro-regions play a key role in strengthening the economic, social, and territorial cohesion of the European Union and its close neighbourhood by empowering

cross-border areas to address specific, shared challenges collectively, through exchanges and cooperation and joint implementation, contributing to increased policy effectiveness and impact;

- O. whereas there is a need for Mediterranean territories to finally have an operational instrument, such as a macro-regional strategy enabling them to develop and implement a concrete action plan and joint projects in response to common priorities identified in existing frameworks such as the UfM or ARLEM;
- P. whereas an integrated and sustainably managed blue economy strategy has the potential to address the multidimensional environmental challenges faced by the Mediterranean basin, while providing decent jobs, preserving the livelihoods of local communities, contributing to food security and underpinning the green transition of the broader Mediterranean area;
- Q. whereas the Member States should apply an ecosystem-based approach to maritime spatial planning, including a robust strategic environmental assessment that takes into account the cumulative impacts of all maritime activities, climate change, the precautionary principle, sensitivity mapping, and active stakeholder engagement in a way that is consistent with the EU Green Deal's climate and biodiversity goals;
- R. whereas, as highlighted by several reports, the adverse effects of climate change are often felt more keenly by women than men as a result of systemic gender discrimination and societal expectations related to gender roles;
- S. whereas providing social security benefits for fishers, in particular those working in small-scale fisheries, is key to ensuring the resilience of the sector and the transition towards more sustainable fisheries;

The Mediterranean: a challenge for Europe

- 1. Recalls that the territory of the EU covers half of the Mediterranean basin and the European Union cannot remain passive in the face of the multiple political, social, economic, demographic and environmental challenges confronting the Mediterranean basin; stresses the importance of direct and diversified cooperation for regional peace, especially in the Eastern Mediterranean;
- 2. Deplores the continuous degradation of the environment in the Mediterranean basin, the loss of biodiversity and the increasing air and marine pollution;
- 3. Stresses that cohesion policy still has further potential for action to provide appropriate responses to the challenges facing 110 million Europeans; believes that the measures provided for under cohesion policy must be coordinated with and complementary to measures under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, the National Recovery and Resilience Plan and other national policies;
- 4. Is concerned about the increasing pollution by plastic and domestic waste and calls for a historic effort to limit and manage them by promoting the circular economy, in particular in highly urbanised areas and on island territories, where space and resources to store and process waste are limited; calls on the Member States, regions and the

relevant managing authorities to plan and use the cohesion funds to invest in technologies and infrastructure specifically aimed at recovering materials from residual waste for circular economy purposes; calls on the creation of a pilot project on zero marine pollution in the Mediterranean, thus testing the core principles of a Mediterranean macro-regional strategy around a concrete objective;

5. Points out that water security is one of the key factors in the well-being of the Mediterranean; calls for sustainable water security measures and for a more sustainable approach to be taken to adapting Mediterranean agriculture to the scarcity of water, bearing in mind its impact on the water ecosystem;
6. Notes with concern, that the European shores of the Mediterranean suffer from greater environmental degradation than the shores of Northern Europe (especially in port cities that do not benefit from the protection of emission control areas to reduce airborne emissions);
7. Considers environmental problems to be cross-cutting and complex, such that each entity, region or state acting alone can only provide partial solutions, and that it is necessary to ensure a broad, integrated and common approach embracing the whole Mediterranean area;
8. Considers that a dynamic of cooperation set in motion by the EU and its Member States and regions can have a knock-on effect on the whole basin; recalls that direct and shared management programmes, such as European territorial cooperation programmes, represent a major opportunity to facilitate an alignment of objectives, funds and projects;
9. Considers it essential to establish a system of up-to-date information on investments made in the Mediterranean area in order to monitor the environmental effectiveness of the funding involved; calls for more effective and better coordinated use of existing funding instruments to meet the challenges arising in the Mediterranean basin, such as measures to improve marine biodiversity and to restore and protect marine habitats and species; notes that expenditure for the EU's southern and eastern neighbourhoods has been increased by EUR 280 million in the 2023 budget and calls for this financial allocation to be used, inter alia, to support ambitious environmental measures in the Mediterranean; notes that in the current CFP architecture and with the funding possibilities available to fisheries through the EMFAF, funding is mostly decoupled from cohesion policy, although some interlinkages can be developed on an ad hoc basis; points out that a large amount of funding can be mobilised through the EU budget to support Mediterranean projects as well, through the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument, European Territorial Cooperation, Horizon Europe, LIFE and Erasmus programmes, which are also open to non-EU countries;

The Mediterranean: potential and problems

10. Highlights the potential of all the Mediterranean regions for the development of onshore and offshore renewable energy sources and for a just and inclusive ecological transition, to contribute to the fundamental transformation towards the most climate neutral economy possible in the years ahead, in particular by developing and expanding

renewable forms of energy and increasing the interconnection of energy markets, as well as by cooperating on the production and transportation of renewable hydrogen; considers that it is highly uncertain whether higher demand for green energy can be supplied from within the EU unless further investments are made to secure these supplies in the region, as well as accelerating and simplifying procedures for renewable energy projects;

11. Underlines that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can contribute to finding innovative solutions not only for the deployment of renewable energies and the circular and blue economy; considers that further simplification should be promoted to ensure that SMEs across all European regions can access cohesion funds;
12. Recalls that overfishing and destructive fishing practices remain a threat to the survival of many species; is concerned about illegal bottom trawling inside Mediterranean marine protected areas; is convinced that the transition to a sustainable blue economy in the Mediterranean region will contribute to tackling environmental challenges, thus preserving the health of the oceanic basin and maintaining economic prosperity, while supporting sustainable and inclusive development and quality jobs with the direct involvement of fishery-sector operators and the representatives of the coastal communities; calls on the Commission to monitor data on stocks and to carry out impact assessments to take decisions on fishing quotas; calls on the Commission to promote the digital transformation and the use of new technologies in the fields of environmental monitoring, reporting and assessment, as well as for governance issues;
13. Expresses concern about the invasion of the Mediterranean by alien species, which can have serious repercussions for water ecosystems in the context of climate change, rising sea levels, heatwave shocks and increase in sea water temperatures;
14. Draws attention to the increasing density of maritime traffic and the danger of oil spills and the risks these activities present for marine ecosystems and particularly sea mammals;
15. Regrets that most EU Member States around the Mediterranean have not adopted maritime spatial plans; calls on the Commission to follow up with these Member States in order to ensure the swift adoption of such plans;
16. Draws attention to both the environmental and the social impacts caused by tourism due to its seasonality and its uncontrolled development (such as cruises, worsening coastal erosion, new polluting leisure activities, precarious seasonal work and rising housing prices; considers the need for a careful balance between the environmental objectives and the preservation of economic competitiveness and stresses the importance of promoting a responsible approach to tourism; calls on the Member States and Regions to devise sustainable tourism action plans in consultation with stakeholders and civil society and in line with a future European roadmap for sustainable tourism, and to make full use of the Next Generation EU funds and Structural Funds to finance tourism transition action plans in the Mediterranean basin;
17. Points out that island territories face economic imbalances linked to the handicaps associated with their relative isolation, which must be addressed by concrete measures,

as required by Article 174 TFEU, in the economic, administrative, cultural and social sectors;

18. Stresses that women's economic participation continues to represent a significant challenge for gender equality in the Mediterranean basin, with uneven employment rates and levels of inclusion in decision-making processes among the countries of the region; recalls that empowering women and creating the preconditions for inclusive participation in public and private economic and social entities could lead to achieve the objectives of mitigation and adaptation to climate change;
19. Considers that the Mediterranean's geographical position between Europe and Africa and its role necessitates the development of a cooperative basin-wide approach to foster better and safer management of migration, address the drivers of irregular migration and forced displacement, and help put an end to the humanitarian disasters occurring in the Mediterranean sea;

The Mediterranean: a common space to be structured

20. Considers that the Mediterranean is a cohesive geographical area sharing a unique historical and cultural heritage and a Mediterranean climate resulting in similar environmental characteristics, and that it faces similar risks of natural disasters such as fires, floods, earthquakes, drought and increasing scarcity of water resources; notes that the Mediterranean basin has been hit by an ever-increasing number of extreme weather events and natural disasters in recent years; therefore invites the Commission to study the possibility of tailoring the EU civil protection mechanism better to the Mediterranean basin and to put forward a proposal for a strengthened Solidarity Fund; calls on Member States to adopt measures to mitigate the effects of heatwaves and droughts in coastal areas, which are expected to become more frequent in the context of climate change and which threaten human life and biodiversity and to dedicate cohesion policy funds in remedying ecological disasters that have taken place in the Mediterranean such as the one occurred in El Mar Menor; calls on Member States and the Commission to monitor areas in danger of becoming an ecological disaster and mitigate the impact with cohesion funds;
21. Welcomes the WestMed sea basin initiative in the Western Mediterranean and Interreg programmes such as Interreg Mediterranean, ADRION, NEXT MED and MARITTIMO, as good examples of direct and diversified cooperation, including at regional level, with shared objectives;
22. Calls on the Commission to tackle disparities in levels of development, including shortfalls in institutional and administrative capacities, infrastructure interconnections and trade relations;
23. Calls on the Commission to support, particularly by means of Interreg programmes, networks of marine protected areas in the Mediterranean along similar lines to those of the Mediterranean Protected Areas (MedPAN) network, and to work on the project to create a global network of marine protected areas ('Blue Belt'), linked with the outermost regions and the overseas countries and territories;

24. Welcomes the progress of the Adriatic-Ionian macro-regional strategy (EUSAIR), which has mobilised the Member States and their regions, third countries and their local authorities; considers EUSAIR a successful example where the EU proved to be a driving force and a vector of openness, benefiting from the ADRIION transnational programme, which aligned objectives supporting the fulfilment of the strategy's roadmap; maintains that these same principles and a similar common approach must be applied to the other areas of the Mediterranean; considers that such a macro-regional strategy can amplify and accelerate the policies necessary for the development and preservation of the available resources through the cooperation of all the actors involved;
25. Calls on the Commission to provide support for a macro-regional strategy in the Mediterranean taking its 'new agenda for the Mediterranean' into account, in particular its point five on the 'ecological transition, climate resilience, energy and the environment'; considers that the diversity and the size of the territory concerned also necessitate the implementation of three distinct but coordinated strategies, namely strategies for the Western Mediterranean, the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, and the Eastern Mediterranean; calls for the support of the countries and authorities concerned and for a central role of regions and local authorities in their governance;
26. Considers that a macro-regional strategy for the Mediterranean, which would entail substantial and active involvement of the regional and local authorities concerned, has considerable potential for addressing the multidimensional environmental challenges of the whole basin; believes that this macro-regional strategy must be based on a solid and representative multilevel governance scheme involving regional and local authorities and entailing the participation of civil society actors; believes that such a strategy could be used more specifically to encourage circular economy projects, fight plastic pollution, protect biodiversity, strengthen relations with third countries to control IUU fishing and to ensure compliance with the policies of the UNCLOS, contribute to resolving use conflicts through proper maritime spatial planning, preserve the socio-economic contribution of fisheries to the well-being of coastal communities, in particular in islands, support the diversification of fishers' activities, including retraining and conversion, promote stock management measures throughout the Mediterranean basin, and encourage third countries to implement marine protected areas (MPAs) in their territorial waters;
27. Believes that small-scale fishers and those in the most vulnerable situations require ad hoc forms of financial assistance and support, in order to help fishers enter new market segments, limit the economic and social gap between north and south and avoid undermining fishing activities and employment in the sector;
28. Invites the Member States to make full use of FLAGs to design and implement local development strategies addressing economic, social and environmental needs; calls on the Member States to guarantee that FLAGs involve all stakeholders and that EU funding is spent according to objective criteria, in a manner that ensures the sustainable development of local communities;

29. Recalls that each successful cooperation experience contributes to the objectives of peace and security, prosperity, human development and good governance, which are the other cornerstone objectives of the agenda for the Mediterranean;
30. Invites the European Council to submit to the Commission a detailed macro-regional strategy for the Mediterranean with a view to its approval under the Spanish Presidency of the Union in the second half of 2023;
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 - ◦
31. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the national and regional parliaments of the Member States.

1.3.2023

OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES

for the Committee on Regional Development

on the role of Cohesion Policy in addressing multidimensional environmental challenges in the Mediterranean basin
(2022/2059(INI))

Rapporteur for opinion: Nora Mebarek

SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Fisheries calls on the Committee on Regional Development, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

- having regard to its resolution of 3 May 2022 entitled ‘Toward a sustainable blue economy in the EU: the role of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors’¹,
- having regard to its resolution of 6 October 2021 entitled ‘Rebuilding fish stocks in the Mediterranean: assessment and next steps’²,
- having regard to its resolution of 9 June 2021 entitled ‘EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030: Bringing nature back into our lives’³,
- having regard to the opinion of European Committee of the Regions of 11 October 2022 entitled ‘Towards a macro-regional strategy in the Mediterranean’⁴,
- having regard to the Food and Agriculture Organization report entitled ‘The State of Mediterranean and Black Sea Fisheries 2022’,
- having regard to the MedFish4Ever Ministerial Declaration, adopted by ministerial representatives of the Mediterranean coastal states in Valletta, Malta, on 30 March 2017,
- having regard to Directive 2014/89/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 July 2014 establishing a framework for maritime spatial planning⁵,

¹ [OJ C 465, 6.12.2022, p. 2.](#)

² [OJ C 132, 24.3.2022, p. 56.](#)

³ [OJ C 67, 8.2.2022, p. 25.](#)

⁴ <https://webapi2016.cor.europa.eu/v1/documents/CYZ3CSFTTJZN-161561581-7340/download>.

⁵ [OJ L 257, 28.8.2014, p. 135.](#)

- having regard to the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean’s Regional Plan of Action for Small-Scale Fisheries in the Mediterranean and Black Sea,
 - having regard to the Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean,
- A. whereas, according to the Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas, the Mediterranean is one of the major reservoirs of marine and coastal biodiversity, with 28 % of endemic species, 7.5 % of the world’s marine fauna and 18 % of its marine flora;
 - B. whereas the Mediterranean basin is home to over 150 million inhabitants, including numerous fishing communities; whereas 84 % of the fishing fleet is small-scale and artisanal; whereas the fisheries sector represents 1 million direct and indirect jobs;
 - C. whereas in its 2030 biodiversity strategy, the Commission proposed that at least 30 % of the sea area in the EU should be protected; whereas according to the Mediterranean Protected Areas Network, 8.33 % of the Mediterranean Sea currently has protected status;
 - D. whereas the Mediterranean basin is warming 20 % faster than the global average, with the occurrence of marine heatwaves doubling since the 1980s; whereas the network Mediterranean Experts on Climate and environmental Change estimates that this could lead to the local extinction of up to 50 % of commercial fish and marine invertebrates by 2050;
 - E. whereas, according to the latest General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) report on the state of Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries, published in 2022, there has been a 10 % decrease in the percentage of stocks in overexploitation since 2012 and fishing pressure has decreased on average by 21 % in the last decade; whereas the effects of this reduction are starting to show in the increased biomass of some stocks;
 - F. whereas marine litter is a major concern in the Mediterranean, with the concentration of microplastics reaching a record level of 1.25 million fragments per km², making the Mediterranean one of the most polluted seas in the world; whereas fisheries both contribute to this situation and suffer as a result of it;
 - G. whereas an integrated and sustainably managed blue economy strategy, bringing together such activities as shipping, seagoing passenger transport, fisheries, energy generation, ports, shipyards, coastal tourism and land-based aquaculture, has the potential to address the multidimensional environmental challenges faced by the Mediterranean basin, while providing decent jobs, preserving the livelihoods of local communities, contributing to food security and underpinning the green transition of the broader Mediterranean area;
 - H. whereas such a strategy requires adequate maritime multilevel governance, allowing countries and regions throughout the Mediterranean basin to coordinate action, develop policy tools more effectively and maximise the use of funding and financial instruments;

- I. whereas the Cohesion Fund should support activities that align with the Union's climate and environmental standards and priorities and do no significant harm to environmental objectives, as enshrined in the horizontal principles of the Common Provision Regulation⁶;
 - J. whereas the Member States should apply an ecosystem-based approach to maritime spatial planning (MSP), including a robust strategic environmental assessment that takes into account the cumulative impact of all maritime activities, climate change, the precautionary principle, sensitivity mapping, and active stakeholder engagement, in line with the EU Green Deal climate and biodiversity goals;
 - K. whereas increased pollution from human activities, habitat degradation, the introduction of non-indigenous species, overfishing, and the impact of climate-driven changes on the marine environment and ecosystems risk compromising the sustainability of Mediterranean fisheries;
 - L. whereas providing social security benefits for fishers, in particular those working in small-scale fisheries, is key in ensuring the resilience of the sector and the transition towards more sustainable fisheries;
1. Recalls that according to the 2022 GFCM report on the state of Mediterranean and Black Sea fisheries, the proportion of overfished stocks decreased from 88 % in 2014 to 73 % in 2020; nevertheless remains concerned about this slow rate of progress on overfishing in the Mediterranean;
 2. Highlights that factors exerting pressure on Mediterranean fish stocks and marine biodiversity also include other human-induced problems such as plastic pollution, fuel dispersion, habitat loss, maritime traffic, climate change and the proliferation of invasive alien species; fears that the projected further deterioration of the marine environment in the Mediterranean would hit coastal and fishing communities even harder, and hamper the future sustainable development of the entire EU; calls for the adoption of a consistent approach across policies, in line with the objectives of the Green Deal, in order to tackle the impact of all pressures on the Mediterranean Sea, including all forms of pollution, offshore drilling and nutrient run-off, and to effectively implement existing legislation on the protection of the marine ecosystem and the management of marine resources, and to ensure that all marine protected areas under EU Member States' jurisdiction are effectively implemented, monitored, controlled and managed, with the involvement of all relevant stakeholders, in particular small-scale fisheries;
 3. Recalls that the EU fisheries and aquaculture sectors have suffered a series of setbacks in recent years as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's war of aggression on Ukraine and persistently high fuel prices, and remains extremely fragile to date; notes that these factors have undermined the profitability of thousands of companies to the

⁶ Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy, [OJ L 231, 30.6.2021, p. 159](#).

point of endangering their very survival, with a potentially devastating impact on employment and social cohesion in coastal areas; notes that the size of the EU Mediterranean fishing fleet has decreased by 23.5 % over the last three years; points out the importance of socio-economic assessments and considerations when implementing tools such as multiannual plans;

4. Stresses that the development of the blue economy in the Mediterranean could bring many benefits and opportunities to develop local economies; points out, however, that it will inevitably also increase competition for the use of marine and coastal space and resources; calls for the full deployment of ecosystem-based integrated coastal zone management and MSP as tools to avoid conflicts and situations where fishers face danger when carrying out their activities owing to the completely arbitrary application of territorial water limits, and therefore to promote harmonious sustainable and long-term development within ecological limits, taking into account socio-economic considerations throughout the Mediterranean basin;
5. Notes, in particular, that the blue economy is experiencing an increase in new activities and competition for space, which is a major challenge for traditional activities such as fisheries and aquaculture; calls, in this regard, for the views of all blue economy stakeholders to be taken into account in MSP development and implementation;
6. Regrets that most EU Member States with Mediterranean coastlines have not adopted maritime spatial plans; calls on the Commission to follow up with these Member States in order to ensure the swift adoption of such plans;
7. Notes that in the current common fisheries policy (CFP) architecture and with the funding possibilities available to fisheries through the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF), funding is mostly decoupled from cohesion policy, although some interlinkages can be developed on an ad hoc basis; notes that most operators in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors are small, which, depending on Member State implementation, can pose an obstacle to their access to cohesion funds; suggests that efforts should be made to facilitate the sectors' access to cohesion funds, including through greater involvement of fishers' and aquaculture producers' associations; notes that, beyond the EMFAF, a number of EU funds are relevant to the blue economy, including the European Structural and Investment Funds, the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance, the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – 'Global Europe', the Connecting Europe Facility and the Just Transition Fund; calls on the Member States to leverage existing opportunities under the Cohesion Policy instruments and all available EU funds to also promote international cooperation;
8. Highlights that easier access to EU funding for the fisheries and aquaculture sectors, and in particular for small-scale operators, is key to ensure the resilience of the local communities that depend on it; notes that this calls for specific measures and support to allow the sectors to strengthen their competitiveness, grow and develop; regrets that funding procedures are often complex; calls on the Member States, in this context, to provide technical assistance at local level to ensure that the fisheries and aquaculture sectors, in particular small-scale operators, are able to benefit from EU funding for sustainable and low-impact fishing and aquaculture activities;

9. Recalls that income diversification, where necessary, can also contribute to the transition to sustainable management of marine resources and to the resilience of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors, in particular small-scale operators; calls on the Member States to facilitate investments in income diversification projects when implementing the EMFAF and other EU funds, and to ensure that fishers, in particular those working in the small-scale fisheries segment, are covered by social security benefits, such as unemployment and retirement benefits;
10. Believes that small-scale fishers and those in the most vulnerable situations require ad hoc forms of financial assistance and support, in order to help fishers enter new market segments, limit the economic and social gap between north and south and avoid undermining fishing activities and employment in the sector;
11. Calls on the Commission to ensure that every legislative proposal is preceded by a thorough evaluation of the measures already adopted, as well as a wide-ranging impact assessment to quantify its potential socio-economic and environmental impact on coastal communities and on the productivity and competitiveness of EU fisheries undertakings and the production chain, is supported by the best available scientific advice and proper consultation with the affected fishing sectors, and is implemented gradually and in proportion to the sector's capacity for action;
12. Believes that the governance of the Mediterranean could be improved through better coordination and by setting up a dedicated operational instrument for the development of a strategy for an integrated, long-term and sustainable blue economy that develops within ecological limits and takes into account socio-economic aspects; highlights, in this regard, the importance of consulting and involving stakeholders, in particular organisations representing fishers, aquaculture producers and coastal communities; reiterates its call for the establishment of cooperation networks between the governments of the Member States, fishers' associations, workers' organisations, wastewater bodies, coastal stakeholders, ports, NGOs and regional conventions in order to strengthen a bottom-up approach based on dialogue and inclusion and promote practical solutions, with a view to ensuring more effective implementation of the rules and providing adequate resources in areas such as the collection, disposal and recycling of marine litter;
13. Notes that, in the context of the governance of the Mediterranean, the Commission needs to step up its dialogue with Mediterranean third countries so as to ensure compliance with the policies of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the GFCM in order to fight and eliminate IUU fishing and the market distortion resulting from the differences in competitive conditions for sector operators, which puts EU fishers at a disadvantage; further calls on the Commission to encourage all third countries in the Mediterranean basin to ratify UNCLOS; commends the invaluable contribution of the GFCM towards achieving fully sustainable management of maritime resources, including through its IUU Action Plan and its Regional Action Plan for Small-Scale Fisheries in the Mediterranean and Black Sea; highlights the role of the GFCM in ensuring coordination in the adoption and implementation of conservation measures for the Mediterranean; regrets that not all of the management recommendations adopted by the GFCM are followed through by its members;

14. Invites the Member States to make full use of Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGs) to design and implement local development strategies addressing economic, social and environmental needs; calls on the Member States to guarantee that FLAGs involve all stakeholders and that EU funding is spent according to objective criteria, in a manner that ensures the sustainable development of local communities;
15. Welcomes the renewed political impetus in recent years to alleviate the growing environmental degradation of the Mediterranean and enable a sustainable blue economy strategy that develops within ecological limits, as illustrated by EU and international initiatives such as the renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood, the WestMed Initiative, the West Mediterranean Multiannual Plan, the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region, Interreg MED, BLUEMED, MedFish4Ever, the UfM's Blue Economy Working Group, and the Regional Action Plan on marine litter management in the Mediterranean; regrets that these numerous initiatives are yet to fully bear fruit, as the environmental prospects for the Mediterranean remain bleak; agrees with the conclusion of the 2020 report on the State of the Environment and Development in the Mediterranean that 'to avoid projected failures, current trajectories must urgently be corrected'; calls, therefore, for the deployment of a macro-regional strategy at the scale of the entire Mediterranean basin, dedicated to climate change mitigation, environmental conservation, social well-being and economic growth, and the sustainable development of the blue economy; believes that such a strategy could be used more specifically to improve the standard of living in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors, foster circular economy projects in these sectors, ensure market stability and the availability of food supplies, address plastic and other forms of pollution, protect biodiversity, enhance relations with third countries with respect to the fight against and the elimination of IUU fishing; contribute to solving usage conflicts through adequate MSP, and promote compliance with international treaties on territorial waters;
16. Highlights that this macro-regional strategy can contribute to preserving the socio-economic contribution of fisheries, in particular small-scale fisheries, and aquaculture to the well-being of coastal communities, in particular on islands, and promote stock management measures throughout the Mediterranean basin in order to achieve the objectives of the CFP; encourages all Mediterranean countries to implement marine protected areas in their territorial waters, provide for the sustainable economic development of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors, in particular with respect to transformation, decarbonisation and commercialisation; and support the diversification of fishers' and aquaculture producers' activities, including through retraining and reskilling.

INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

Date adopted	1.3.2023
Result of final vote	+ : 22 - : 1 0 : 1
Members present for the final vote	Clara Aguilera, João Albuquerque, Carmen Avram, Pietro Bartolo, Izaskun Bilbao Barandica, Maria da Graça Carvalho, Asger Christensen, Rosa D'Amato, Francisco Guerreiro, Niclas Herbst, Ladislav Ilčić, France Jamet, Pierre Karleskind, Predrag Fred Matić, Francisco José Millán Mon, Ana Miranda, Caroline Roose, Peter van Dalen
Substitutes present for the final vote	Gabriel Mato, Raffaele Stancanelli, Annalisa Tardino, Lucia Vuolo
Substitutes under Rule 209(7) present for the final vote	Stelios Kympouropoulos, Erik Poulsen

FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE ASKED FOR OPINION

22	+
ECR	Ladislav Ilčić, Raffaele Stancanelli
PPE	Maria da Graça Carvalho, Peter van Dalen, Niclas Herbst, Stelios Kypourouopoulos, Gabriel Mato, Francisco José Millán Mon, Lucia Vuolo
Renew	Izaskun Bilbao Barandica, Asger Christensen, Pierre Karleskind, Erik Poulsen
S&D	Clara Aguilera, João Albuquerque, Carmen Avram, Pietro Bartolo, Predrag Fred Matić
Verts/ALE	Rosa D'Amato, Francisco Guerreiro, Ana Miranda, Caroline Roose

1	-
ID	France Jamet

1	0
ID	Annalisa Tardino

Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention

INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE

Date adopted	22.3.2023
Result of final vote	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: flex-end; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: right; padding-right: 10px;">+:</div> <div>37</div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: flex-end; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: right; padding-right: 10px;">-:</div> <div>0</div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: flex-end; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: right; padding-right: 10px;">0:</div> <div>2</div> </div>
Members present for the final vote	François Alfonsi, Pascal Arimont, Adrian-Dragoş Benea, Isabel Benjumea Benjumea, Tom Berendsen, Erik Bergkvist, Stéphane Bijoux, Franc Bogovič, Corina Creţu, Rosa D'Amato, Matthias Ecke, Mircea-Gheorghe Hava, Krzysztof Hetman, Peter Jahr, Manolis Kefalogiannis, Elżbieta Kruk, Nora Mebarek, Martina Michels, Giuseppe Milazzo, Alin Mituţa, Andželika Anna Możdżanowska, Denis Nesci, Niklas Nienaß, Younous Omarjee, Tsvetelina Penkova, Marcos Ros Sempere, André Rougé, Susana Solís Pérez, Irène Tolleret, Monika Vana
Substitutes present for the final vote	Álvaro Amaro, Daniel Buda, Isabel Carvalhais, Mauri Pekkarinen, Peter Pollák, Bergur Løkke Rasmussen, Bronis Ropė
Substitutes under Rule 209(7) present for the final vote	Chiara Gemma, France Jamet

FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE

37	+
ECR	Chiara Gemma, Elżbieta Kruk, Giuseppe Milazzo, Andżelika Anna Moźdzanowska, Denis Nesci
PPE	Álvaro Amaro, Pascal Arimont, Isabel Benjumea Benjumea, Tom Berendsen, Franc Bogovič, Daniel Buda, Mircea-Gheorghe Hava, Krzysztof Hetman, Peter Jahr, Manolis Kefalogiannis, Peter Pollák
Renew	Stéphane Bijoux, Alin Mituța, Mauri Pekkarinen, Bergur Løkke Rasmussen, Susana Solís Pérez, Irène Tolleret
S&D	Adrian-Dragoș Benea, Erik Bergkvist, Isabel Carvalhais, Corina Crețu, Matthias Ecke, Nora Mebarek, Tsvetelina Penkova, Marcos Ros Sempere
The Left	Martina Michels, Younous Omarjee
Vers/ALE	François Alfonsi, Rosa D'Amato, Niklas Nienäb, Bronis Ropė, Monika Vana

0	-

2	0
ID	France Jamet, André Rougé

Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention