



29th March 2021

MEDITERRANEAN COOPERATION ALLIANCE

“Facing together common challenges and integrating strategies for a better and sustainable future”

Statement in response to the European Commission and the High Representative Communication on a “Renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood. A new Agenda for the Mediterranean”. (JOIN 2021) 2 Final.

The Mediterranean Cooperation Alliance, coalition gathering the regions of the **Inter-mediterranean Commission of the CP MR**, the **Euroregion Pyrenees-Méditerranéan**, the **Adriatic Ionian Euroregion** and the networks of local authorities **MedCités** and **Arco Latino**, welcomes the Communication on a “Renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood. A new Agenda for the Mediterranean” gives a global overview of the most striking issues for this area over the coming years.

Since the launching of Barcelona Process, large-scale international projects, as well as a great number of local and regional initiatives, have been contributing to create a consolidated network of cooperation.

Retrospectively, in view of the experience accumulated through the Barcelona Process, there seems to be now an urgent need for an innovative territorial dimension of public policies to steer the definition and the implementation of more effective, cohesive, and legitimated transnational policies in the region.

Taking advantage the experience of its members, the Mediterranean Cooperation Alliance wishes to underline the key role of both, the transnational and sub-state multilevel coordination, in the deployment of this new Mediterranean Agenda.

Three main issues are of particular relevance and should be truly considered by Euro-Mediterranean and EU Institutions in the revision of the European Neighbourhood Policy for the South.



1) The Agenda 2030, The European Green Deal and the New Urban Agenda are the frameworks to address the urgent challenges that the Mediterranean region is currently facing.

In the current context, marked by the unprecedented health crisis of the COVID-19 and its dramatic socio-economic impacts, implementing SDGs should be more than ever at the core of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, including the Southern Neighbourhood Policy and the post-COVID-19 recovery strategies. Given SDGs' crosscutting dimension and their transformative potential, the EU should structure regional strategies to recover from the COVID-19 crisis and accelerate the transitions towards sustainability in the Mediterranean for the ten years to come.

The debate on the implementation of the SDGs recalls the principles of policy coherence, multilevel governance and localization (place-based approach). The effective achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in the Mediterranean requires a strong support to a greater involvement of regional and local authorities in decision-making processes, as well as in the definition and management of EU and Mediterranean programs.

In this regard, multilevel governance in the region appears to be a need in order to fulfil what the European Green Deal is aiming. Sub-state authorities are the ones that work closer to the citizen, boosting sustainable mobility in cities; helping the creation of innovative SME in regions; struggling to preserve its surrounding biodiversity; proving to be more energy-efficient in their territories, continentals as well as insulars.

In the end, they become the perfect allies to the states to work together in the shared agendas.

2) The need to foster the development of multilevel network and collaborative governance models in the region.

The Mediterranean Cooperation Alliance points out that fostering the development of multilevel, network and innovative collaborative governance models is of fundamental importance in a region where reforms often stall, fail and even reverse. A renovated cooperative political culture is required, promoting broad political consensus and improving autonomy at the different levels of government, administrative and technical capacity, exploiting to the fullest the benefits of decentralization.

EU institutions must continue to offer formal frameworks that incentivize experimental (but accountable) models of governance. Central governments must assure long-term political support and must involve local and regional authorities in the negotiation of domestic policy-making related to territorial and trans-national policies. Local and Regional Authorities must increase and/or benefit from increased administrative and institutional capacities in order to consolidate their ability in policy delivering. This should be closely linked to reverse dynamics on closing space for civil society by working with it as a must-principle to succeed in the objective to build vibrant, inclusive, cohesive and peaceful societies.



Local and Regional Authorities in the Mediterranean and their networks of cooperation, such as the Mediterranean Cooperation Alliance, can play a key role in the search for greater coordination amongst already existing transnational frameworks and allowing concrete opportunities to the implementation of policy and funds on the ground. Likewise, they can also contribute to reporting local realities to higher governance levels, hence guaranteeing different scales of intervention and initiatives that are more efficient.

3) The opportunity to refine the approach of the macro region for the Mediterranean, in order to ensure a coordinated approach and to strengthen synergies between existing initiatives.

The Mediterranean area represents a complex socio-economic, political and institutional setting on different levels combining diverse European and Mediterranean, national, regional, local and global cultures, strategies, funds and policies. In particular, it encompasses certain member states of the EU, pre-accession and candidate countries, as well as states included in the Southern Neighbourhood Policy, Euro-Mediterranean and multilateral institutions and different sets of sub-state, economic and civil society players.

Macro-regionalization processes in the region are indeed trying to innovate the modus operandi of transnational cooperation dynamics by offering a common framework to foster synergies and complementarities amongst already existing initiatives, programs and governance structures.

In this context, a macro-regional approach for the Mediterranean basin is needed to achieve better synergies and greater coordination among the existing and emerging initiatives, programs etc. and promoting the benefit that it could bring. The macro-regional framework could be promoted by a bottom-up process that can facilitate a new emphasis on territories and governance, improving cooperation between different levels of government.

To conclude, it is of utmost importance that multi-level governance be better considered for the revision of the European Neighbourhood Policy for the South, in particular as it is not quoted as such in the Communication at stake. Local and Regional Authorities, as well as their respective networks thereof, should unequivocally be consulted to that end.