

An aerial photograph of a coastline with waves crashing onto a sandy beach. The image is partially framed by a large, stylized teal letter 'X' on the right side.

THE MEDITERRANEAN FORUM

Circle the Med

The Mediterranean Online Forum 2020

Key conclusions

Introductory remarks

The Forum was organised at the premises of the European Public Law Organisation (EPLO) in Athens - www1.eplo.int - from where it was broadcasted exclusively online from circlethemed.com. The organising body was the Circular economy and Climate Change Institute of the EPLO, an institute that promotes knowledge and good practice on Circular economy, Blue economy and Digital economy.

The aim of the Forum was to highlight the importance of the Mediterranean Sea Bassin as the most prominent regional sea of the European Union (EU) - known also as « the cradle of our civilisation » - where peace, cooperation, prosperity, the rule of law, human rights, territorial cohesion and new governance models enhanced by institutional and capacity building - objectives of the EPLO - should be supported and promoted. Most importantly the focus of the forum was on how the new global and EU priorities can be holistically promoted and implemented across the Mediterranean, i.e. how the Mediterranean basin can become "Covid19 resilient", "climate resilient", and how it can be progressively transformed into a Circular economy area, by also fully implementing the UN Sustainable development goals (SDGs).

Key conclusions

1) Promote and support Circular economy, together with Digital economy in the Mediterranean. Develop to that extent the necessary synergies among the EU, the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), the Barcelona Convention and it's Mediterranean Action Plan, as well as all the countries of the Region, and their stakeholders.

The role of the Youth is extremely important. They are key social drivers and have actively promoted climate issues, both in their mitigation and adaptation pillars. It is for them - our children - that the principle of sustainable development is to be honoured.

2) Develop a new form of diplomacy, the "Circular economy diplomacy" to promote and support the Circular economy model and the new culture surrounding it. Circular economy should be both vertical and horizontal (top down & bottom up, but also cross sectoral as well as intrapreneurship). A new generation of CSR and ESG should be developed in the form of "Corporate Circular responsibility".

3) Promote a "Climate resilient" and "Covid19 resilient" Mediterranean.

The Mediterranean, it's coastal areas and islands are very vulnerable to climate change. Climate change and environmental degradation can lead to pandemics or increase their intensity. It is some kind of cascade. Therefore all the links of this chain have to become virtuous. Moreover, protecting the above boosts tourism which is the "heavy industry" of most of the Mediterranean countries and has to become Covid19 resilient.

4) Circular economy has to be mainstreamed and streamlined in the whole Mediterranean basin, as part also of the neighbourhood policy of the EU, but has also to be fully implemented in all the countries of the Mediterranean and all their policy areas, both vertically and horizontally. The social dimension of Circular economy should also be promoted as public participation and social acceptance are key to implement climate and environmental policies and built ownership.

5) All the key policy areas have to integrate Circular and Digital economy principles and actions, in line - as a good practice - with the two Actions Plans of the EU.

We need thus to develop Circular agriculture, energy, tourism, culture, promote in this context good practice and eco-innovation and create green jobs.

Circular culture implies building “culture bridges” among the Mediterranean countries but also protecting archaeological and cultural monuments from climate impacts, as well as monuments of the Nature, which could also be UNESCO monuments (biospheres). In this context, the Greek initiative, supported by the UN Secretary General, for the creation of a Flexible mechanism to protect the cultural capital of the planet, as well as the monuments of the nature, will be extremely important for the rich cultural heritage of the Mediterranean.

6) Circular economy is the overarching priority, the umbrella of the two other important ones, i.e. Blue economy and Green Growth. They have both to become Circular and the two new concepts to be developed should be Circular Blue Economy, and Circular Green Growth. It is not a pleonasm. It provides the qualitative elements that Circular economy ensures in its “lato sensu” concept.

7) Blue Economy is the economy par excellence of the Mediterranean.

The 2020 Blue Economy Report of the European Commission describes all the facets of Blue economy and has to be read in the light of the aforementioned Circular economy Action Plans. From fisheries and aquaculture, to tourism, navigation and ports, underwater cables and pipelines and exploration of hydrocarbons. A broad range of activities that have to be Circular, and when it comes to the EU have to be included in the Maritime spatial Plans under Directive 2014/89/EU “establishing a framework for maritime spatial planning” which can cover the EEZ of the EU Member States. Such Plans have to undergo a Strategic Environmental Assessment in accordance with the SEA Directive 2001/42/EC, which will ensure that their cumulative effects and impacts on the environment - as well as their climate proofing - will be holistically assessed.

8) The environment is an economic driver. Green Growth has to be Circular and follow the EU Taxonomy regulation 2020/852 standards to benefit from Green financing deriving both from the EU, but also from the IFIs: EIB, EBRD, Black Sea Bank. Green financing implies to a large extent green public procurement and climate proofing criteria and has an external and internal dimension. Projects tendered have to comply with its standards, but also private projects need to be in line with it in order to be eligible for financing.

9) The Mediterranean is primarily a sea basin and thus its marine environment has to be protected. It is a green infrastructure and a huge ecosystem providing precious ecosystem services that need to be sustainably managed. Marine litter is a huge problem in the Mediterranean; the Forum has illustrated good practice. The Barcelona Convention and its Protocols, as well as the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive 2008/56/EC, are important legal tools to protect the marine environment and combat land-based and sea pollution. Their full implementation and enforcement is a must.

10) The islands are more vulnerable to climate change and deserve not only their own climate adaptation plans, but also Circular economy plans on their own, addressing holistically all the issues they are confronted with and promoting Circular tourism. The clean energy islands initiative of the EU constitutes a best practice towards decarbonisation of the islands and promotion of Renewable sources of energy, electromobility and management of their waste as a resource. The Just transition Fund of the EU can also support the islands in their transition towards clean energy sources, including their interconnection to the grid. An EU Strategy for the islands - similar to the one for the Outermost regions - should be developed.

11) Civil protection mechanisms for the Mediterranean should be developed and supported in line with Digital economy and joint projects developed. They are eligible as such for EU and IFIs financial support. Civil protection should encompass all the climate change facets, such as floods, desertification, droughts, tsunamis, as well as Covid19 impacts and earthquakes and lead also to awareness raising actions and training which are needed to ensure capacity building, relevant digital infrastructure and preparedness.

12) Know how and good practice on all the above priorities and actions exists and most importantly they can be developed and supported in the context of the Interreg Programmes that need to be further developed and boosted in terms of resources.

The architecture of all the existing Interreg programmes has to remain unchanged, as all have shown their added value; additional ones could be considered in the light of the Green deal and the Climate Law priorities which in any case need to be mainstreamed in all the existing programmes.

The New Generation EU, the Recovery and Resilience Fund, the Just transition Fund, the Structural Funds of the new programming period 2021-2027, including the pre-accession and the neighbourhood policy instruments, as well as dedicated programmes such as LIFE, Horizon etc. in addition to IFIs new financial instruments can support all the above.

What is important is to develop project pipelines, using also the available technical assistance and the good practice that can be shared across the Mediterranean.

The EPLO and its Circular Economy and Climate Institute would like to thank wholeheartedly the prominent speakers and the distinguished audience of the Circle the Med forum which has become a success thanks to our joint involvement. The EPLO and the Institute are keen to provide any support, share experience and build capacity in all the areas covered by the Forum and promote the network that was built thanks to the Forum by extending their activities in the Mediterranean Region.

George Kremlis

Advisor of the Greek Prime Minister on Climate, Energy, Environment and Circular economy. Honorary Director of the European Commission. Member of the Board of the EPLO and Honorary President of the Circular economy and climate Institute.