



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

*Brussels, 16.2.2018*

*C(2018) 855 final*

*Dear President,*

*The Commission would like to thank the Camera dei Deputati for its Opinion on the Communication "Initiative for the sustainable development of the blue economy in the Western Mediterranean" {COM(2017) 183 final}, hereafter referred to as the "Initiative".*

*In 2015, the Union for the Mediterranean Ministerial Declaration on the Blue Economy invited to explore the added value and feasibility of appropriate maritime strategies at sub-regional level by building also on the experience of the 5+5 Dialogue. On 26 October 2016, the Foreign Affairs Ministers of Algeria, France, Italy, Libya, Malta, Mauritania, Morocco, Portugal, Spain and Tunisia encouraged further work on this Initiative, together with the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean.*

*The Initiative is based on the Commission's long-standing experience with sea basin and macro-regional strategies (such as the Atlantic Strategy, the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and the European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region). It also builds on other European Union policies linked to the region, such as the European Neighbourhood Policy Review priorities and the recent Communication on International Ocean Governance.*

*In drafting the Initiative, the Commission made a point to strongly involve all relevant actors and stakeholders to ensure that all their interests and concerns were duly taken into account and provide every possible opportunity for coordination and cooperation. Actors and stakeholders were involved through a series of communication initiatives ranging from organising stakeholder meetings on both sides of the western Mediterranean to newsletters, social media, a dedicated website and a large scale conference.*

*The extensive consultations between stakeholders and national authorities have pointed to a series of challenges and gaps that can be summarised in three main areas as follows: a safer and more secure maritime space; a better governance of the seas and a*

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*smart and resilient blue economy. A rolling Framework for Action identifies the gaps that need to be filled and the potential added value of the priorities and actions proposed. The Initiative will be funded by existing international, European Union, national and regional funds and financial instruments, which will be coordinated and complementary.*

*The Commission welcomes the Camera dei Deputati's support to the Initiative and is pleased to have this opportunity to provide a number of clarifications regarding the Camera dei Deputati's concerns on geographical aspects, financing, efficiency and governance of the Initiative.*

*The geographical scope of the Initiative is based on the 5+5 dialogue, as per the first Union for the Mediterranean Ministerial Declaration on the blue economy, adopted on 17 November 2015. The ten participating countries refer to themselves as western Mediterranean already in the 5+5 dialogue, therefore the same wording has been used to name this Initiative. However, the scope of action and the potential benefits of the Initiative could easily extend beyond this sub-basin. Marine and coastal areas are interconnected systems, so depending on the needs to be addressed, actions may involve partners in the central Mediterranean and north-east Atlantic and will remain open to other partners.*

*The Framework for Action of the Initiative incorporates the findings of the assessment of its feasibility and added value, carried out by involving the stakeholders at an early stage of the process,<sup>1</sup> and has been built up on specific inputs provided by the ten participating countries. Its possible main goals and priorities have been discussed with the stakeholders during a dedicated conference on the sustainable development of the blue economy in the western Mediterranean, held in Barcelona on 2 February 2017.*

*The Initiative is funded by channelling and coordinating existing international, European Union, national and regional funding that is relevant to the three goals. The fund alignment should be promoted by all interested parties and remains subject and without prejudice to the assessment of the evaluation procedures and criteria for the concerned funds, programmes and projects. In this way, it will contribute to generate pipelines of projects and underpin the implementation of existing instruments/tools, without having any impact on already committed funds. The decision on possible re-allocation of funds will remain a prerogative of the responsible authorities.*

*The ministers responsible for maritime affairs of the ten participating countries endorsed the Initiative, its Framework for Action and its governance structure on 30 November 2017, in Naples. Ministers decided to establish a Steering Committee, which will be co-chaired by two countries on a rotation basis. The European Commission and the Union for the Mediterranean Secretariat will remain closely associated to the work of the co-chairs to support them in implementing the Initiative. In particular, the Commission will ensure the strategic approach at European Union level, including coordination with existing European Union related policies, and initiatives (including the adjoining*

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<sup>1</sup> Relevant documents can be downloaded at <http://www.westmed-initiative.eu/downloads/>

*Atlantic Action Plan and the European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region, as well as with the BLUEMED<sup>2</sup> and PRIMA<sup>3</sup> Initiatives) and alignment to funds and programmes. On the other hand, the Union for the Mediterranean Secretariat will ensure coordination at Union for the Mediterranean level and liaise with relevant regional organizations and institutions to mobilize resources and capacities for the implementation of the Framework for Action.*

*The Steering Committee may establish technical groups involving relevant experts and stakeholders (including from research and business communities) to ensure the appropriate level of discussion at operational level and to identify and promote the implementation of cooperation projects.*

*The Commission takes good note of the recommendations contained in points e) to i) of the Opinion of the Camera dei Deputati, which concern concrete actions to be undertaken for a better implementation of the initiative. It is worth highlighting that the Framework for Action lists several projects and actions proposed by countries and stakeholders during the preparatory phase. Each action refers also to possible sources of funding and target groups. However the Steering Committee has the mandate to review the actions and targets of the Framework for Action as deemed necessary. Considering that each country is represented in the Steering Committee, proposals made by the Camera dei Deputati could also be presented for discussion by the Italian representative in a meeting of the Steering Committee.*

*The Commission hopes that these clarifications address the issues raised by the Camera dei Deputati and looks forward to continuing our political dialogue in the future.*

*Yours faithfully,*

*Frans Timmermans  
First Vice-President*

*Maroš Šefčovič  
Vice-President*

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.bluedmed-project.eu/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/research/environment/index.cfm?pg=prima>