

PRESS RELEASE 24/6/05

ENVIRONMENT COMMISSIONER FORGETS MEDITERRANEAN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY IN SPEECH TO EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Environmental NGOs are deeply disappointed at the omission from Commissioner Dimas' speech of 20 June on Mediterranean environmental issues of any mention of the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development supported by EU.

The Comité de Suivi - a network of seven regional networks representing several hundred EU and south Mediterranean environment NGOs focusing on the Euromediterranean Partnership - is once again dismayed at the lack of coherence in European Commission and EU actions and statements regarding the Mediterranean.

The NGOs' concerns on two Commission documents issued in April on the Euromediterranean Partnership were expressed in a letter to President Barroso of 4 May. A subsequent press release of 7 June commented on further incoherence in the outcome of the 7th Conference of Euro-Mediterranean Foreign Ministers (Luxembourg 30-31 May).

In his speech to the 20 June meeting in Brussels of the Cultural Committee of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly entitled "Environmental Protection, Barcelona Convention and Euro-Mediterranean Partnership", Commissioner Dimas promoted the EC proposal, subsequently endorsed by the Foreign Ministers for the de-pollution of the Mediterranean by 2020. However, this proposal fails to acknowledge both on-going regional activities to combat land and sea pollution within the framework of the Barcelona Convention (managed by the UN Environment Programme's Mediterranean Action Plan – UNEP/MAP - through its six regional activity centres), or the emerging Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development.

In contrast, the Euro-Mediterranean foreign ministers stated in their agreed conclusions of 31 May that they *"supported the successful conclusion of the drafting of the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development as this will become an important vehicle for mainstreaming sustainable development throughout the Partnership."*

The MSSD was adopted earlier this week on 22 June by the UNEP/MAP advisory body, the Mediterranean Commission for Sustainable Development (MCSD) at its conference in Athens, and transmitted to the 22 Contracting Parties of the Barcelona Convention for formal adoption at their 14th conference in Portoroz, Slovenia (8-11 November). The Strategy covers seven priority fields of action to achieve sustainable development in the region, with activities to be benchmarked against 51 indicators and reviewed every two years.

The European Community, represented by the European Commission and seven Mediterranean Member States – France, Italy, Spain, Greece, Slovenia, Malta and Cyprus - are members of the MCSD and Contracting Parties to the Convention.

The speech by Mr. Dimas gives the impression that while the EU is committed to one set of objectives, actions and time-bound targets and programmes within the MSSD, the EC is proposing to launch a series of negotiations for adoption of a different set of targets and actions relating to the issues already addressed in the MSSD, which they wish to see endorsed as a separate initiative by the 10th Anniversary proposed Heads of Government Summit in Barcelona in November this year.

Any Commission proposals for Mediterranean de-pollution should support and enhance actions already agreed within the framework of the Barcelona Convention and be in line with the objectives of the MSSD,

which should receive the formal endorsement of the 10th Anniversary Summit of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership in Barcelona, 27-28 November. A separate EU initiative on Mediterranean de-pollution would serve no useful purpose.

END

Notes for Editors:

For further information/interviews contact: Anastasia Roniotes, mio-ee-env@ ath.forthnet.gr telephone: +30 210 324 7267

Eugene Clancy, Friends of the Earth MEDNET co-ordinator, mednet@foeeurope.org telephone. +34 965 652 932

Members of the Comite de Suivi are: Arab Network for Environment and Development (RAED), Environment and Development Action in the Third World (ENDA), European Environmental Bureau (EEB), Friends of the Earth (FoE/MedNet Programme), Mediterranean NGO Network for Ecology and Sustainable Development (MEDForum), Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development (MIO-ECSDE), World Wide Fund for Nature Mediterranean Programme (WWF/MEDPO)

1. The Press release about the letter to President Barroso and the Press release commenting on the outcome of the Foreign Ministers' conference is at:

<http://www.foeeurope.org/press/basic.htm>

2. The Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development, was drafted by the Mediterranean Commission for Sustainable Development, an advisory body of the UNEP Mediterranean Action Plan. (<http://www.unepmap.gr>). The MCSD MAP services the Barcelona Convention 1976 and its Protocols. The MCSD adopted the MSSD at its 10th conference in Athens 20-22 June
3. Seven EU members states (France, Spain, Italy, Greece, Malta, Cyprus, Slovenia) and the European Community are Contracting Parties, along with 16 south and east Mediterranean states. The Commission represents the European Community.