

The MEDA Regional Environment Programme SMAP
NGO position on the directions envisaged by the Commission

This paper is an initial critique of SMAP III by the Mediterranean environmental NGO steering Committee, the Comité de Suivi (CdS)¹.

First and foremost...

The CdS looks with interest at the Commission initiative to re-orient the SMAP programme towards more strategic and policy objectives as proposed in the Commission's document "Directions envisaged for the third phase of the MEDA Regional Environment Programme (SMAP III)". The CDS reaffirms its will to actively contribute to the further development and implementation of the suggestions expressed in this document. However, the CDS is concerned that the "Directions" paper and the SMAP III Programme Summary have been produced with no consultation of NGOs and that it remains very unclear whether NGOs will be allowed to play a significant role in its implementation.

Sustainable development requires the active participation of all stakeholders and actors. It is a process that requires new ideas and ways of thinking, and greater participation in the political, social and economic debate. In the Mediterranean context, the regional cooperation process through programmes such as SMAP should lead to integrating sustainable development and good governance principles in all decision-making, including that of the European Commission.

Brief review of today's environmental situation in the Mediterranean.....

The CdS broadly agrees with the Blue Plan's view of the environmental situation in the Mediterranean today. Environmental integration and sustainable development continue to be ignored in the national development plans of EuroMed partner countries. The low political ranking, restricted funds, etc. result in a general ineffectiveness of environmental ministries, which constitutes just one more major obstacle in moving the Mediterranean countries along the path to sustainable development.

In such a context, the CdS feels that there is a need to confirm and strengthen the SMAP role of "environmental pillar" of the EMP by giving to the Programme appropriate financial and human resources as well as political recognition and capacity to build environmental sustainability into the wider EMP implementation, including the bilateral MEDA plans and the creation of the MFTA. The allocation of 15 million euros to the SMAP III Programme is clearly insufficient to live up to this ambition and there should be guarantees that SMAP Programme objectives are complemented with actions and funding at the national level (MEDA bilateral

1

1. Arab Network for Environment and Development (RAED),
2. Environment and Development Action in the Third World (ENDA),
3. European Environmental Bureau (EEB),
4. Friends of the Earth (FoE/MedNet Programme),
5. Mediterranean NGO Network for Ecology and Sustainable Development (MEDForum),
6. Mediterranean Information Office for Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development (MIO-ECSDE),
7. World Wide Fund / Mediterranean Programme (WWF/MEDPO)

programmes and national funding). SMAP should be a policy tool to integrate environment in all sectors and horizontal (regional) EuroMed programmes.

The CdS agrees that the first two calls, SMAP I and II failed to live up to expectations and fears that SMAP III may continue to lack the political mandate, leadership and financial backing to be more than a financial instrument to implement environmental protection measures through pilot projects in the region. Even as regards these pilot projects, SMAP has struggled so far to operate efficiently and continues to suffer long delays.

NGO participation in SMAP

Since the inception of SMAP in 1997, the NGO community has been a willing and constructive partner trying to improve the SMAP instrument and contribute to its success. Time and again CdS have made critical but constructive comments and proposals and even successfully run a number of SMAP projects under very difficult logistical and local conditions. The CdS is therefore disappointed that in the Commission's attempt to "structure its approach of regional funding for the environment" the NGO community chances of presenting proposals have diminished significantly.

The CdS is especially concerned about the fewer opportunities that exist for NGO project funding in the Mediterranean, which will weaken civil society and reduce scope for innovation in approaches to sustainable development generated by new projects.

Environmental Integration...

The EuroMed strategy for environmental integration as adopted in Athens in July 2002 has been a failure to date. The first test case for the strategy – the EuroMed energy action plan 2003-2006 adopted in May 2003 made no attempt to address environmental integration in its planning. The EuroMed Energy forum is not open to public participation. There is no regional strategy for the promotion of environmentally sustainable energy. No regional strategy for the promotion of demand side management and renewable energies. Instead, there is a body (REMEP) with a clear mandate to promote the fossil fuel economy in the region. The CdS is of the opinion that representatives from the priority sectors of the EMP and the EIB should report annually to the EMP Foreign Ministers and SMAP Correspondents meeting on progress made in implementing the environmental integration strategy in their sector, and should held accountable for failure to do so.

Possible objectives and focus for SMAP III

The CdS agrees that many of the obstacles to sustainable development in Mediterranean partner countries have a lot to do with governance and the poor organisation of government administrations (lack of transparency, integration and capacity, etc). This is a widespread national problem that needs to be tackled urgently making it a priority for MEDA bilateral funding. SMAP cannot substitute for this wider commitment to environment integration by the MEDA programme, but should focus on issues of regional importance such as IWRM, desertification, climate change, integrated sustainable rural development, coastal zone management and others, facilitating their integration in national development policies, building actors capacity, demonstrating solutions.

It goes without saying that the 15 million euros earmarked to SMAP III is not adequate to even tackle one of these regional problems comprehensively. Only when MEDA bilateral sources, i.e. 90% of the budget available under the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership are used to promote environmentally sustainable national development policies and investments

will real transformation away from the current unsustainable development models take place. Mediterranean countries can best be aided in this respect by introducing environmental conditionality to MEDA financial disbursement and to the European Investment Banks Mediterranean lending facility. The CdS believes this will help development planners and policy-makers effectively integrate environmental considerations into national sectoral strategies.

CdS Recommendations for SMAP:

The current mandate given to SMAP is little more than for a “grant provider for few pilot environmental projects”. This is insufficient to make a real environmental impact. SMAP must be given the mandate and means to make the EMP a process that promotes sustainable development.

This includes:

- Ministerial leadership: The Naples Foreign Ministerial Conclusions stressed the need for environmental protection and sustainable development policies to be implemented. This should be pursued along the lines of the Declaration of the Euro-Mediterranean meeting of Environment Ministers in Athens in July 2002 and the Plan of Implementation of the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development. A properly strengthened SMAP with sustained political support from EMP foreign and Environment ministers should monitor the implementation of the sustainable development process in the way outlined above.
- SMAP should promote the adoption by the EMP of key sustainability indicators to measure progress in the region. Such indicators should be of similar stringency as those applied by EU environmental laws and regulations.
- EMP Environment Ministers responsible for the SMAP should monitor and ensure implementation of the recommendations of the Sustainability Impact Assessment launched in 2004 by the European Commission.
- SMAP should enjoy greater funding to administer fully its present and future tasks.
- SMAP activities and procedures should be transparent and inclusive of civil society organizations and work closely with other Mediterranean based institutions such as the Mediterranean Action Plan.
- The SMAP secretariat reports and recommendations should be translated to national languages of the region and be made available to the public.

END

For more information please contact Mr. Eugene Clancy / Friends of the Earth MedNet Coordinator: mednet@foeeurope.org or visit www.foeeurope.org