

An underwater photograph of a coral reef, showing a large, flat, white coral plate with a brownish-orange border. The water is dark and slightly murky. The image is framed by a teal hexagonal shape on the right side.

THE MEDITERRANEAN FORUM

Circle the Med

The Mediterranean Hybrid Forum 2021

Key conclusions

Introductory remarks

The second edition of Circle the Med Forum has been even more successful than Circle the Med 2020. Two qualitative elements have increased its success:

- The participation of Egypt, from where the forum was also broadcasted through a dedicated studio in Cairo at the premises of the Ministry of Environment, with a very high level participation from the Government of Egypt and of key Officials.

- The Awards Scheme initiated for the first time, which has awarded prominent ESG companies, and which is expected to be extended next year to similar awards in Egypt.

The participation in terms of speakers and moderators was of very high level and the discussions were of high quality and very interactive. Moreover, the geographical scope has embraced not only the Mediterranean countries, but also their neighbors, covering the neighborhood policy of the European Union in its full extent.

Circle the Med is par excellence the climate and environment diplomacy forum. It has promoted the concept of **Circular Mediterranean** and has built on the circular economy model as the one that will ensure a smooth energy transition and the carbon neutrality of the Region. In that respect, and within the various thematic pillars of the Forum, the concept of circular culture, circular tourism, and so on smart cities, transport, energy, green growth, blue economy and digital economy, has been promoted, **as circular economy needs to be mainstreamed in all the national policies, as well as in all the sectoral policies, both in a vertical and in a horizontal manner**, covering also the civil society and the companies and boosting circular entrepreneurship. In that respect, through the Forum, important stakeholders both from the civil, the business and the academic society have participated. When it comes to the business community, the concept of Circular Environmental & Social Governance (C-ESG) was promoted, developed, and supported, and these were also the driving elements that have led to the awards which have been provided to selected companies.

As Circle the Med 2020 and Circle the Med 2021 were co-organized by the Institute of Circular Economy and Climate Change, which is part of the European Public Law Organisation (EPLC), the importance of the role of the EPLC in the Mediterranean Region has been highlighted, and in that respect, initiatives concerning institutional and capacity building to follow up Circle the Med and to build capacity between the Circle the Med annual events have been discussed, with the view to developing more specific pieces of the puzzle and focus more on the various pillars that Circle the Med has covered, in a tailored manner.

One of the key elements that were discussed was building bridges between the North and the South shore of the Mediterranean, as well as between the East and the West, through the development of networking, best practices, exchanges, twinning activities, etc. In that respect, the role of EPLC as a capacity and institutional building organization was discussed to promote further important initiatives in the Region. The good practices and the ambitious climate and environmental architecture of Egypt were noted. They constitute best practice to be shared within the Region and can be further supported in this common process, as there are win-win elements for sharing of common experiences. In this context, the importance and outcome of the high level meeting held in Athens, attended by three Heads of State and Government, namely President El-Sisi of Egypt, President Anastasiades of Cyprus and Prime Minister Mitsotakis of Greece was highlighted as a success story. The cooperation among the three countries consists in the construction of undersea cables that will connect Egypt to Cyprus and Greece, and which will bring green electricity to two EU countries and further to the

European Union electricity market, which needs more electricity - and in particular green electricity - from the important RES projects, solar in particular, that Egypt is developing.

Among the key concepts of Circle the Med 2021, the idea of promoting a **Green Deal for the Mediterranean Region** was discussed, as **the Green Deal and the Climate Law of the European Union has a strong external dimension**, which is being promoted in the context of the Neighborhood Policy and in the context of the pre-accession process for candidate and potential candidate countries. This is a concept that can be expanded even further, namely the international dimension of the Green Deal to be promoted as an instrument to boost the energy transition, the circular economy and the carbon neutrality worldwide. In that respect, a dedicated Green Deal for the Mediterranean with the idea of an **Adaptation and Resilience Strategy for the Mediterranean basin**, with a particular emphasis to Eastern Mediterranean, where the climate impacts will be felt even more than in Western Mediterranean, has been discussed, although ideally the strategy should be holistic, covering the full Mediterranean and all the countries involved in the Circle the Med framework.

In that respect, the importance of various types of diplomacy has been highlighted, going from the **diplomacy of the Cities and the Regions** – as also discussed with the President of the European Committee of the Regions, – and **the diplomacy of the specific components/pillars of the Circle the Med**, such as: cultural diplomacy, green growth diplomacy, blue economy diplomacy, circular tourism diplomacy, renewable energy diplomacy, etc. All these, have a strong geostrategic, holistic, peacemaking, capacity building, rule of law and cooperation dimension.

The importance of the Greek Initiative on protecting the cultural and natural heritage from climate change impacts was highlighted, and Egypt - being an ancient civilization - has expressed strong interest and commitment towards this UN Initiative led by Greece, in collaboration with UNESCO, WMO and UNFCCC. The Initiative was represented in COP26 in a High-level event.

The Forum has **welcomed the foreseeable hosting of COP27 by Egypt**, where major achievements are expected to boost and complement the progress that will be achieved in COP26, and in that respect, ideas were discussed on how to build more capacity and bridges with the view to ensuring a very successful COP27.

When it comes to more specific conclusions regarding the various pillars, the key elements to be highlighted from each dedicated panel are the following:

Cultural Heritage:

The Med is the cradle of our civilization. Build cultural bridges and promote cultural exchanges and events of all sorts. Promote further the Greek Initiative at UN level to protect our cultural and natural heritage from climate change impacts.

- Intensification of multilateral cooperation, mostly among neighbor states
- Promoting the cultural authenticity in the Mediterranean region
- Cultural heritage must be included in the Green Deal
- Promoting actions for boosting awareness on impacts of climate change on cultural heritage
- Taking advantage of innovative digital development for preservation of cultural heritage
- Promote underwater cultural heritage preservation

- New strategy for protecting cultural heritage
- Cooperation with international bodies concerned with the preservation of heritage by providing requirements for the protection of cultural heritage from the dangers of climate change

Green Growth:

It has to become circular and promote only green investments and projects. The EU Taxonomy Regulation and Green Financing are to be taken into consideration as good practice, even beyond the EU. Circular entrepreneurship to be promoted. Digital economy has also to be mainstreamed in Green Growth and Blue Economy.

- Implementation of agricultural and fisheries policies in the framework of circular economy
- Promoting of circular agricultural and fisheries diplomacy in the MED region
- Commit towards scientific and relevant policy engagements to promote SDGs in the Region
- More active inclusion of private sector in the fight against the adverse impacts of climate change
- Increase connectivity for providing energy security during transition
- Include the most vulnerable in the transition; promote the social dimension of the transition
- Promote the EU circular economy patterns as key in the context of the EU Green Deal
- Achieve a green growth by circular business growth
- Urgent need for relevant tailored public education at domestic and supranational level
- Strong commitment of the MED for the implementation of common strategies that should be addressed from a global perspective with a support of the regional perspective
- Solid common Med environmental policy and cooperation for preserving the region
- Increasing cooperation between the private sector on both sides towards achieving further development of green investment

Blue Economy:

To become circular and digital too. Protection of the marine environment and combat against marine litter and microplastics. Single use plastics EU legislation is a good practice to be promoted in the Region.

- Promote Blue Economy as a key driver of the economic development
- Ensure sustainability of Blue Economy strategies
- MED countries need to improve cooperation and figuring how to improve cooperation/interconnect their economics
- Digitalization will play a key role to improve Blue Economy strategies
- Funding the Blue component in the green deal
- Blue Economy must be circular/sustainable in terms of tourism, fisheries and transportation
- Involve people in the development of Blue Energy
- Improve integration and resilience of maritime coastal issues

Renewable Energy Sources:

They are key for the energy transition of the Region and carbon neutrality. Also for desalination which is very important for the Region because of water scarcity problems. Good practices in this respect have been developed in Greece with the awarded project Hydrousa and zero brine technology.

- Reducing the costs of supplies to increase socio-economic welfare benefits
- Increase system flexibility of islands
- Include long-term production of blue and green Hydrogen
- Optimize production, sustainable storage and invest in new technologies and help stabilize market fluctuations
- Increase the competitiveness of RES
- Balance between tech solutions and natural climate solutions
- Promoting more blue Energy
- Private sector to foster energy development and interconnectedness
- Increase cooperation between countries regarding the development of electricity exchange, especially those issued from new and renewable energy, and to benefit from this cooperation to enhance commitments to reduce emissions and exchange this reduction among member states

Smart, Circular and Climate Neutral cities:

Develop the holistic concept of circular city to replace the smart city one.

- A strong focus on the transferability and scalability of ambitious endeavors and innovative solutions is needed
- The collaboration of the state and the local levels is a must
- Although innovation has been promoted successfully, its scale-up requires legislative and framework changes
- Although the differences between the south and north shore of the Mediterranean seem significant - questioning the collaboration potential -, there are plenty of common challenges and transferrable solutions
- Every successful plan and investment requires the engagement of citizens
- To address complex challenges the decision makers should create the conditions for bottom-up innovation (citizen science, entrepreneurship, hackathons, etc)
- Capacity building, exchanges and twinning activities are the main tools to collaboratively promote innovation, circularity and carbon neutrality in the Mediterranean basin

Sustainable Tourism:

To be developed as circular tourism with the view to reduce the climate, energy and environmental footprint in all the life cycle of the chain of the relevant activities – transport, accommodation, catering and food services. The idea of a climate and covid resilient tourism was also highlighted as key in the Region's tourist destinations.

- Promote circular economy practices in tourism
- Increase consumer awareness
- Diversify tourist services
- Tourism as a driver for social resilience
- Include culture as a sustainable touristic product
- Recovery of coastal and maritime tourism
- Access to finance for micro-SME's

Closing statement:

Circle the Med 2021 as a multidisciplinary, multicultural and international Forum was a very successful one with an attendance of **more than 4500 live viewers from 59 countries** of the broader Region. The conclusions will be uploaded and will be forwarded to Key International and National Organizations, namely to the:

- European Union Institutions
- Union for the Mediterranean
- Barcelona Convention
- Governments of the countries concerned

All discussions were recorded and can be found on the website of Circle the Med. They were held in English and simultaneous interpretation was provided in Arabic.

George Kremlis

President of the Circle the Med Forum

