



Circle the Med

The Mediterranean Forum — 7th edition

Outcomes & Key Conclusions

18-19 January 2024





Outcomes & Key Conclusions of the 7th edition of the Circle the Med Forum

The 7th edition of <u>Circle the Med Forum</u>, held in Athens on Thursday, 18th, and Friday, 19th January 2024, took place at the premises of the <u>European Public Law Organisation</u>, host, and organizer of the Forum. The afternoon of the second day saw proceedings at the Amphitheater of the Acropolis Museum.

This year's Forum marked a significant expansion, addressing the challenges faced by the Black Sea basin, exacerbated by ongoing conflicts. The discussions shed light on the common challenges and interconnections between the Mediterranean and Black Sea regions.

The Forum has achieved a high attendance with an average online participation of 500 people from 45 countries in the broader region and over 200 physically present attendees. It was broadcasted broadly and this 7th edition has also reached a very high visibility, attendance and recognition as the circular economy "par excellence" forum of the Region and as an environmental, climate and energy diplomacy driver, leading to a new form of diplomacy, the circular economy one. The main rational of Circle the Med is to transform the Mediterranean Sea basin into a circular one, both as regards its North and South shores but also its marine environment. The same objective is to be followed as regards the Black Sea.

In the morning of the second day, two panels focused on island issues, specifically energy transition and circularity. These sessions were co-organized with the worldwide network Greening the Islands and its president, Gianni Chianetta. With thousands of islands in the Mediterranean, the Forum highlighted their potential as energy transition laboratories and contributors to the circular economy, within the broader context of the Blue Economy. The Mediterranean is a "climate hot spot". Temperatures have already increased more than in other regions and the sea level has risen. Moreover, because of the increase of the sea temperature, invasive alien species have entered in the Mediterranean through the Suez Canal.

As regards the Black Sea, the war has led to a heavy pollution of the marine environment, in addition to the climate degradation, because of the rise of emissions and various waste streams, including those of dangerous substances. The Forum has concentrated at first to the issue of transforming the Green Growth into a Circular one. The Green Growth, together with the Blue Economy and the Digital Economy constitutes one of the three pillars/priorities of the EU in the framework of the Green Deal and under the umbrella of the Circular Economy. The importance of the latter was highlighted as the new economic model - contrary to the linear economy which still prevails - which will boost the energy transition and ultimately support carbon neutrality. Solid and liquid waste are resources which if not properly managed can lead to marine pollution.

Litter pollution and micro plastics are heavily polluting, in particular the Mediterranean and in this context, it was stressed that the implementation and swift enforcement of the Single Use Plastics Directive is key, inter alia, to prevent land-based pollution.







The marine environment is also affected by the floods which lead also to erosion of the costs, but most importantly to the transfer of waste in the sea from legal and illegal landfills.

Liquid waste, especially dangerous, and waste water are also important. The appropriate treatment of the "grey water" can provide a precious resource for irrigation and industrial use in a period of water scarcity. This is also true for the sludge which can be used as fertiliser or as energy resource. The energy transition and the promotion of Renewable Energy Sources (RES), as well as of Hydrogen, is key and needs to be supported by the strengthening of the grid and the storage capacity.

The development of offshore wind projects in both Seas - and the synergies among Greece, Bulgaria and Romania - is also extremely important and can be supported, not only by the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) but also by the Maritime and Fisheries Fund, among other Fund streams. Best practices have been shared to that effect.

While gas is largely emerging as the transition fuel, LNG overcapacity is to be avoided as Hydrogen will be the fuel of the future together with the RES which have a huge potential to increase further in the Region. Desalination using RES and new technologies to manage the resulting brine, in the framework of circular economy, can provide the water needed for green hydrogen, in particular on the islands, while satisfying their water needs. Rain water harvesting was also discussed as an important resource to be exploited, in particular on the islands.

Tourism plays a pivotal role in the economies of the Mediterranean and Black Sea regions, having a significant environmental, energy, and climate footprint because of over-tourism, low-cost flights, and all-inclusive patterns, making it imperative for tourism to embrace circular practices. Tourism has to become circular and, in this context, the Green Destinations Initiative can largely contribute, as well as the concept of Green Hotels, supported by certification processes.

The Blue Economy stands as a cornerstone for both seas. It has a very broad scope covering not only fisheries and aquaculture, but also energy, offshore wind, tide, pipelines, cables, LNGs, marine transport, ports and marinas, exploration and exploitation of hydrocarbons etc. The overarching goal is to develop a Circular Blue Economy using also Digital Economy in a mutually mainstreamed and synergetic process. Blue economy has a footprint - environmental, energy and climate - that needs to be assessed and reduced in general, but also "in concreto" when new projects are envisaged. Strategic environmental assessments to identify the carrying capacity of the environment, as well as environmental impact assessments for individual projects are necessary to ensure circularity and promote energy transition and carbon neutrality, while enabling climate proofing in the context of green public procurement.

These are to be carried out in the framework of maritime spatial planning and of the relevant EU Directive which is also key in the context of the Taxonomy Regulation of the EU for green financings.





The exploitation of the sea resources is vital for our economies but has to be performed in accordance with the circular economy, the SDGs and the EU legal framework, as well as the international law one, namely the Barcelona Convention and its Protocols, the Mediterranean Action Plan and the synergies with the Union for the Mediterranean and the actions and strategies that the latter is developing. The same could be true for the Black Sea, with the reservation that the Bucharest Convention underperforms and in any case is a convention that needs to be reviewed up to the new challenges: climate crisis, micro-plastics, Danube macro regional Strategy, wind offshore and hydrocarbons exploration/exploitation. The EU could take an initiative in the Region for a new convention, for those who are willing to sign it and go ahead.

Fisheries and Aquaculture provide important food resources; they are to become circular and the companies involved ESG - ideally C- ESG - and their waste to be managed as resources - raw materials or secondary products - providing biomass that can be used in waste to energy projects or in the production of fertilisers.

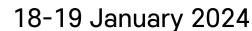
The concept of smart cities was also developed with the view to its extension to the holistic one of "circular cities" covering all the impacts in a city and improving the quality of life of its citizens: waste, drinking water, waste water, RES, eco-mobility, led lighting etc., integrating digital economy tools.

The GR-eco islands initiative, recognised as a pioneering effort, was presented with a focus on its success and the potential for its extension to more islands as a best practice.

In addition, the discussion delved into the impacts of the climate crisis and environmental degradation on our cultural and natural heritage. The Greek initiative at UN level, co-driven with UNESCO, UNFCCC and WMO, was presented together with good practices developed in Spain and in Greece on protecting our cultural heritage. Mainstreaming culture in climate action has been acknowledged in COP 28 and the preparations of COP29 for a formal decision in this context are already to start by all the key actors to make it happen. Ancestral intelligence together with artificial intelligence and an emotional intelligence attitude emerge as key to achieving this important goal of humanity.

Food safety and resilience under the Green Deal and the F2F strategy was discussed in the light also of the climate and energy crisis exacerbated by the war in Ukraine and other recent wars which undermine the food chain and lead to increase of prices. Circularity in the food sector is primordial as regards fertilisers and pesticides but also ecological products and the circular management of waste in the food sector as resources to be reused by the economy. The good practices and knowledge developed by the Agri Business Forum were acknowledged.

The role of the Youth as climate and circular economy ambassadors in the framework of sustainable development and the SDGs was also presented. Awareness raising and education are essential in this context.







The role of the business community in advancing best circular economy practices was a focal point of discussion, with C-ESG companies presenting important findings. Carbon capture and storage, new waste streams as resources, construction and demolition waste and their importance for the economy, including as a resource on critical raw materials, IT smart circular-digital applications, waste to energy, circular industrial parks, economic instruments, such as "pay as you throw" and DRS, as well as the extended producer responsibility, were topics that had been analysed. The key role of the Hellenic Recycling Association (EOAN) was also stressed in this context.

Shifting the focus to the formal high-level meeting at the Acropolis Museum, outstanding contributions were made in several areas:

- on civil protection and the need to increase prognosis, prevention, preparedness, risk management and resilience;
- energy connectivity in the region, in particular through PCI and PMI projects to promote the transfer of clean energy and develop the grids and storage.

The importance of circular shipping, alternative banker fuels from biomass, ammonia, electrification in shipping and green-circular ports was presented. The Blue fund in Greece for the islands, in particular of the Aegean, constitutes a best practice to be shared.

The panel of the Ambassadors was a pioneering one as it has led to precious contributions and exchanges for increased cooperation, data collection and awareness raising, as well as common actions in the Region, but also worldwide, since environmental challenges know no borders. The driving forces in the Mediterranean and in the Black Sea, as well as the interconnections of the two ecosystems were discussed and ideas for two respective macro regional strategies were presented.

Last but not least, the discussion underscored the crucial role of green financing and the Banking sector - as well as the C-ESG Bank concept - in promoting the circular economy and providing expertise on Taxonomy issues. The presentations highlighted the availability of funds and stressed the importance of encouraging relevant PPPs to further advance circular initiatives.

The Awards ceremony that took place, honored prominent ESG companies, NGOs and youth representatives, who have developed good practices in various sectors and inter alia in artificial intelligence and innovation.

The outcomes and conclusions of the 7th edition of Circle the Med, along with the previous ones available on its website, will serve as a precious resource for the upcoming Our Ocean Conference scheduled to be held in Athens on 15-17 April 2024.







Looking ahead, Circle the Med will continue its active presence in various events and is set to organise dedicated webinars until its next 8th Forum.

Additionally, the EPLO, with the contribution of its Circular Economy and Climate Institute and Circle the Med, are planning to organise a conference in Rome on the occasion of the inauguration of the EPLO premises in Rome at the historic building of Palazzo Altemps. It will be held in the second trimester of this year and will cover the current three challenging crises: climate, health and migration. The purpose of the conference is to develop new governance Public Law frameworks and administrative schemes to address the challenges related to the three key issues by: Building prediction/anticipation, preparedness, risk management and resilience Public Law patterns and good practices. It will lead to a governance reform needed under the new threatening circumstances which are mutually reinforced in a cascading effect.

In conclusion, I and the organising team of the Institute would like to thank all the personalities and prominent speakers that have honoured us, as well as all the sponsors whose contributions were instrumental in the success of the Forum.

George Kremlis

President of the Circle the Med Forum

Member of the Board of the EPLO and Chairman of its Circular Economy and Climate Institute

Representative of the EPLO in Bulgaria