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### **A NETWORK OF EFFICIENTLY MANAGED MARINE PROTECTED AREAS IN THE ADRIATIC: A SERIOUS CHALLENGE FOR THE RIVERINE COUNTRIES**

*Robert Turk*

Paper presented at the round-table

**‘EU Maritime Policy and the (Northern) Adriatic’**

organized by the Maritime Law Association of Slovenia (MLAS)

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# **A NETWORK OF EFFICIENTLY MANAGED MARINE PROTECTED AREAS IN THE ADRIATIC: A SERIOUS CHALLENGE FOR THE RIVERINE COUNTRIES**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The under representation of marine ecosystems in the global list of protected areas<sup>1</sup> resulted in the commitment of the Contracting Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), to establish by the year 2012 a network of comprehensive, representative and effectively managed regional (and national) protected area system. In this context, during their 14th ordinary meeting, held in Portorož, Slovenia, November 2005, the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention invited the Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas (RAC/SPA) to elaborate a programme of work aimed at supporting the Mediterranean countries to achieve the CBD's 2012 target by establishing a representative network of MPAs in the Mediterranean Sea. Based on a draft document, prepared by the RAC/SPA, the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention adopted at their 16<sup>th</sup> ordinary meeting in Marrakech in November 2009 the Regional Working Programme for the Coastal and Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean Sea including the High Seas (referred hereafter as Working Programme)<sup>2</sup>.

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\* Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Nature Conservation, Slovenian focal point for Specially Protected Areas (MPAs). Paper presented at the round-table 'EU Maritime Policy and the (Northern) Adriatic' organized by the Maritime Law Association of Slovenia (MLAS), EU Maritime Day 2011, 20 May 2011, Portorož, Slovenia.

<sup>1</sup> Partnership for Interdisciplinary Studies of Coastal Oceans, 2011. The Science of Marine Reserves (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Europe), 22 pages, [www.piscoweb.org](http://www.piscoweb.org).

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.rac-spa.org/sites/default/files/doc\\_cop/decision\\_ig\\_19\\_13\\_en.pdf](http://www.rac-spa.org/sites/default/files/doc_cop/decision_ig_19_13_en.pdf).

The Programme of Work<sup>3</sup> foresees a three-step hierarchical planning approach, which begins at the large scale and focuses in on ever-smaller scales. At the widest scale, that is the Mediterranean Basin, the baseline for designing an ecological network would be the identification of large-scale ecological units. The second step would be the identification of priority conservation areas within the ecological units. Priority conservation areas would represent the focal areas for the third and last step – the identification of individual MPAs, forming an ecological network within the priority conservation area. Individual MPAs should protect habitats or areas where the concentration of ecological processes results in a high diversity of species and habitat types.

## **2. THE ADRIATIC SEA**

In the process, foreseen in the Working Programme, the Adriatic Sea was identified as one of the large-scale ecological units of the Mediterranean Sea<sup>4</sup>. It is also recognized as one of the sub-areas of the Mediterranean Sea in the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive and a very special, diverse and characteristic portion of the Mediterranean in many ways<sup>5</sup>.

Unfortunately, one of the characteristics of the Adriatic is also the strong pressure on the marine and coastal ecosystems, deriving from human activities such as maritime transport, fishing, tourism and urbanization. Establishing marine protected areas (MPAs) in key locations of high ecological value, and organizing MPAs into networks, is considered one of the most effective ways of conserving marine ecosystem biodiversity and functions<sup>4</sup>. They are however, only part of the solution, which relies mainly on an ecological governance of the socio-economical and political processes within but also outside the Adriatic region.

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.rac-spa.org/sites/default/files/doc\\_pwmcpa/pwmcpa\\_en.pdf](http://www.rac-spa.org/sites/default/files/doc_pwmcpa/pwmcpa_en.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> G. Notarbartolo di Sciara, T. Agardy, 2009, Identification of potential SPAMIs in Mediterranean Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction, Contract N° 01/2008\_RAC/SPA, High Seas. 70 p.

<sup>5</sup> G. Notarbartolo di Sciara, Methods for the identification of EBSAs in the Adriatic Sea, Proceedings of the workshop »Towards a representative network of marine protected areas in the Adriatic«, 2011, to be published.

With a wish to stimulate the process of defining ecologically and biologically significant areas in the Adriatic Sea and thus to contribute to the implementation of the Regional work programme for the Mediterranean coastal and marine protected areas, including the high seas, the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Nature Conservation decided to organise yet another workshop (after the two in 2006 and 2008), dedicated to the biodiversity conservation in the Adriatic, this time on the subject of marine and coastal protected areas. The organization of the workshop, held in October 2010 and entitled »Towards a representative network of marine protected areas in the Adriatic«<sup>6</sup>, was enabled by the financial support of the Principality of Monaco and partially by the Regional Centre for Specially Protected Areas of the Barcelona Convention, which accepted the role of the session's co-organiser. The introductory contributions were presented by Tullio Scovazzi, international law professor at the University of Milano, Chedly Rais, Okianos and former scientific director of RAC/SPA, Giuseppe Notarbartolo di Sciara, president of the ACCOBAMS agreement professional council, Evangelos Papathanassiou, director of the Greek Sea Research Centre, and Joachim Claudet from the University of Perpignan.

Following the two-day discussion that focused mainly on gathering data, formal and procedural methods, as well as manners and steps for the formation of a representative network of marine protected areas in the Adriatic, the participants agreed on a set of conclusions and recommendations that were sent to pertinent stakeholders around the Adriatic. They could be summed as follows:

- the current situation of MPAs in the Adriatic is unsatisfactory in terms of representativity and management,
- the establishment of new MPAs is progressing too slowly,
- national strategies with the aim to ensure conservation for all types of marine biodiversity, including resources, should be elaborated,
- An *ad hoc* multi-disciplinary working group of experts should be set up that would:
  - take stock of existing habitat inventorying and/or mapping initiatives in the area;

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.zrsvn.si/dokumenti/73/2/2010/Program\\_2089.pdf](http://www.zrsvn.si/dokumenti/73/2/2010/Program_2089.pdf)

- initiate studies on connectivity throughout the Adriatic (habitat mapping, tagging, genetics etc.) and agree on a common assessment methodology and on a monitoring plan that could be conducted on a regular basis,
  - use a precautionary approach when data limitation cannot be overcome within an appropriate time frame;
  - identify missing scientific information concerning EBSAs and propose ways and means to secure this missing information, and
  - based on the EBSA defined in the Adriatic, and the findings of the relevant recent investigations, further develop the identification of marine areas that could be proposed as SPAMIs
- the relevant organizations such as RAC/SPA, IUCN, WWF, etc. are invited to provide support and facilitate the setting up of this working group as well as the progress of the work,
  - the administrative and legal constraints to the establishment of SPAMIs in areas beyond the territorial waters, including deep waters, should be identified.

The participants also stressed that beside the development of a representative network of MPAs, it is of uttermost importance in terms of conservation that the national strategies, as well as the regional one, focus also on a better governance system outside MPAs. They underlined that in this context, the EU Integrated Maritime Policy, in particular Marine Spatial Planning (MSP), has the potential to help further integrating the MPAs with the other sea uses. Identification, design and effective management of MPAs should be included as a priority in the process of Marine Spatial Planning, thus making the MSP also an important tool for the implementation of the Working Programme.

### **3. THE MEDITERRANEAN PERSPECTIVE**

Following the 2008 Almeria Declaration and the 2009 Marrakech Declaration that called on States to continue the establishment of marine protected areas and to pursue the protection of biodiversity with a view to the establishment by 2012 of a network of marine protected areas, the RAC/SPA implemented a project funded by the European Commission to promote the

creation of a representative ecological network of protected areas in the Mediterranean through the SPAMI system, including areas that lie on the high seas, with a view to enhancing the conservation of Mediterranean marine habitats and their resources in the pelagic, bathyal and abyssal fields. The results of the first phase of the project, that is the preparation of a global list of Mediterranean marine areas lying on the high seas, including the deep sea, that can contain areas that could be candidates for the SPAMI List, was presented at the Extraordinary meeting of National Focal Points for the protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Biodiversity (NFPs for SPA/BD), held in Istanbul in June 2010.

#### **4. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS**

The progress made since was extensively debated by the participants to the 10<sup>th</sup> ordinary meeting of the NFPs for SPA/BD, held in Marseille in May 2011. The activities of the Project's second phase aim namely at facilitating the process of designating as SPAMIs sites included in the areas identified in the first phase as areas for conservation interest on the high seas, including the deep sea. In this context, the aims and the outcomes of the Piran Workshop on MPAs in the Adriatic were presented. The discussion on the issue focused mainly on the document *Draft Approach to facilitate proposals for inclusion in the SPAMI List of areas located on the high seas or in areas where the limits of national sovereignty or jurisdiction have not yet been defined* (UNEP(DEPI)MED WG.359/6), which was backed by an info document on the legal aspects relating to the establishment of marine protected areas beyond national jurisdiction in the Mediterranean. In spite of being aware that the establishment of MPAs in high seas is not an easy task, the general feeling of the participants was that the process of implementation of the Regional Working Programme for the Coastal and Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean Sea including the High Seas is not proceeding in a satisfactory pace and that the commitments concerning marine biodiversity conservation (Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development, Aichi targets, EU biodiversity strategy to 2020,) taken by the Mediterranean riverine countries should be regarded as of uttermost priority.