

Your excellence Mrs. Commissioner, Deputies, Mr. President, Dear Colleagues and Participants,

I would like to start by thanking the organisational committee of the Conference for the kind invitation - I am really happy to be with you today and to share my personal approach to Maritime Sustainable Regional policy.

Our participation in this event is more than symbolic; we are not gathered just to sign an important Charter concerning **Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM)**. As regional representatives we are obliged to prove our true interest for this crucial topic, to debate on a sustainable coastal management policy in the Mediterranean, to raise awareness amongst significant stakeholders and decision makers all over Europe and finally to transform the particular policy to specific action in our areas.

In view of the common policy and moreover the common action, Region of East Macedonia and Thrace takes the opportunity today to present its expertise following the implementation of various projects which were planned and focused on that field, like for e.g. '**BEACHMED-e**', '**COASTANCE**', '**SHIFT**' and '**TOSCA**', leading us to follow a holistic approach to the sustainable management of our coasts. Last and not least, REMTH, fully aware of the importance of its coastal zone, proceeded in 2012 to the design of an Integrated Operational Plan for its coastal area.

Dear participants, we were together when signing the Bologna initial Charter on 22nd of February 2007. A contribution to the drafting of the 2nd Charter was also given by the joint Final Declaration issued in March 2012 in my city, Komotini (GR), a few months ago, during the closing conference of **COASTANCE** Project. Today, via Bologna Charter II and by re-launching the very same principles of the former political agreement, it is expected to raise more awareness not only amongst the authorities which are facing the same problems, but across the European continent. Not only to promote innovative strategies towards a substantial coastal management, but to ensure their implementation throughout strong synergies and political initiatives.

Following this principle we must also take into consideration the current circumstances if we wish to avoid serious deviations on our way to our goals; the current crisis, the lack of trust among the national governments within the European family, the new challenges towards a faster and more flexible Europe in decision making and the replacement of the old tools with new ones towards 2020 (transition period), should lead us to be more and more focused on developing strong synergy.

Throughout this alliance we could overcome all the obstacles which came up during the last four years and the previous Programming Periods (since many of them are still existing to date).

It is needless to say that we all share the same anxieties, the same concerns about the future of environmental impacts on coastal areas and how they will be prevented. Coasts are in many respects the most valuable areas not only in Greece or the Mediterranean basin, but in European Continent in general. They are places of outstanding natural beauty, a desirable place to live, and busy economic 'powerhouses' providing work for growing numbers of people. On the other hand, these magnificent places are proven to be the most vulnerable due to a series of phenomena. The greatest pressures are still **observed** in the Mediterranean. Northern and Western European coastlines although attracting a large number of tourists do not confront the environmental problems of the Mediterranean. It is estimated that 50% of the ecologically richest and most sensitive areas in EU are located in coastal areas. As you might understand, the increasing erosion and the marine flooding risks arising on the mid-long term related to the effects of climate changes (sea level rising, extreme storm events, increasing frequency & intensity etc.) push research institutions and consequently public administrations and local authorities towards a holistic strategic approach for the Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) with a particular emphasis on coastal protection. Thus, integrated Maritime Spatial Planning (IMSP) has become an acknowledged and recommended management approach in the EU.

Nevertheless, there is still a lack of experience and capacities available to the policy makers and practitioners to implement these recommendations. New approaches are needed to arbitrate between those often conflicting or competing activities. As correctly mentioned in Bologna Charter, ***'coastal zones are strategic fields for the harmonic and sustainable development of territories and people of the entire Mediterranean area'***. Thus, I agree with the previous speakers on the need for ***'a sustainable spatial planning, a correct management of sediments and natural resources, an integrated approach in coastal management and interventions programming'***.

Connected to the above mentioned facts, I would like to share a few concerns regarding the necessity of the Charter for my Region's insular and coastal Areas; Our region, as many other Local Authorities all over Europe, is now formulating its new strategy on Coastal Management and according to the directions of national and EU physical planning we follow the model of 'quality over quantity', accepting that this is

the only way that will allow us to overcome their current condition and utilise their comparative advantage, fully harmonised with the principles of sustainability. Coastal areas of our Region are characterised by rich biodiversity and large number of rare species and habitats, including significant natural areas; national parks, wetlands, river deltas and wetlands, lakes hosting priceless rich flora and fauna, great biodiversity, large number of rare species and habitats (of an international importance), variety of ecosystems, abundant water resources.

To that end, our Strategic Objective and our Vision too, is: to maintain and raise the coastal zone of REMTH to a competitive advantage of the entire region transforming it to a source of benefits for residents and visitors too and a model of harmonic coexistence between the human and the nature.

However to obtaining that, much effort and work is required, far beyond an adequate planning. Applying integrated sustainable spatial policies means change of approaches along with change of actions. Both policy makers and administrative structures should reconsider their role and their approaches to spatial planning. Not only at local level. The central administration often constitutes a major obstacle to integrated coastal management. The local community; no policy can be applied if it does not reflect the public values. Thus **publicity, awareness raising, training** should be encompassed in the higher priorities of our plans. **Public effectiveness** should be considered very important at the first stages of our effort. Sustainable planning should not be viewed as a list of additional constraints. On the contrary, sustainable planning should be recorded as a means to increasing local competitiveness while preserving the natural resources. Response, effectiveness, provision of support is expected from both policy makers and the administration, towards applying integrated sustainable management. Exchange of experience and sharing of resources should be embedded in our action as an indispensable mode of acting; at both national and transnational level.

Let move to another chapter and try to approach the expected outputs and results of the present initiative. The main issue to be addressed here is to identify the way through which we can ensure the effectiveness of this tool and the expected impact by the end of the day: I agree that the necessity to promote a **MACRO-PROJECT** or **MACRO-REGION** initiative for the Mediterranean coastal zones protection and management should be the first priority. Best Practices all over Europe have proved that macro-projects and consequently macro-regions **CAN** indeed 'save the game' as happened in Danube's or Baltic's case for instance. We should definitely take stock and evaluate relative processes before we move forward. Such practices available

for the coastal Regions and Institutions of the Mediterranean Basin, aiming to the core of our objectives should achieve in my personal point of view the expected mainstreaming. But, in order for this to be achieved, it is out of question the need for strong support by organisations with capacity to promote this initiative. We are really satisfied - as members of **CPRM** - to be aware of the strong support of this important organisation. The commitment of **CPRM** to further foster and support our positions to EU Institutions is more than welcome. We really count on its valuable experience.

Dear colleagues and friends, tomorrow this Political Document has to pass the message to the audience as well as to european institutions and stakeholders. To my personal view it should rely on three clear axes:

- To be convincing for the need of our scope – this means an excellent dissemination strategy,
- To be well prepared for crucial fights – this means an establishment of an action plan,
- To ensure the progress and potential deviations – this means an establishment of a monitoring/evaluation ‘structure’.

Closing my intervention, I would like to stress a last point: the fact that we are now in the preparation phase of the new programming period enables us to plan for the next years; actually a pleasant coincidence and a challenge for the new Charter.

Thank you very much for your attention and looking forward to working with you towards realising our common vision for the Mediterranean basin. Congratulations for the excellent preparation of the event **and the important initiative.**

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