



Implementation of the ecosystem approach  
in the Adriatic through marine spatial planning

# Report of the final conference of the GEF Adriatic project

*28 June 2021, Herceg Novi, Montenegro*



Mediterranean  
Action Plan  
Barcelona  
Convention



Montenegro  
Ministry of Ecology,  
Spatial Planning and Urbanism

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- The meeting was opened by the moderator, who underlined that the Adriatic Project was successfully executed thanks to the cooperation between the Ministry of Ecology, Spatial Planning and Urbanism of Montenegro, the Ministry of Tourism and Environment and the National Agency for Protected Area from Albania and the UNEP/MAP with its two regional activity centers (PAP/RAC and SPA/RAC).

- The State Secretary for Ecology of Montenegro, Mr Danilo Mrdak, welcomed all the participants in the name of the Ministry of Ecology, Spatial Planning and Urbanism of Montenegro. He stressed out that this was the first live international meeting in the last year, and a unique opportunity to present the results of the project, and to see which would be the next steps to follow. He indicated that this project allowed the start of the process of Marine Spatial Planning in Montenegro, and that he was, personally as a biologist and as a State Secretary, particularly happy that they succeeded together to put under protection a marine area of Platamuni. He insisted that it was important to take in consideration both the economic needs and the need to protect the most important resources in the coastal zone and in the marine area. He reminded participants that visitors were mainly coming in Montenegro for the clean sea and the beautiful environment, and that if they would lose it, they would not attract visitors any longer. Mr Mrdak finished his introductory speech by thanking UNEP/MAP and wished that the work that was started by Montenegro in the project would continue after the project's end. He thanked the Albanian colleagues, the non-governmental organizations, the academics and the researchers for the great collaboration, and expressed his will to keep on collaborating with PAP/RAC in the future.

- The Deputy Minister from the Ministry of tourism and environment of Albania, Ms Ornella Cucci, thanked all the organizers of the meeting and welcomed the participants. She emphasized the importance of the project GEF Adriatic, which succeeded despite the pandemic, to fully achieve its objectives and to complete the program of work which was planned. She emphasized that in Albania, marine issues were considered as a priority for the last three years, and that the project allowed to make an MSP Preliminary Assessment Report of Vlora area in Albania. She thanked PAP/RAC and SPA/RAC as well as the Montenegrin Ministry staff and NAPA from Albania who coordinated the activities in their respective countries, and all the experts that contributed to the implementation of this project.

- Tatjana Hema, acting coordinator of UNEP/MAP, continued by thanking all the organizers and participants to the meeting. She stressed that implementing the GEF Adriatic project was particularly challenging because of all the situation with the pandemic. However,

the Montenegro and the Albanian team, strongly supported by UNEP MAP secretariat and MAP component teams - PAP/RAC and SPA/RAC – managed to conclude the project successfully and with very good results despite the difficulties. She highlighted that this project allowed the participating countries to provide the data requested by the reporting system of the Barcelona Convention.

She stressed the importance that both countries keep on gathering the data they started to gather during the project.

- Zeljka Škaričić, director of PAP/RAC, reminded participants that the GEF Adriatic project was a very innovative and complex project, which has shown how some new integrations can be done. Integration between IMAPs, between the ecological objectives, between the IMAP process and the ecological objectives, or integration of the land and sea uses planning. It is something which is not commonly done. The results of these project can help to shape better policy documents in the Mediterranean basin but also in the rest of the world. This project was a follow up of activities which had been implemented in the MedPartnership – a previous GEF project – and will be followed by the MedProgramme, a GEF project which is just starting. She finished by thanking both national teams from the Ministries, as well as all of the GEF Adriatic team members.

- Khalil Attia, Director of SPA/RAC first thanked the organizers of these event. He congratulated the Montenegrin authorities for the declaration of the first marine reserve in Montenegro, and expressed his will that there will be more of them in the future. He thanked the Ministries for their excellent collaboration, as well as UNEP/MAP Coordinating Unit and PAP/RAC for the quality of their support.

- Marina Marković, program officer and coordinator of the project on the name of PAP/RAC, then presented the major achievements of the GEF Adriatic project. In terms of ecosystem approach, there were 7 main achievements in the project.

1. They identified which were the most crucial locations in the sea where monitoring needs to be implemented, as well as the frequency of the monitoring and the frequency to be used. Two national data bases were produced in order to allow the countries to store the data to assess and to report based on this data.

2. They made the first comprehensive assessment in both countries.

3. They used all these data and provided an interpretation of the data so they could be used for marine spatial planning.

4. They identified areas which are valuable, but also areas with a lot of pressures.

5. Based on these information, they translated them into specific measures identifying among others areas where a specially careful planning should be implemented.

They actually merged MSP and Ecosystem Approach in order to reach the Good Environmental Status.

- Mr Anis Zarrouk, SPA/RAC project officer and coordinator of the project in the name of SPA/RAC, continued by presenting the Integrated Monitoring Program, one of the main outcomes of the GEF Adriatic project. He said that one of the main challenges of the GEF Adriatic project was that monitoring the state of the sea was not enough: one should also

monitor the indicators on land as most of the pressures are coming from the land. Another challenge of the project was that the data were not necessarily aligned with the needs of IMAP, and that the elaboration of data base for the two countries allowed to deal with this challenge. He mentioned that two marine surveys in the two countries were carried out.

- Ms Ivana Stojanović from the Ministry of Ecology, Spatial Planning and Urbanism of Montenegro stressed out the importance of the national IMAP for Montenegro. She underlined that the GEF Adriatic project helped Montenegro to comply with the requirements for entering the European Union.

- Mr Zamir Dedej from the Ministry of Tourism and Environment and the National Agency for Protected Areas of Albania took the floor to thank all the experts who have been working in Albania on this project. He said that they did an excellent and innovative work.

- Ms Klodiana Marika, MAP Focal Point for Albania, emphasized the fact that the GEF Adriatic project provided a sound basis to provide a standardized data which represent an added value, especially in the transboundary context in between Albania and Montenegro. Having solid data help to better manage the environment, to protect the biodiversity and to prevent marine litter which ends up in the sea and then in the oceans. The national IMAP has been shared with all the stakeholders identified in the process in Albania. She finished by expressing her satisfaction that the project allowed not only to prepare documents, but also to build the capacities in the country through the training that has been done. At last, she congratulated all the GEF Adriatic team for the excellent work which has been done, and expressed her hopes that more projects would come in the future to implement the recommendations.

- Rezart Kapedani, SPA/RAC expert on marine diversity, said that building the data base first started with a stocktaking of the existing data, and the identification of the data which were needed. He told that if the IMAP document was to be completed with a section on financing and on institutional set up, it would be ready to be used in Albania by the National Agency for monitoring purpose, as the monitoring is not meant to stop with the project but to keep on being implemented after its end. He finished by saying that the up to now, there were very few parameters which were monitored in Albania, and it would be now possible to change this situation with the new IMAP.

- Ms Ivana Mitrović from the Agency for Nature and Environmental Protection told that the data which have been collected in the framework of this project are very useful for the Agency, and that the Agency is thankful for this result.

- Ms Nada Krstulović, marine biologist, thanked the GEF Adriatic team. As Montenegro is currently working on its monitoring program according to the requirements of the Marine Strategy Framework directive, and said she was sure that the IMAP program would be very useful to do so. She said a fantastic work has been achieved in the framework of this project.

She told that one of the main results of the project was that it raised awareness on the need to collect data on the state of the marine environment.

- Ms Ornella Cucci started by thanking Nada Krstulovic for her intervention, and continued by insisting on the importance for the politicians to listen to the experts when elaborating their programs.

- The State Secretary for Ecology of Montenegro, Mr Danilo Mrdak highlighted the need to develop a joint strategy between countries in the Adriatic region to apply for additional funds for joint trans-national activities.

- Mr Vladimir Živković from Center for ecotoxicological researches of Montenegro (CETI) highlighted the importance of the GEF Adriatic project for this institution. As an outcome of GEF Adriatic the need for continuous monitoring was finally stressed out, which was not in practice before. Prior to this project, the data were discontinuous and “scattered” and the network of stations that is proposed within GEF Adriatic got broadened for eutrophication parameters and contaminants, which is of great importance of CETI. The opportunity was also used to assess the current state regarding eutrophication and contaminants in Montenegrin marine area, and engaging international experts was a great help to national experts.

- Ms Ana Mišurović, an expert with more than 30 years of experience in environmental monitoring, said that both countries, Albania and Montenegro, as Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention, have responsibility to protect the quality of their national marine environment. The problem is the waste management, the sea is unfortunately the absorber of waste, and little can be done without rigorous penalties for those who pollute. It is a transnational problem – in 2010 the litter that polluted the south Croatian beaches actually originated mainly from Albania and Montenegro. We need to secure funds for future research of marine environment.

- Mr Mrdak said that more important than funds (which can be secured) is a strong political will to tackle problems with waste and environmental problems in general.

- Ms Milica Mandić from the Institute of Marine Biology in Kotor highlighted that, at the moment, on Mediterranean level, Montenegro is the country with the highest per capita amount of waste that ends up in the sea (8.7 kg of plastics per capita per year in Montenegro ends up in the sea). The results of the GEF Adriatic project are important, especially the marine spatial plan which will have to be incorporated in any future national plan that will concern the sea. And not importantly, institutional collaboration in Montenegro was lifted to a much higher level with this Project.

- Video showing the results from 2020 field survey in Albania (Patok Rodoni Bay), carried out as a part of the GEF Adriatic project, was shown to the attendees. The 2019 field survey in Montenegro was presented by Ms Milena Bataković from the Agency for Environment and Nature protection in Montenegro. The survey was carried with the help of

Croatian experts from the Institute of Oceanography and Fisheries in Split and their research vessel, and national experts from different institutions of Montenegro. The findings of the results were important especially in Boka Kotorska bay, since they inspired initiatives for establishment of protected areas. Ms Bataković focused on the results concerning the corraligenous communities, especially highly valuable *Savalia savaglia*. This specie was found in high numbers in Boka Kotorska Bay, the numbers of colonies discovered are one of the highest in the Mediterranean. Based on these findings, formal procedure for protecting these colonies was initiated and is under way. In the meantime, some information tables were set up and the sea was cleaned from marine litter.

- A brief video on Good Environmental Status (GES) was shown to the attendees.
  
- Ms Ana Štrbenac from Stenella Consulting Ltd, Croatia, held the presentation on two GES assessments carried out for Albania and Montenegro. Ms Štrbenac pointed out that these reports are the results of the first attempt to assess GES in Albanian and Montenegrin marine and coastal areas, based on principles and criteria set under the Barcelona Convention and its Integrated Monitoring and Assessment Programme of the Mediterranean Sea and Coast and Related Assessment Criteria (UNEP/MAP/IMAP). Two final reports on GES assessment in each county were prepared with the objective to provide insight in the marine ecosystem's state and current pressures, though assessing a number of ecological defined components, as well as to identify shortcomings and existing gaps for future coastal and marine management towards GES. General conclusion for Montenegro is that at the moment GES assessment could be done only partially, foremostly due to limitation or lack of data, including gaps in certain baseline knowledge and long-term data series. Still some preliminary and only indicative conclusions could be made, which serve as a guideline for future improvements needed for adequate GES assessment, better understanding of the state of marine and coastal environment and implementation of concrete conservation actions. For Albania general conclusions are that at the moment GES assessment cannot not be done, foremostly due to limitation or lack of data. However, even this is a valuable information, which could lead to improvement and future actions to enable adequate GES assessment and gain a better understanding of the state of marine and coastal environment.
  
- Ms Marina Marković from PAP/RAC presented the draft Marine Spatial Plan (MSP) for Montenegro. The MSP is aimed at the whole marine area of Montenegro but with the focus on the narrow coastal zone which is the area with highest concentration of anthropogenic activities. Important result of this activity was that the valuable ecosystems were spatialized along with areas with significant human pressure, to ensure that the pressures to marine environment in the future get as minimal as possible. These information revealed what are the specific areas which need some protection/rehabilitation and which areas need limitations in term of human activities (tourism, fisheries, aquaculture...). There was a lot of issues in identifying precise spatial information, but with inter-institutional collaboration now the comprehensive spatial GIS database exists in Montenegro. Comprehensive analysis allowed not only a series of maps but concrete recommendations for different areas and activities. This is a first plan providing detailed delineation of marine uses in Montenegro. It fulfills the EU requirements regarding the implementation of the MSP

Directive. MSP plan for Montenegro provides an important step towards the responsible management of marine area: finding a balance between protecting the most valuable marine ecosystems and at the same time boosting the development of maritime activities.

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- Mr Dedej highlighted that activities in the project regarding the MSP process in Albania was not extensive as in Montenegro, but produced two important results: the draft guidelines for the MSP in Albania, and secondly, via stakeholder collaboration, the exercise for MSP was carried in the pilot area of Vlora Bay.

- Ms Darinka Joksimović from the Maritime Safety Department noted that she was delighted that GEF Adriatic was one of the first “ecological” projects to be of great relevance for maritime safety. Maritime Safety Department is in the process of revising the national contingency plan for pollution from ships which will be followed by wildlife response plan and shoreline response plan. For both these plans the outputs from the GEF Adriatic, especially the data related to MSP, will be of great importance in the future.

- Captain Mijović also thanked the Project team for the great cooperation.

- Ms Aleksandra Ivanović from the Public Enterprise “Morsko Dobro” said that for her institution the outputs from the MSP component of the Project, but also the database and other documents that came from the Project, will be significant for minimizing certain spatial conflicts between different sea uses (for example touristic use and mariculture).

- Ms Tamara Brajović from the Ministry of Ecology, Spatial Planning and Urbanism of Montenegro thanked the project and invited all the Montenegrin institutions to use the project documents in future planning and environmental protection, and continue the great collaboration which was initiated in this Project.

- Ms Milena Bataković also invited everyone to acknowledge the resulting conclusions of the proposed MSP for Montenegro, since it is not only a document that concerns spatial planning but also for nature protection and not just some obligation that Montenegro needs to fulfil for future EU accession, but it is important for the wellbeing of all of us.

- Mr Anis Zarrouk from SPA/RAC presented the mail resulting outcomes and lessons learnt from the GEF Adriatic Project. The first one was the realization of importance of **cooperation**. Second is **integration** – integrative approach in this project was pioneering in light of using many different methodologies and connecting different environmental components, all with goal for improved environmental management. Third is **innovation**, as connecting the ecosystem approach to marine spatial planning is an innovative idea. Other important achievements were **data acquisition and capacity building**. The bridge that was built within the GEF Adriatic is a good foundation for future collaboration in the Adriatic Region

- It was highlighted that the outputs from the project need to be available to everyone, also to students who can contribute a lot in their future research in writing their university

thesis. Mr Mrdak explained that all project outputs will be uploaded to the Project website (adriatic.eco). Also, Montenegro is planning to set up the national geoportal in the future.

- Ms Stojanović wanted to highlight once more that the cooperation between national institutions was a great achievement of this project. Also the capacity building, i.e. inclusion of international experts was a great success of transferring the most recent knowledge on marine environment and related monitoring and assessment.

- Mr Ivan Sekovski, PAP/RAC programme officer presented the upcoming activities in GEF MedProgramme (its Child Project 2.1) and the related SCCF project for both countries. GEF MedProgramme is a programme that includes 9 Mediterranean countries and it is supposed to last until 2024. In Montenegro, main activities related to MedProgramme's Child Project 2.1. are the development of a coastal (ICZM) plan for Boka-Kotorska Bay and mainstreaming the climate change adaptation into this plan (via SCCF Project). For both countries, Albania and Montenegro, preparation of the priority actions plan for Buna-Bojana transboundary aquifer, that is envisaged within this project, will be of great importance. For both countries a national assessment of submarine groundwater discharges will be carried out. In addition, in Albania a Mediterranean Coast Day celebration with the topic of coastal aquifers is envisaged during the project duration.

- A video developed by Green TV on litter and clean-up activities, and on need for stronger environmental protection, was shown to the attendees.

- The meeting was closed by final greetings from Ms Brajović, Mr Dedej, Ms Cucci, Ms Škaričić and Mr Mrdak, who all thanked to meeting participants, and all national and international experts and project partners involved.



## ***ANNEX I – AGENDA OF THE MEETING***

<b>27 June 2021</b>	
<b>By 16.00</b>	<b>Arrival</b>
<b>17.00 – 21.00</b>	<b>Field visit – Platamuni; leaving from port Meljine</b>
<b>28 June 2021</b>	
<b>9.15 – 10.00</b>	<b>Registration and welcome coffee</b>
<b>10.00 – 10.30</b>	<b>Welcome</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ministry of Ecology, Spatial Planning and Urbanism – Montenegro</li> <li>- Ministry of Tourism and Environment – Albania</li> <li>- UNEP/MAP Barcelona Convention</li> <li>- UNEP/MAP - PAP/RAC</li> <li>- UNEP/MAP - SPA/RAC</li> </ul>
<b>10.30 – 12.30</b>	<b>Overall intro to the project</b>  <b>Results:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Integrated Monitoring Programmes for Albania and Montenegro</li> <li>- Marine surveys in Patok-Rodoni Bay (Albania) and Montenegro</li> <li>- Good Environmental Status</li> <li>- Marine Spatial Planning</li> </ul> <b>Discussion</b>
<b>12:30 – 13:15</b>	<b>Looking back on the last three years</b>  <b>Embedding the results of GEF Adriatic into the new initiatives</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- UNEP/MAP-PAP/RAC - MedProgramme</li> <li>- Ministry of Ecology, Spatial Planning and Urbanism – Montenegro</li> <li>- Ministry of Tourism and Environment – Albania</li> </ul> <b>Conclusions</b>
<b>13:15</b>	<b>Lunch</b>