

MED9 – Informal meeting of Environment Ministers

Šibenik 18-19 May 2026

JOINT STATEMENT

We, environmental ministers of the Group of Southern EU Member States (MED9) and/or their representatives, met in Šibenik on 19 May 2026, to discuss strengthening cooperation in addressing pressures on the water and sea resources of the Mediterranean and consequently an improvement of their management recalling an integrated from source to sea approach. To this end, we:

STRESS that water management is a matter of EU, national and regional security and the basis for stability, security and resilience as well as economic development of the Mediterranean as a whole.

READY to explore further possibilities for cooperation with countries from the wider Mediterranean region on the water, coastal and marine management, for we recognise the special ecological value of the Mediterranean ecosystems, the conservation of which is our shared interest.

RECOGNISE that extreme droughts, uneven water cycles and seasonal pressures from tourism, directly threaten our nature, society, agriculture and the economy.

COMMIT to strengthening resilience of critical water infrastructure against climate extremes and biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation as well as increasing cyber and energy risks. This approach is further confirmed by recent international climate risk assessments that recognise the Mediterranean as one of the most vulnerable areas in terms of drought, hydrological instability and ecosystem degradation.

STRESS that safe drinking water is a fundamental prerequisite for the preservation of our communities and the vitality of key sectors of the economy. Building resilience to pronounced seasonality and climate extremes is our absolute priority.

BELIEVE that reducing losses in water supply systems, among other solutions, is essential to increase water availability, thus directly saving energy and reducing operating costs as well as reducing the abstraction of valuable resources vital for biodiversity conservation.

HIGHLIGHT that ecosystem restoration, green infrastructure and nature-based solutions provide a major opportunity to support water quantity and quality management and enhance resilience against both droughts and floods, and therefore **COMMIT** to scale up investment in nature-based solutions and to enhance the restoration of wetlands and other freshwater

ecosystems, including efforts to restore the natural connectivity of rivers as well as their riparian areas and floodplains, including through the removal of artificial barriers, in accordance with the Nature Restoration Regulation.

SUPPORT the accelerated digitalisation and deployment of artificial intelligence and other smart solutions for early detection of faults and real-time system management. Modernisation of water supply through these technologies is not only a matter of technical efficiency, but a necessary step in building a resilience of the sector essential for the preservation of human life, biodiversity, ecosystem services and long-term security of supply.

STRESS the strategic importance of integrated and sustainable management of water resources, including the incorporation of non-conventional water resources, such as safe reuse of treated wastewater and sustainable desalination, particularly in water-scarce Mediterranean regions with limited freshwater availability, as essential components of their water balance, thereby ensuring system stability while preserving the priority of protecting natural water bodies.

CONCERNED by the decline of marine biodiversity, CONFIRM that the protection of the Mediterranean Sea and its marine ecosystems require integrated source-to-sea approaches linking land-based activities, coastal management, water policies, and marine protection. We insist on an inseparable link between the management of catchments and the protection of the marine environment and marine biodiversity. Implementation of systematic and coherent monitoring to improve water, coastal and marine environment is therefore necessary. The implementation of the Water Framework Directive (WFD) must be firmly integrated with the protection of coastal areas, recognising that rivers are the main vectors of pressures, but also key factors for the recovery of the Mediterranean.

RECOGNISE the importance of protecting and restoring marine and coastal ecosystems, including blue carbon ecosystems such as Posidonia seagrass meadows, as essential tools for biodiversity conservation, climate resilience, coastal protection and sustainable development.

REAFFIRM the importance of strengthening cooperation at regional level and beyond, so as, inter alia, to enhance attention to prevention of transboundary water and marine pollution.

STRESS the importance of introducing coherent advanced, autonomous monitoring systems, which enable real-time water monitoring and sharing data, as appropriate. Such mechanisms are essential to meet the standards of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) and allow for a timely response to pollution in this vulnerable and almost closed ecosystem.

RECOGNISE that the presence of microplastics poses significant and potentially long-term risk to all living organisms, aquatic ecosystems and human health. In this context, we STRESS the importance of developing comparable methodologies and data, building on existing international regulatory frameworks, to ensure coherence of approaches and a reliable basis for policymaking.

CALL for the adoption of coherent monitoring protocols for macroplastics, microplastics and marine litter taking into account the pollution from river estuaries to the open sea, building on harmonised and science-based methodologies. We STRESS the importance of advancing wastewater treatment systems and related research, in line with ongoing work at EU level, to better understand and address pathways of microplastic emissions, particularly in sensitive and protected areas, including Natura 2000 sites.

ADVOCATE better cooperation to harmonise analysis protocols and exchange of best practices. The Mediterranean requires a common scientific language so that our policies are based on exact and comparable data, ensuring that strategic decisions are made on the basis of scientific evidence.

RECOGNISE the inseparable link between the water, food and energy sectors and, to this end, TAKE NOTE of the recently adopted Strategy for the Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystems Nexus in the Mediterranean Source to Sea Continuum. Reducing the energy intensity of water systems through smart loss management is our direct contribution to climate neutrality of the European Union. Optimising these systems is essential for reducing the carbon footprint and increasing the sustainability of public services.

RECALL the need, in order to implement the above actions, for a better intergenerational cooperation and inclusion of the young generation in all sectors. RECOGNISE a need to address this topic through the entire educational system.

CALL ON the European Union to provide strong financial mechanisms as part of the implementation of the objectives of the EU Water Resilience Strategy, in order to provide funds for the specific challenges of the Mediterranean – from source salinization to extreme droughts, water shortages and water supply resilience, among others. These issues require priority access to finance in all current and future programmes. We STRESS that sufficient funding is needed for critical water infrastructure, to address water-specific investment needs in water-scarce regions, including desalination and water reuse facilities.