

Note to editors

The Westmed Maritime Clusters Alliance:

Results and progress of numerous initiatives to promote a sustainable Blue Economy

On June 8th, as part of the 8th edition of Seafuture, the WestMed National Hub for Italy organized in collaboration with Big Cluster and Federazione del Mare a workshop dedicated to the valorisation of results and the promotion of new initiatives within the Maritime Clusters Alliance.

Leonardo Manzari, chaired the first session of the event, introducing the greetings of **Daniele Bosio**, Coordinator of Maritime Affairs at the Italian Ministry of Cooperation and Foreign Affairs, and Coordinator for Italy of the WestMED Initiative, and of **Luca Palazzo**, of the Presidency of the Council, Department for Cohesion Policies. Both underlined the key role of maritime clusters for the development and growth of the blue economy, especially for the countries of the southern shore of the Mediterranean. Thanks to WestMed Initiative and the joint work of the two Italian maritime clusters (Big Cluster and Federazione del Mare) a strong boost has been given to all activities related to the blue economy, creating a robust network with the clusters of North Africa, especially with the Tunisian one and, recently, with the Mauritanian one.

Maritime clusters are in fact becoming the engine of innovation and thanks to them about 1,500 projects have been launched with Interregional funds aimed at supporting development and facing new challenges considering the needs of all the actors of the blue economy.

Manuel Pleguezuelo, from DG MARE of the European Commission, recalled that the Commission's 2017 Communication on the WestMed Initiative focused on the development of maritime clusters as a key to progress. After 5 years of work, the Commission's report confirms the success of the initiative that has achieved important results in terms of dialogue and diplomacy, in the thematic technical groups supported by the Italian Presidency, in cooperation and development of alliances between clusters and in the launch of the observatory on the blue economy which provides analysis and data on the growth of added value and employment. No less important is the new dialogue platform on energy transition and fisheries and aquaculture to identify innovative solutions.

Adriana Salazar Olivan, Union for the Mediterranean, recalled that this intergovernmental organization brings together the 27 EU countries and 16 other countries of the Mediterranean Basin, to work together for the development of this basin with a broad dialogue approach aimed at concretizing shared solutions to address common challenges. In particular, a Blue Fund was created, with the support of the European Commission to support large-scale investments in the Mediterranean. To this end, the role of maritime clusters is increasingly crucial.

Shaun Patrick Ebejer, Maltese National Coordinator, WestMED Initiative co-Presidency, reiterated that the connections between all clusters need to be strengthened to improve the Sustainable Blue Economy in the WestMED region which is already very active in the various areas (sustainable aquaculture, maritime transport and green ports and maritime clusters, maritime spatial planning, sustainable tourism and blue skills//ocean literacy): all issues that will be at the core of the WestMED Stakeholder Conference 2023 to be held in Malta on June 22nd.

The second part of the event was dedicated to the main achievements of the maritime clusters of the WestMED Alliance and its members. Speakers:

- **Anja Detant**, CINEA, the European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency established in 2021 to implement parts of some EU programmes, and which plays a key role in

supporting the EU Green Deal through the efficient and effective implementation of its delegated programmes.

- **Hamadi BABA HAMADI**, President of the Mauritanian Maritime Cluster, recently established after political and economic leaders became aware of the importance of the sea and its operators for the country and for its openness to the rest of the world.
- **Emna Sohlobji**, Secretary General of the Tunisian Maritime Cluster, which since 2020 has established a strong cooperation with the Italian clusters on issues related to transport, ports, sustainable tourism and fishing, digitalization, and marinas. **Emna Sohlobji** was elected this year as a leading African Woman for the Blue Economy.
- **Ruben Eiras**, Secretary General of the Portuguese cluster Forum Oceano, illustrated the innovative Hub Azul Dealroom platform, which provides SMEs with a network with all the data and information on funds and startups, establishing an easy and efficient system for the exploration of all the business activities of the global blue economy.
- **Laurence Martin**, Secretary General of the Federation of the Sea, ENMC, and **Thanos Smanis** WMAM, presented the new European Blue Forum, launched in Brest during the European Maritime Day, thanks to which a community of different sea users will be created, passionate and committed to working together to bring bold and ambitious changes to the shared challenges of nature and climate change. Within the Forum, stakeholders will have the opportunity to influence the structure and direction of the European Blue Forum in a balanced and inclusive way and, through this, the future of Europe's sustainable blue economy to help build a common and united path towards the vision of the Sustainable Blue Economy. The role of maritime clusters will be crucial in this regard.

Christian Chiavetta, WestMED Assistance Mechanism – National Hub for Italy, coordinated the interventions of the representatives of the organizations that manage the European projects presented and dedicated to the numerous sectors of the blue economy. Many of these have been approved and launched recently; others are awaiting evaluation:

- ForMare - EMFAF Maritime Clusters:– CALLMEBLUE; ERASMUS+ - MARMED
- Ocean Forum - COSME Euroclusters – MedBan
- CTN BIG – COSME Euroclusters – IKAT
- Strategis Cluster - ERASMUS+ - MAQUAM
- SGD4MED – EMFAF Ports & Maritime Transport – POWER4MED
- Federazione del Mare – EMFAF Women in Blue Economy – WINBIG
- Mediterranean Sea Pole – COSME Euroclusters – ELBE Alliance (online)

Antonio Novo Guerrero, European Clusters Alliance, **Axelle Salvage**, ENMC, and **Walter Vassallo**, Blue Marina Awards, spoke about the development of their respective organizations, mentioning the possible synergies with the WestMED Maritime Clusters Alliances, citing the numerous consolidated cooperation agreements and opportunity areas in the blue economy.

Giovanni Caprino, President of Cluster BIG, and **Laurence Martin**, Secretary General of the Federation of the Sea, concluded the work by highlighting how since the 2021 edition of Seafuture the number of projects dedicated to the blue economy has multiplied exponentially, to the point of making its management increasingly challenging. This shows how important it is to continue to strengthen the synergy between all clusters and work together to achieve common goals together.

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