

Press Release

North-South Prize of the Council of Europe awarded to the Mediterranean Experts on Climate and environmental Change, citing the region's identity as "a shared space of peace, development and human rights"

- The North-South Prize of the Council of Europe recognizes initiatives that defend causes related to human rights, democracy and the rule of law. It has been awarded to the network of the Mediterranean Experts on Climate and environmental Change (MedECC).
- The award acknowledges the importance of partnership and cooperation on both shores of the Mediterranean to face common global environmental challenges. The Council of Europe celebrates the contributions of more than 190 environmental scientists from 25 countries to the first comprehensive scientific assessment of environmental risks in the Mediterranean region.
- During a ceremony to be held in Lisbon on December 9, 2021, the Portuguese President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa will confer the award on the MedECC coordinators, Professor Wolfgang Cramer and Dr Joël Guiot.

Lisbon, 9 December 2021. The Mediterranean Basin and its people are under imminent threat of damages due to changing climate, increasing pollution and the degradation of the land and the ocean. Now a collaborative scientific assessment of these risks has been awarded the North-South Prize of the Council of Europe. The prize will be handed to the Coordinators of the Mediterranean Experts on Climate and environmental Change (MedECC) by the Portuguese President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa during a ceremony in Lisbon on December 9, 2021 – jointly with the other awardee, the International Commission against the Death Penalty. The Jury recognized the work of MedECC as *"leading example of the potential of collaboration between states and societies to face the challenges of climate change and environmental sustainability, as well as a response to the need for scientific and expert cooperation to produce knowledge-based analysis as a sound basis for policy"*.

Climate and other environmental changes have become major threats to both ecosystems and human well-being worldwide. The Mediterranean region is particularly vulnerable because it cumulates environmental risks, including strong warming and drying (up to 6°C by 2100), accelerating sea-level rise (presently 4 mm per year, 80 cm by 2100, possibly more), rapid urbanization, increasing pollution of the air and the water, and the impacts of mass tourism. Ecosystems suffer from land degradation including the loss of half of the wetlands, overfishing (20% of fish species at risk of extinction by 2050), non-sustainable agriculture, wildfires (burnt area may double by 2100) and the invasion of non-indigenous species ('tropicalization'). These factors strongly impact water resources, biodiversity on land and in the ocean, human health and security, with the most severe consequences for the South and the East.

During six years, nearly two hundred scientists from the MedECC network have assessed more than 3800 articles and reports in the scientific literature about these risks for the Mediterranean Basin, presenting their findings in a comprehensive report, covering all subregions and domains of change. This large assessment was only possible due to the voluntary contributions from many experts. Professor Wolfgang Cramer from CNRS (France), one of the two coordinators of MedECC, notes that *"it is very encouraging for us and all our colleagues that the Council of Europe recognizes the role of this work for people in the region so prominently – this now needs to be followed by political action to avoid further loss of lives and assets"*.

The MedECC vision for the Mediterranean rewarded by the North-South Prize

Poverty, social inequalities, gender inequalities and conflict hamper sustainable development and environmental resilience in Mediterranean countries. But through its long history of cultural exchange, the region has also shaped a common identity which can be a force to take up the environmental challenge. Given the rapidly changing environment, it is now crucial that policies recognize the role of scientific knowledge for the protection of human life and nature. Cooperation of actors on different geographic levels (from local to international) and among different groups (stakeholders, scientists, practitioners) across the Mediterranean will be essential. Through the open exchange among scientists practiced by the network itself, MedECC has given a positive example.

“The sharing of experience among scientists from nearly all Mediterranean countries was a hugely rewarding part of this work”, says Dr Joël Guiot from CNRS (France), also coordinator of MedECC. Dr Guiot also notes that there is *“potential for adaptation to these risks and for some mitigation of their causes, but much stronger financial efforts are necessary, well beyond those proposed by the COP26”*. Through its comprehensive risk assessment, the report illustrates, with specific detail for all Mediterranean subregion, the strong need for strengthened policies required to achieve the agreed goals of the UNFCCC Paris Agreement on keeping climate change well below 1.5°C, as well as the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals such as “Life Below Water”, “Life on Land”, “Climate Action” and others.

MedECC is supported by several Mediterranean intergovernmental organizations, mainly Plan Bleu, the Mediterranean Action Plan of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP/MAP) and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM). The Secretary General of the Union for the Mediterranean, Nasser Kamel, underlined how *“The Mediterranean Sea is a fragile ecosystem that suffers from different ills such as biodiversity loss or pollution. Policies for the sustainable development of Mediterranean countries are urgently needed to mitigate these risks but policy-makers lacked adequate information. This is why the MedECC initiative, supported by the UfM Secretariat, constitutes a leading example of the potential of the Euro-Mediterranean scientific and policy-makers community working together creating solutions for a better future”*. Ms. Tatjana Hema, the UNEP/MAP Coordinator, noted that *“this network of independent experts from around the Mediterranean has become a robust science-policy interface, providing evidence-based foundation for informed decision-making at a time when the region grapples with the triple crisis of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss”*.

More information on MedECC

Established in 2015, during the preparations for the UN Climate Conference COP21 in Paris, the MedECC network now involves more than 700 scientists from 35 countries from the Mediterranean and Europe—190 of these worked directly on the First Mediterranean Assessment Report. MedECC aims to provide improved scientific knowledge on climate and environmental change impact in the Mediterranean Basin.

Inspired by the open science-based and policy-oriented approach of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), MedECC demonstrates the potential of collaboration between independent experts studying all aspects of environmental sustainability.

The full First Mediterranean Assessment Report “MAR1”, with a Summary for Policymakers in English, French, Arabic, Spanish (Castilian) and Catalan is freely accessible at <http://www.medecc.org>.

For media inquiries and interviews:

For all inquiries about MedECC, please contact Dr Kasia Marini, Lead Science Officer of MedECC (marini@medecc.org).

Interview requests with Professor Wolfgang Cramer and Dr Joël Guiot should be addressed to Dr Marini but can also be made by e-mail (wolfgang.cramer@imbe.fr and guiot@cerege.fr)

Professor Wolfgang Cramer is a Senior Scientist with the French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS), working at the Mediterranean Institute for Marine and Terrestrial Biodiversity and Ecology in Aix-en-Provence, France (web page <https://www.imbe.fr/wolfgang-cramer>, twitter handle @wolfgangcramer).

Dr Joël Guiot is Emeritus Senior Scientist with the French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS), working at the Centre for Research and Teaching in Environmental Geoscience (CEREGE) in Aix-en-Provence, France (<https://www.cerege.fr/fr/users/joel-guiot>, twitter handle @joelguiot).

MedECC Secretariat postal address: PLAN BLEU, BP 30220, 13202 Marseille Cedex 02, France

Plan Bleu Communication Officer: Ms Pauline Simon (psimon@planbleu.org)

Coordinating Unit for the Mediterranean Action Plan, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP/MAP), Barcelona Convention Secretariat Public Information Officer: Mr Jihed Ghannem (ghannem@un.org)

Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) Communication & Media Relation Officer: Ms Marine Moulin (marine.moulin@ufmsecretariat.org)

Inquiries about the Council of Europe and the ceremony in Lisbon on December 9, 2021, should be made to Ms. Monica Mendez (Monica.MENDES@coe.int).

Journalists' requests for accreditation to participate to the ceremony: Ms. Rozenn Hemon (Rozenn.HEMON@coe.int).

The ceremony will be transmitted live on: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/north-south-centre>.