**Press release**

[MARLITER Regional Information Workshop in Constanta: making progress toward creation of the project ICT based tool for the Black Sea]

*Partners and stakeholders from 5 countries review the preparation of an important project output to populate the future web-based portal*

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Regime: No limitation

The second project regional event, an information workshop entitled “Stocking Meeting of the Study of Data and Information for ICT based Tool of MARLITER” was held in Constanta, Romania on 3 – 4 July 2019. Over 30 representatives of partners and stakeholders from five countries reviewed the progress of work on an important project output, the Study of data and information to be used for the production of the web-based portal of monitoring data for the Black Sea. The participants engaged in a lively debate on the identification of solutions to the global marine litter issue. Stakeholders and experts from the hosting country were particularly helpful in the provision of comments and suggestions related to the local scene and good practices.

The participants provided a review of information on the availability of marine litter data on national level, and also on issues like legislative gaps or bottlenecks encountered on country-level data collection. *“The main problem that all MARLITER partners encounter is the lack of a clear legislation regarding marine litter. Furthermore, the data available should be supplemented and enriched, beach monitoring activities should be conducted more regularly and they should be better supported by the Member States. In Greece, the top marine litter item on the beach is cigarette butts and filters, and the situation is very much the same in Bulgaria, where 84% of marine litter is represented by artificial polymeric objects”*, says Angelica Paiu, project coordinator.

The participants took part in three working groups. The first of them focused on identifying stakeholders' expectations, what they could offer in terms of information to the project, as well as on the expectations from the MARLITER project and its benefits.

The results identified a number of elements to be implemented within the project. Stakeholder expectations included: better communication between interest groups; improving the visibility of marine activities to the public as well as their monitoring; designing activities and measures reducing the amount of marine litter and supporting the concept of improved waste management and waste prevention at a local level; as well as improvement of legislation regarding marine litter.

Of particular interest to all participants were the ideas and suggestions about what the stakeholders could offer. Among those identified were resources, information, ownership of project results, support to beach monitoring and school activities related to public education and awareness raising regarding marine litter prevention and reduction.

Regarding the expectations from the project, the participants and stakeholders focused on educating and informing the public, raising awareness on the marine litter issue, preserving protected areas and intensive training, as well as working toward the improvement of current legislation so that marine litter should be incorporated in it.

Work continued with discussion on the information relevant to the marine litter study. “*In order to reduce the amount of waste going to the sea and beaches, it is necessary first to know the current situation in detail. We need complete and up-to-date information and for this, all authorities that have such data have to make them public. At the same time, there is a need to further harmonize the ways of collecting data so that cross-border comparisons can be made*”, says Mihaela Cândea Mirea, Executive Director of the NGO Mare Nostrum.

After presentations from all partners on the progress of work on the study on national level, the partners from Aristotle University of Thessaloniki suggested ideas and provided detailed instructions and guidance on the work further. They presented the envisaged structure of the interactive portal, where data and information on the Black Sea and marine litter will be uploaded to help make this global issue more visible and better understandable to regional and national stakeholders.

The workshop is part of the project “Improved online public access to environmental monitoring data and data tools for the Black Sea Basin supporting cooperation in the reduction of marine litter” or MARLITER, supported by the Joint Operational Program “Black Sea Basin 2014-2020”, part of the European Neighbourhood Instrument. Partners in the project are Black Sea NGO Network of Varna, Bulgaria; NGO Mare Nostrum of Constanta, Romania; Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece; the Ukrainian Scientific Center of Ecology of the Sea of Odessa, Ukraine; and the Black Sea Eco Academy of Batumi, Georgia. The project aims to improve cooperation in environmental monitoring, one of the programme's main priorities, and to promote environmental co-ordination and cooperation on the reduction of marine litter in the Black Sea Basin. Its duration is 30 months and it has a total budget of about 770 thousand euros.

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