Clean seas by 2020: Scientists identify main environmental 'stressors' in the Mediterranean and Black Seas

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Over 200 leading scientists from over 20 countries around the Mediterranean and Black Seas gathered in Barcelona last week to share the results of their joint work carried out over the last year. They summarized on a regional and basin scale the environmental "stressors" on which the scientific research of PERSEUS will focus intensively over the next three years.

Some of the main environmental "stressors" that were identified are: fisheries; maritime transport; land-based pollutants from industry and agriculture; oil, gas and mineral exploration and exploitation including oil spills. By understanding the links between these key environmental "stressors" and their outcomes, scientists aim to provide key insights and recommendations that, when translated to relevant policies and actions, will significantly improve and even restore the strained ecosystems of the Mediterranean and Black Seas.

The scientists met from the 22nd to the 25th January, in the framework of the ambitious EU-funded project called 'PERSEUS' which stands for 'Policy-oriented marine Environmental Research in the Southern EUropean Seas'. The Faculty of Geology of the University of Barcelona (UB) and the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya • BarcelonaTech (UPC) hosted the General Assembly meeting and the Umbrella Workshop of PERSEUS, which today represents the largest marine environmental research project covering both the Mediterranean and

Black Sea.

The PERSEUS Project Coordinator, Dr. Evangelos Papathanassiou, from the Hellenic Centre for Marine Research says: "We are applying the 80/20 rule to our approach. We are really focusing our research on the 'critical 20%' aspects of the 'stressors', that, if limited or modified, can result in the '80% difference' for restoring the ecosystems of our seas." Closing the week of events, the President of the PERSEUS Advisory Board and President of the Balkan Environmental Association (B.EN.A), Prof. Fokion Vosniakos,noted "We have high expectations from PERSEUS. It is the first project of its kind where the natural scientists will work closely with socio-economists to prepare concrete policy recommendations for decision-makers to ensure the 'good environmental status' of our seas."Scientists will be challenged to define what "sustainable" means for these two seas. It is clear that getting the balance right between environmental and economic considerations is a continuous work in progress, but it is also clear that scientists need to help policymakers understand that "business as usual" is no longer an option.

Miquel Canals, professor from the Department of Stratigraphy, Paleontology and Marine Geosciences at the UB and organizer of the meeting, states that: "PERSEUS project, and consequently the UB, aims mainly at contributing to the good environmental condition of the Mediterranean Sea in 2020. This fact, which can seem far away from daily worries of citizens, can directly benefit them, as it will improve the quality of water and the products we get from the sea, in short, of the marine and coastal system. This improvement will be translated into a benefit in health and the welfare of citizens and future generations as the one produced by the decision of using unleaded petrol made some time ago. That decision has contributed to a healthier atmosphere, ocean and food. This is the line that PERSEUS follows".

Rosa Mari Darbra, professor from the Department of Chemical Engineering at the UPC and co-organizer of the meeting, explains than: "the PERSEUS workshop and General Assembly have been a success as many international researchers have exchanged their knowledge in order to improve the environmental quality of the Mediterranean and Black seas. The protection of these seas is of high relevance due to their geographical position and the socio-economic benefits they provide to the inhabitants of these areas. The results of this first year of research have been very useful to establish the basis for future work and to unify different approaches with the final aim of achieving a good environmental status of the aforementioned seas and helping the EU countries to implement the Marine Strategy Framework Directive".

More information: Visit the PERSEUS Website www.perseus-net.eu for the latest information on the PERSEUS project's activities, findings and useful tools.

Provided by University of Barcelona

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