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Shipping

Solutions

Efthimios E. Mitropoulos describes decades of support for the Mediterranean Action Plan in maritime safety and pollution prevention

The Mediterranean is a vital artery for merchant shipping, which transports 90 per cent of the world's goods. At any one time, 2,000 merchant ships are crossing its waters. Some 30 per cent of international sea-borne trade volume originates or is directed to its ports and 28 per cent of the world's sea-borne oil traffic transits the Mediterranean with some 200,000 crossings per year.

The vast majority of these voyages are completed safely, efficiently and without harm to the marine environment. Shipping has always been a safe, secure and environmentally-friendly form of transport and its performance has improved notably in the last three decades. This can largely be

attributed to the work of flag, port and coastal states in implementing measures adopted by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), including conventions, protocols, codes, guidelines and recommended practices covering such matters as: the design, construction and equipment of ships; the competence of seafarers; safety management; protecting the marine environment and compensating victims of pollution incidents; and adopting a comprehensive maritime security regime for ships, companies and port facilities.

IMO's work to prevent and reduce marine pollution by ships has made it a natural partner for UNEP in protecting the world's oceans in the context of the Regional Seas

Programme. The 21 countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea – which participate in the Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP), and are contracting parties to the Barcelona Convention – are also all Member States of IMO. All but one are also contracting parties to IMO's International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, all but three to the marine pollution prevention convention, MARPOL 73/78.

Shipping is, by its nature, an international industry requiring internationally agreed standards and rules. Regional co-operation and collaboration are important for implementing these standards and are key objectives of IMO's global technical co-operation programme. IMO is wholly supportive of the Regional Seas Programme and proud to have been involved since its inception.

IMO has been directly responsible for the technical and administrative management of the Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean Sea (REMPEC) since it was established – initially as the Regional Oil Combating Centre for the Mediterranean Sea – in Malta in December 1976.

The first such regional centre in

the world under the UNEP Regional Seas Programme, its original mission was to assist Mediterranean coastal states in implementing the Barcelona Convention's Protocol concerning Co-operation in Combating Pollution of the Mediterranean Sea by Oil and Other Harmful Substances in Cases of Emergency. Some elements of this protocol have since been reflected in IMO's International Convention on Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response and Co-operation, adopted in 1990, which stipulates that parties should try to conclude bilateral and regional agreements to enhance their capacity to respond to major incidents.

Financed by the Mediterranean Trust Fund, REMPEC has developed its activities along four main lines: disseminating information; training personnel; assisting the preparation of contingency plans; and facilitating co-operation in cases of emergency.

When it began its work, only a few Mediterranean countries were considered to have the means for oil spill response. Now the sea is well prepared to deal with pollution incidents, particularly oil spills. Sub-regional contingency plans have been established between neighbouring countries, including the RAMOGEPOL Plan for the Ligurian Sea (France, Monaco and Italy), the Lyon Plan for the Gulf of Lyon (Spain and France) and a plan for the southeast Mediterranean (Cyprus, Egypt and Israel). Another, for the southwest Mediterranean (Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia).

REMPEC's objectives and functions were modified in November 2001 to reflect its new role as envisaged by the Protocol concerning Co-operation in Preventing Pollution from Ships and, in Cases of Emergency, Combating Pollution of the Mediterranean Sea adopted in January 2002. Its future activities will expand to focus on providing, establishing and operating port reception facilities within the Mediterranean; promoting regional co-operation in port State control and monitoring marine pollution from ships, and more rigorously enforcing the provisions of MARPOL 73/7. The focus at national level will be on assisting States in establishing and operating port reception facilities to receive waste produced by ships and helping those that face difficulties in ratifying, implementing and enforcing relevant IMO conventions.

It is a broad and ambitious role, but one that reflects the aims of the wider maritime community and all IMO Member States in achieving the IMO objectives of safer, more secure and efficient shipping on clean oceans, with specific emphasis on the Mediterranean. As MAP celebrates its 30th anniversary, we can build on the excellent regional co-operation that has developed and look forward to translating the new Protocol into practical actions that will significantly reduce pollution from maritime-transport-related activities ■

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