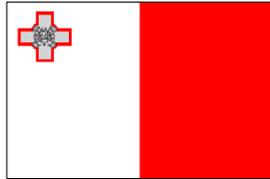




European Union



Republic of Malta



Italian Republic



Sicilian Region

Strategic Environmental Assessment

Proposal:

Cross-Border Cooperation Programme

Italy-Malta 2014-2020

(European Regional Development Fund European Territorial Cooperation Objective)

NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

provided for in Annex 1 of Directive 2001/42/EC, as implemented by Legislative Decree 152/2006 and subsequent amendments in **Point j)**

Proposer:	Regional Environmental Authority
Sicilian Region Department of Regional Planning	Sicilian Region Regional Department for the Environment Service 1 SEA-EIA

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Introduction

The Cooperation Programme (CP) Italy-Malta 2014-2020 is based on Regulation 1303/2013, which lays down common and general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund.

The Italy-Malta CP 2014-2020 forms part of the European Territorial Cooperation objective, in the field of Cross-border cooperation (Article 2 (1) of the EU Regulation no. 1299/2013 on specific provisions for the support from the European Regional Development Fund to the European territorial cooperation objective, referred to as ETC Regulation) designed to support cooperation among neighbouring regions to promote integrated regional development between neighbouring regions with sea and land borders in two or more Member States or between neighbouring regions in at least one Member State and a third country on the external borders of the Union other than those covered by programmes under the external financing instruments of the Union.

In view of the purposes of the strategic environmental assessment it is appropriate to refer to:

- Article 8 of Regulation 1303/13 which establishes the principle of sustainable development and the Union's promotion of the aim to preserve, protect and improve the quality of the environment, as set out in Article 11 and Article 191, paragraph 1, TFEU, taking into account the "polluter pays" principle;
- Article 55, paragraph 4, of Regulation 1303/13 on the EU's structural and investment funds (ESIF) which states that the ex ante evaluation includes the requirements of the Strategic Environmental Assessment under Directive 2001/42/EC of the Council.

Therefore, the Managing Authority of the programme is required to prepare the Environment Report in compliance with Article 5 of Directive 2001/42/EC (known as SEA Directive) of the Parliament and the Council, taking into account its implementation in the respective Italian and Maltese national standards.

The purpose of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is "to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans/programmes [...]" (Article 1 of the Directive).

In accordance with Article 5 of EU Regulation 1303/2013 the Sicilian Region – Planning Department – and the Maltese State Funds and Programmes Division have launched (in July 2012) a "combined multi-level governance approach" of involvement by the partnership in the preparation activities of the Cooperation Programme. In the various public consultation processes, the multi-level approach has involved both generic partnership (open to all public/private stakeholders and citizens in general) as well as skilled partnership (directed to involve authorities and competent subjects in intervention matters of the OP).

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Alongside the drafting of the programme, the Managing Authority, in close collaboration with the regional Environmental Authority, competent authority for the SEA (the EIA SEA Service of the Regional Environment Department) has launched the following evaluation activities, relating to:

- (February-June 2013): the preparation of a preliminary report (scoping document), comprising the presentation of the methodology and the definition of the Environment Report contents and the consultation methods to be used;
- the preliminary report also identifies the environmental components and establishes the environmental objectives to be pursued with the Cooperation Programme;
- (May-September 2014) the drawing up of the environment report, which includes the presentation of an environmental context analysis, a consistency analysis of the programme with other current environmental programmes and plans, an effect analysis, the definition of mitigation measures and the delineation of a monitoring system for the implementation phase;
- (May-September 2014) the drafting of the Environmental Impact Assessment which involves the evaluation of the possible impacts caused by the OP activities on the conservation status of habitats of Community interest protected by the Natura 2000 network;
- (September-November 2014) the realisation of the consultation with the Public and with the competent Environmental Authorities;
- the support for the elaboration of the decision.

The present version of the Cooperation Programme, contains the indications resulting from the whole evaluation procedure which has been carried out so far.

The analyses contained in the Environmental Assessment Report of the Cooperation Programme Italy-Malta 2014-2020 were carried out in accordance with the provisions established by Directive 42/2001/EC, as implemented in Italy by the "Environmental Code" in the Italian Legislative Decree 152/06 and subsequent amendments and in Malta by the "SEA Regulations" in Legal Notice 497 of 2010. The information included in the environment report as defined in Annex 1 of Directive 2001/42 /EC contains the points listed hereunder:

- a) an outline of the contents, of the main objectives of the plan/programme and of the relationship with other plans/programmes;
- b) aspects related to the state of the environment and its probable evolution without the implementation of the plan/programme;
- c) environmental characteristics of areas which could be significantly affected;
- d) any existing environmental problems relevant to the plan/programme, including those concerning areas of particular environmental importance under Directives 79/409/EEC and 92/43/EEC;
- e) environmental protection objectives established at international, community or member state level which are relevant to the plan/programme and the manner in which, during its preparation, account was taken of these objectives and of any environmental considerations;
- f) any possible significant effects on environmental components: biodiversity, population, human health, flora and fauna, soil, water, air, energy, climatic factors, material goods, cultural, architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the interrelationship between the above factors;

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- g) measures planned to prevent, reduce and compensate, as completely as possible, the eventual significant negative effects on the environment caused by the implementation of the plan/programme;
- h) a summary of the reasons for the choice of the identified alternatives and a description of how the evaluation was carried out, as well as any difficulties encountered (such as technical deficiencies or lack of know-how) in compiling the required information;
- i) a description of the intended measures concerning the monitoring referred to in Articles 9 and 10;
- j) non-technical summary of the information.

a) an outline of the contents, of the main objectives of the plan/programme and of the relationship with other plans/programmes

The proposed strategy in the Cross-Border Cooperation Programme Italy Malta 2014-2020 aims to contribute to the smart, sustainable and inclusive growth across borders, supporting the specialisation in the areas of research and innovation, developing the competitiveness of micro, small and medium enterprises, protecting the environment and promoting activities to mitigate the effects of climate change and of natural and man-made disasters in the area.

This objective will take into account the potentials and the challenges of the main areas of interest related to environmental protection, security of land and sea, cultural heritage, quality of life and health of citizens.

In particular, the programme aims to:

- Reinforce research, technological development and innovation or rather strengthen the innovative capacity of the cross-border area by increasing the expertise of certain technologically advanced sectors identified in the following KET (key enabling technologies): electronics, mechatronics, micro and nanosystems, biotechnology and research applied to human health. By activating the necessary networks between the areas of research and production areas of the two territories (clusters, industrial districts, universities, research entities - public and private - SMEs, incubators, social innovators individual and/or associates etc.), the programme will seek to ensure the creation of a request for structured innovation that meets the following development requirements: protection of the environment, safety of land and sea, the cultural heritage, quality of life and public health (Axis 1);
- Promote the competitiveness of the cross-border area namely by encouraging the creation and expansion of businesses in areas related to environmental protection, security of land and sea, cultural heritage, quality of life and health of citizens by offering financial support for the start-up of new businesses and for the development/reinforcement of cross-border services for new and ongoing businesses. The programme also intends to encourage the mobility of workers in the cross-border area through the creation of stable networks, the provision of information services, coaching, tutoring, cross-border employment fairs, vouchers for the realisation of internship placement of young graduates in companies operating in the areas of the programme strategy (Axis 2);

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- Safeguard the environment and promote the efficient use of resources by contributing to the protection and preservation of the marine and terrestrial biodiversity of the territories of the two islands. This can be done through restoration of the terrestrial and marine habitats and the creation of innovative services and/or systems promoting awareness and enjoyment of the natural heritage. The programme also intends to promote interventions to mitigate the impact of climate change and to cope with scenarios of natural and man-made hazards (Axis 3).
- Ensure activities to support programme implementation, improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the programme's management and monitoring system (Technical Assistance).

Table 1: Justification for the choice of the thematic objectives and the investment priorities

Thematic Objective	Investment Priorities	Justification for the choice
1. Reinforce research, technological development and innovation (...)	1b) promote business investment in R&I by developing links and synergies between businesses (...)	The need to improve the specialisation of the high innovative potential of the cooperation area (electronics, mechatronics, micro and nanosystems, biotechnology and research applied to human health) The need to improve the innovative capacities, the competitiveness and internationalisation of SMEs in the European and international markets. The need to support social innovation in a context of major economic crisis and budget constraints.
3. Promote SME competitiveness	3a) promote entrepreneurship particularly by facilitating the economic exploitation of new ideas (...)	The need to promote and encourage the economy through a bottom-up approach (smart communities, smart cities, social innovation). The need to increase the growth rate of the leading economic sectors in the cross-border area (environmental protection, preservation and security of land and sea, the cultural heritage, quality of life and health of citizens).
	3b) promote sustainable employment of high quality and support worker mobility through the integration of cross-border labour markets (...)	The need to increase the number of relationships and exchanges of experience between researchers/students and micro, small and medium enterprises.
6. Preserve and protect the environment and promote resource efficiency;	6d) protect and restore biodiversity and soil, and promote services for ecosystems, even through Natura 2000 and Green infrastructure.	The need to protect and restore the ecological diversity of the cooperation area threatened by human activities. The need to mitigate the pressure resulting from the tourism sector and from the urbanisation process, particularly in the coastal regions of the cooperation area.
	5b) promoting investments to address specific risks, ensuring disaster resilience and developing disaster management systems	The need to mitigate any possible cross-border risk (natural and man-made). The need to reduce the pressure on the natural heritage (marine and coastal areas and the sites of the Natura 2000 network) caused by human activities and environmental factors (such as climate change in particular).

The programme budget constitutes the main dimensional measurement of the programme on which to place the assessments of the environmental effects. The total budget of the programme amounts to **€51,708,436.47** with an ERDF contribution of **€43,952,171** better described in section 3 of the Cooperation Programme. The contribution is divided among the investment priorities as shown in the following table:

Table 4: Overview of the investment strategy of the cooperation program

Priority Axis	ERDF support (%)	Thematic Objective	Investment Priorities	Specific objectives corresponding to the investment priorities
Axis 1	30%	1. Reinforce research, technological development and innovation	1b) promote business investment in R&I by developing links and synergies between businesses	1.1 Increase innovation and research activities to meet the development needs of the cooperation area.
Axis 2	17%	3. Promote the competitiveness of the cross-border area	3a) promote entrepreneurship particularly by facilitating the economic exploitation of new ideas	2.1 Encourage the creation and strengthening of enterprises (micro, small and medium) in the areas of the cross-border intervention.
			ai) promote sustainable employment of high quality and support worker mobility through the integration of cross-border labour markets	2.2 Promote worker mobility in the cross-border area through the creation of networks.
Axis 3	46.17%	6. Preserve and protect the environment and promote the efficient use of resources	6d) protect and restore biodiversity and soil, and promote services for ecosystems, also through Natura 2000 and Green infrastructure	3.1 Contribute to halting the loss of terrestrial and marine biodiversity of the area by maintaining and restoring ecosystems and protected areas.
			5b) promote investments to address specific risks, ensuring disaster resilience and developing disaster management systems	3.2 Promote system and technology activities to mitigate the effects of climate change and of natural and man-made hazards, with particular reference to disasters caused by sea hazards
Technical Support	6.83%	N/A	N/A	

Programme Objectives

To address the programme strategy from the perspective of environmental sustainability, right from the preliminary stages up to its completion, environmental objectives of reference have been established to be pursued with the programme activities.

Generally, the environmental objectives arise directly and mandatorily from the existence of the regulatory framework, such as in the case of the management of waste, water, energy and risk management (floods). In other cases, these objectives derive also from the analysis of strategic documents of national and Community level, as in the case of biodiversity where reference is made to the conventions of Rio de Janeiro, Berne, Bonn, Paris, Ramsar and Barcelona and to the Italian national strategy (National Strategy for biodiversity) and the Maltese one (National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan). Starting from the strategic environmental framework outlined by Community and national regulations (Italian and Maltese), taking into consideration the contents of the preliminary environment report and the outcomes of preliminary consultations, the environmental sustainability objectives have been defined in the following table:

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Environmental sustainability objectives for the strategic environmental assessment of the programming period 2014-2020

Environmental aspects	Environmental objectives
Fauna, flora, biodiversity and landscape	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Contribute to stop the loss of biodiversity in terrestrial and marine environment, improving the state of conservation of species and habitats of Community interest; 2. Improve the biodiversity linked to the rural landscape preserving the human activities that, together with natural base contribute to the bio-cultural diversity which is typical of the rural Sicilian territory;
Urban environment and material goods	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Improve the quality of life of citizens and protect and promote the cultural heritage ***
Cultural, architectural and archaeological heritage	
Soil	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Prevention and mitigation of hydrogeological and seismic risks; 5. Decrease in the territories at risk of desertification;
Water	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Improvement in water services for domestic use in terms of population served by sewage and water treatment and in terms of reduction of network losses; 7. Decrease in withdrawals (reduction of consumption and balance between agricultural, industrial and civil uses) and of pollutant loads in order to improve the quality of water bodies; 8. Increase in the reuse of treated wastewater for agricultural and industrial purposes; 9. Strengthen the infrastructure for distribution, sewerage and cleansing for civilian use;
Air and climatic factors	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. Decrease in greenhouse gas emissions; 11. Increase in carbon sequestration.
Population and human health	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 12. Protect citizens from environmental pressures and risks to their health and well-being (***) 13. Prevention of risks, based on updated vulnerability maps (***)
Energy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 14. Increase in energy production from renewable and innovative sources facilitating the experimentation and the diffusion of renewable sources of energy, providing an alternative to today's most widely used forms of renewable energy such as wind, solar and hydro sources; 15. Achievement and overcoming of the environmental objectives set out by Europe;
Waste	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 16. Reduction at source of urban waste production; 17. Increase in the recycling of material according to the Community's objectives which provide for the reuse and recycling of 50% of paper, metal, plastic and glass by 2020; 18. Minimisation of urban waste that is disposed in landfills; 19. Reduction at source of special waste production;
Mobility and Transport	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 20. Improvement of mobility conditions of people and goods through modal reconstruction in favour of vehicles with less environmental impact; 21. Ensure territorial continuity, environmental sustainability, efficiency (punctuality, regularity, frequency and speed/duration) and efficiency of services (cost minimisation and parsimony in the use of resources).

(***) Transversal objective to be pursued throughout the implementation of the OP and the evaluation of indirect impacts.

Although the objectives recall all the environmental issues indicated by the SEA Directive, it is necessary to point out how, during the formation period of the Cooperation Programme, a higher concentration of financial resources was chosen, pursuing only four investment priorities, namely:

- **1b)** promote business investment in R&I by developing links and synergies between businesses
- **3a)** promote entrepreneurship particularly by facilitating the economic exploitation of new ideas ... **ai)** promote sustainable high quality employment and support worker mobility through the integration of cross-border labour markets
- **5b)** promote investments to address specific risks, ensuring disaster resilience and developing disaster management systems

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- **6d)** protect and restore biodiversity and soil, and promote ecosystem services, also through Natura 2000 and Green infrastructure.

It is clear that not all the priority investments are directly correlated with the environmental components specified in Directive 2000/42/EC. The Cooperation Programme's "contribution" towards certain themes (water, waste, air) can be sought only in the absence of negative interferences with the environment, while positive synergies can be identified in the possibility that the research, mentioned in Axis 1 of the programme, may affect the environmental field (and obtain results that can be implemented in the territory during the programming period).

The only activities that directly intercept the environmental objectives are those of Axis 3 (priority 5 and 6) which pursue the objectives related to landscape, flora and fauna and biodiversity. Ultimately, for the scheduled activities in Axis 2, the principle of "non-interference" applies, in fact they have been designed to ensure a high protection status, preventing that some types of intervention may fall within sensitive and protected areas. For these activities, compliance with Community, national and regional laws regulating environmental management, anticipating the outcome of the evaluations, allows a sufficient degree of environmental protection.

Relationship with other plans/programmes

The Cross-border Cooperation Programme, compared to other plans and programmes (regional Sicilian and national Maltese), can be likened to a typical financial instrument, which operates in full synergy with regulatory instruments in that it **can** allocate resources which are useful to the realisation of some of the interventions herein planned/expected, such as in the management plans of the Natura 2000 Network.

In the assessments made, besides verifying the **synergy** with the instruments (plans, programmes and strategies) that plan/regulate the protected natural areas and with the research and development strategies, likewise a **consistency** has been shown with all the instruments regulating the sectors of waste, water, air quality, health, transport, etc.

On no account does the programme have a territorial binding nature, which means that it is not superior to other planning instruments, and as such does not constitute an authorisation framework for the realisation of any type of project infrastructure and/or processing of land use.

b) aspects related to the state of the environment and its probable evolution without the implementation of the plan/programme

For the absence of significant direct effects on several of the environmental components investigated, and for the probable lack of evolutionary phenomena resulting from the programme implementation (or non-implementation) the state of the environment is treated very briefly recalling only those aspects of probable interference resulting from the programme.

Population and health

Human presence on the territory is in itself a factor that may affect the natural aspects, for the satisfaction of basic needs such as housing construction, and for carrying out economic activity, taking into account that even agricultural practices can have adverse environmental effects.

In general, in recent years, the eligible area has been characterised by the gradual and sustained ageing phenomenon (ageing population), with a declining share of younger persons, a corresponding increasing share of older persons and the consequent rise in the median age of the population. In particular, birth rates are declining whilst the ageing index is increasing. Furthermore, a brain drain of young people migrating to foreign countries in search of better working conditions has caused a further reduction in the young population.

Sicily, compared to Malta, is characterised by a higher unemployment rate, lower income and therefore less consumption capacity. The vastness of the investigated territory, for its topography and population density, shows a degree of variability in terms of "environmental behaviour". In general, the population of the cooperation area has a high propensity to produce waste, to use private vehicles and has a poor perception of the territory and the environment.

With respect to health, no particular problems have been highlighted, locally a higher incidence of certain diseases can be reported in the Sicilian industrialised areas which coincide with the "sites of national interest" of Milazzo, Gela, Augusta-Priolo and Biancavilla. In Malta there are no such particular austere situations to be reported.

The Cooperation Programme, for the type of activities planned and the budget at its disposal, does not act on factors which could cause significant effects on the state of the environment.

Non-significant positive effects, though hard to measure, can be expected in terms of the population's quality of life, arising from the development of measures to provide information on environmental issues.

Water

In the area of water resources management, action was taken at Community level by Directive 2000/60/EC which requires all member states to work towards improving the state of the environment. In both cooperation areas several critical issues have to be reported, the water resource is limited compared to the needs of the population and the production systems, there are still critical aspects caused by the situation of supply networks and by the type of resources used, whereas there are no reports of population health problems related to supply.

In the water cycle, the resource used is discharged into nature in the form of wastewater. The Sicilian territory is characterised locally by a wastewater management system which does not comply with legal provisions, due to the absence and/or the size of water treatment plants in various areas. Malta, however has recently solved this fundamental issue of sustainable development and now has a sufficient budget to meet its infrastructure requirements.

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The Cooperation Programme, for the type of activities planned and the budget at its disposal, does not act on factors which could cause significant effects on the state of the environment. It does not seem necessary to report potential effects not even on a local scale.

Whilst the state of the health of the sea appears as most pertinent, the cooperation area presents very common characteristics with regard to the various forms of pollution as well as the effects of climate change (water overheating). In relation to the types of pollution which have common causes within the territories we highlight the main information of the report 'State of the Mediterranean marine and coastal environment 2012 - United Nations Environment Programme/Mediterranean Action Plan' (UNEP/MAP). The report focuses on maritime transport which is also carried out within the maritime space of the cooperation area as it constitutes a major source of petroleum hydrocarbon contamination. According to the UNEP/MAP 2006 report, 0.1% of crude oil transported in the Mediterranean Sea is thrown into the sea as a result of the illegal activity of washing of oil tanks in transit, while other oil spills are the result of bunkering operations, dock operations and discharge into the sea of oil bilge. The UNEP/MAP 2012 report estimates that, from 2000 to 2009, in the central Mediterranean area alone, the systems in use have registered oil spills that correspond approximately to a total of 5.5 million tonnes while satellite images identify a high possibility of oil spills close to the cooperation area. The effects of hydrocarbon contamination cause very harmful consequences on marine and coastal flora and fauna of the cooperation area that is strongly influenced on a genetic, cellular and biochemical level. Such damages, which often involve the destruction of ecosystems, have consequences both in the short and immediate term and in the long term with time spans often exceeding even 10 years.

In addition to oil pollution, there was a significant presence of marine litter in the vicinity of the bays and of certain coastal areas of the two islands. In this regard, it is important to remember the state of coastal degradation of south-east Sicily and the island of Malta caused by the presence of aquifers exposed to the risk of seawater intrusion into groundwater, by the pollution caused by agricultural activities, and by the progressive presence of non-native species (flora and fauna) in coastal areas. Such causes should be sought in a multidimensionality of phenomena related both to the presence of coastal aquifers at a greater risk of seawater intrusion into groundwater as well as to the effects of pollution caused by agricultural activities in these areas. And indeed, the progressive presence of non-native species (flora and fauna) along the coast of the area are the result of: 1) processes of eutrophication of the aquatic environment, 2) natural invasions of species through the overheated waterways of the Suez Canal or of the Strait of Gibraltar; 3) species transported by ships through the "encrustations" present on the ships hulls and/or present in ballast water; and finally 4) intentional and unintentional introduction of species caused by activities such as aquaculture, including commercial species, baits, and aquarium species (EEA and UNEP 1999).

The Cooperation Programme aims to reduce the risk of accidents through surveillance and reinforcement measures of the security systems. In the short term, however, such measures are not useful to resolve the situations described above or in any case to produce effects which can be measured throughout the whole programme.

Landscape and cultural heritage

The landscape and the cultural heritage are a source of wealth and development, the territory of the cooperation area is rich in monuments and cultural attractions (museums, theatres, etc.) but also in natural resources of unequivocal importance. It is necessary to safeguard this heritage so that it is preserved and kept for future generations. For this purpose

there are various standards, of national and regional levels, which pose restrictions and prohibitions on the transformation and modification of the monumental heritage.

The programme gives priority to the natural landscape, through environmental improvement activities at the sites of the Natura 2000 network and in the protected habitats (funding activities of environmental restoration and renaturalisation). For the whole programme, no activities were reported which were capable of causing potential negative effects on the state of the environment, even though there is the possibility that locally, on a very small territorial scale (sub-municipal), harmful elements could be registered during the implementation phase.

Natural heritage (flora, fauna and biodiversity)

With regard to the state of **nature and biodiversity**, the cooperation area has characteristics which are very homogeneous with the associated problems and common challenges. The area is in fact characterised by a great wealth of biological diversity which is continually subjected to various risks that threaten its progressive loss.

Sicily is one of the major reservoirs of biological diversity of Italy and Europe, due to its geographical, morphological and pedoclimatic conditions, and for its particular features of an island with a system of smaller islands highly heterogeneous for their geomorphological conformation and climatic-natural conditions. The regional territory is home to a rich number of plant and animal species, of considerable endemic and biogeographical interest and/or threatened or endangered species. In Sicily, the Natura 2000 Network consists of 238 sites, of which there are 208 SCIs (Sites of Community Importance for a total of 469,055.60 hectares), 15 SPAs (Special Protection Areas for a total of 380,022 hectares) and 15 have simultaneously the characteristics of SCIs and SPAs (for a total of 19,479 hectares). The total surface area of the Natura-e 2000 sites located in the Sicilian territory amounts to 865,995.55 hectares.

The entire territory of Malta consists of the main island of Malta and the smaller islands of Gozo and Comino. The geology and topography of the islands offer a limited variety of habitats which welcome a wide variety of species, many of which are endemic. The natural habitats of the island of Malta occupy 19% of the entire territory. The network of the Natura 2000 sites is made up of 39 Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) with an area equivalent to 5296.64 hectares (8 of national interest and 28 of international interest) and 16 Special Protection Areas (SPAs) with an area equivalent to 4966.20 hectares.

With regard to natural reserves the cross-border territory has 102 sites of which 70 are located in Sicily with an area equivalent to 77404.84 hectares, while 32 are located in Malta with an area equivalent to 17.93 hectares.

As regards the Parks, it is noted that only Sicily has proceeded to establish 4 through appropriate regulatory instruments: Parco delle Madonie, Parco dei Nebrodi, Parco dell'Alcantara and Parco dell'Etna. At present investigations are underway for the establishment of the Parco dei Sicani. However, it is useful to point out that in Malta there are also 26 Bird Sanctuaries with an area of 1654.72 hectares, 20 Areas of Ecological Importance with a surface area of 2940.85 hectares, 38 Areas of Ecological Importance & Site of Scientific Importance with a surface area of 1881.26 hectares that could become natural parks with a system of improved protection and maintenance of habitats by borrowing the experience from Sicily.

Under the Ramsar Convention the cooperation area has 6 wetlands of which 4 are in Sicily (the areas of Biviere Gela - Vendicari - Integral Natural Reserve Salt Pans of Trapani - RNI Lake Preola, Gorghì Tondi and Pantano Leone and coastal swamps of Capo Feto within the provinces of Caltanissetta, Syracuse and Trapani) and 2 in Malta (areas of Ghadira and Is-Simar).

Finally, it is also important to signal the presence on the Sicilian side of 6 Marine Protected Areas (Plemmirio Lachea island, Ustica, Capo Gallo, Egadi and Pelagie, falling within the province of Siracusa, Catania, Palermo, Trapani and Agrigento) which have allowed, during the course of the Programme Italy-Malta 2007-2013, to activate some important characterisation activities of marine ecosystems with some Maltese marine territory areas of interest not yet protected by appropriate national regulatory instruments.

From the above, it is clear how the area is equipped with a large natural heritage for the presence of a high number of plant and animal species (biodiversity). To protect this heritage several protected areas have been established (parks, reserves, SCIs-SPAs) governed by a series of prohibitions and rules aimed at preserving or improving the state of health of animal and plant species, and to allow that this heritage can be passed on to future generations (sustainability). Despite the system standards governing these territories, the activities of the population (economic and housing) may require the use of these territories in order to exploit their productive potentialities, causing or threatening to cause permanent damage to the conservation state of the natural areas. The Cooperation Programme, not being mandatory for the localisation of the projects, is not a generating element of environmental pressure in the protected areas.

The programme acts on the protected territories in order to improve their conservation state, funding activities for environmental restoration, renaturalisation, protection and dissemination of knowledge. For the whole programme, no activities were reported which were capable of causing potential negative effects on the state of the environment, even though there is the possibility that locally, on a very small territorial scale (sub-municipal) harmful elements could be registered during the implementation phase. However, the activities funded must be consistent with the provisions of the management plans of the sites in the Natura 2000 network (if prepared) and/or with the conservation measures of the site.

Air

With regard to climate change caused by greenhouse gases emissions (GHG), both for Sicily and Malta, the main sources of pollution arise from the transport sector and from the energy production sector.

Sicily records, on average, higher concentrations of pollutants by carbon monoxide (CO). Although the system of assessment and management of air quality does not cover the entire regional territory, some indices show a trend toward improvement.

As regards the production of greenhouse gas emissions due to human activities in Sicily, the level of CO₂ emissions which has been detected is significantly higher than the national total emissions level, mainly due to the large presence of thermoelectric energy production plants and of refineries with obsolete technology. In particular, on the Sicilian side of the eligible area of the programme, namely in the areas of Gela and of Syracuse, there are two of the main sites of energy production and transformation of petroleum products in the region.

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As for Malta, about 60% of CO₂ emissions derives from electricity generation and from the land transport sector although significant reductions were recorded for concentrations of NO₂, SO₂ and gasoline due to the introduction of unleaded petrol.

Emissions of greenhouse gas emissions (GHG), while remaining the lowest on a per capita basis compared with the European average, have increased by 49% until 2010. About 90% of emissions arise from the energy sector.

Air quality, as in the rest of Europe, has a trend toward improvement. The improvement is due to the rules that have altered and encouraged the use of transport fuels which are increasingly "clean" or have a lower content of certain chemical products. The programme does not provide incentives to firms in the abovementioned sectors, and does not act directly on elements that might worsen the state of the environment.

Energy

The energy sector, primarily the "electric" one, in the last decade has had a major boost of development, the energy produced and consumed from renewable sources (RES) is in line with the predictions of the "Europe 2020" strategy. Malta will soon be interconnected with Sicily, therefore to the rest of Italy, through an underground conduit, which will permit greater efficiency (also in terms of economic and environmental sustainability) in the production system.

The Cooperation Programme does not fund activities capable of changing the state of the described environment, so it does not seem necessary to report potential effects not even on a local scale.

Waste

Waste management has been almost entirely based on the use of landfills and the proportion of separate waste collection is very low. In recent years, due to increasingly strict requirements imposed by legislation, improvement measures are being undertaken throughout the territories. The Cooperation Programme does not fund activities capable of generating significant effects on the waste industry, by not acting directly on factors that can worsen the state of the environment.

Geosphere

As for the analysis of the state of environmental health in the territories of the cooperation area a high degree of **vulnerability can be pointed out with regards to hydrogeological, seismic, volcanic, coastal risks, loss of ecosystem biodiversity and desertification.**

The causes of such vulnerability are mainly of natural origin, also due to the impact of climate change, but they have been worsened by changes in the territory, not always rational and sustainable, resulting from human activities (anthropogenic pressure), especially along the coastal strip.

In relation to the risk of desertification the major part of the Sicilian territory presents a widespread sensitivity to territorial degradation. According to the data reported in the "Charter of sensitivity to desertification in Sicily" (published in GURS in 2012) the critical areas in fact represent 56.7% of the territory, of these 17.7% is made up from the less critical areas, 35% from areas of medium criticality and 4% from the most critical areas. The fragile areas, those in which any alteration in the delicate balance between natural factors and human activities can lead to desertification, represent a share equal to 35.8% of the total, which can also be distinguished between the less fragile areas 7%, and the medium fragile areas 12.8%. The areas that exhibit

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high fragility amount to 16% of the entire surface area. Only 5.8% of the regional territory presents a low sensitivity to desertification and 1.8% results unaffected.

In the Maltese islands the high population density of certain areas, and the presence of certain agricultural practices in rural areas have increased the vulnerability to water erosion and soil salinisation, which have intensified particularly in recent years, triggering degradation processes.

The main risk factors are: the hydrogeological disruption (caused by landslides and floods), the decline of organic content, soil contamination from point sources (quarries for mineral extraction, industrial activities and landfills) and from widespread pollution (deposition of dust or combustion products, chemical products for agriculture, etc.), and finally from salinisation. Even the Maltese archipelago results exposed to the risk of desertification due to a number of factors such as soil dryness, poor vegetation cover of the soil and the topographic structure of the area.

As regards the soil, these analyses are more focused on land use. The financial dimension and types of activities of the Cooperation Program does not seem capable of generating significant effects on the soil. Throughout the whole programme, there have been no phenomena of new soil sealing, and therefore it acts directly on elements that can worsen the state of the environment.

Transport

Insularity is one of the common characteristics in the cooperation area and it is undoubtedly an element which adds to the difficulties of the Sicilian and Maltese production system in the context of increased external competitiveness.

With reference to the level of infrastructure development of the eligible area, a highly differentiated picture emerges, with a sea and air accessibility which generally could be considered as satisfactory.

As regards the allocation of the port and airport nodes most relevant to the nature of the programme, the cooperation area features two first-level airports on the Sicilian side in Palermo and Catania and four second-level airports, two of which are located in Trapani and Comiso on main island, whilst the other two are located on the smaller Sicilian islands of Lampedusa and Pantelleria. In particular, the airports of Catania and Trapani provide daily and/or weekly flights to Malta.

With regard to maritime transport, the Sicilian ports affected by freight traffic to and from Malta are Catania, Augusta, Pozzallo and Gela. Gela and Augusta form part of the Trans-European Network TEN.

In response to an unextended territory and to a high population density, Malta has always placed great importance on its own accessibility with a strong emphasis on issues concerning the state of the roads and its port and airport infrastructure, considering that the competitiveness of its development model depends on its transport infrastructure.

The Maltese infrastructure consists of an airport in Malta and a heliport in Gozo. There are four Maltese ports: Valletta, Marsaxlokk, Ċirkewwa and Mġarr, which form part of the Maltese network "TEN-T".

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The Cooperation Programme, for the types of activities funded, is not capable of generating significant effects on the environmental component as described, since it does not provide for any infrastructure, therefore no elements have been reported that could worsen/improve the state of the environment.

c) environmental characteristics of areas which could be significantly affected

As pointed out in the Environment Report, the "areas that could be significantly affected" by the programme consist of the entire Maltese national territory and the whole Sicilian regional territory. Given the vastness of the areas and their complexity, for the strategic environmental assessment, using models of simplification, the territory is subdivided according to "functional areas", some of which overlap with each other, the main ones being:

- non-urbanised areas and urban areas;
- areas restricted by law (landscape heritage, natural reserves, national parks, etc.);
- areas protected by law (SCI/SPA, coastal areas, etc.);
- areas of particular environmental significance.

The summary of classifications can be displayed solely through mapping systems. In any case in the evaluations, account has been taken of the varying degree of sensitivity of the areas, for which the non-urbanised areas have been identified as more sensitive, and for these a deeper level of study on the protected areas has been guaranteed.

The immaterial activities acting on the system of knowledge and services operate indistinctly in the territory, obviously not generating any kind of negative effect. The material activities envisaged by the programme do not contain infrastructures (such as roads, railways, water treatment plants, power lines, etc) but may finance structures (buildings), or maintenance of the territory. Even in this case the effects could be of an extremely limited extent and are exclusively detectable on a territorial scale of the project.

For the investigated issues, the funded material activities are in the majority of cases directly aimed at improving the natural protected areas, and thus capable of generating positive effects detectable throughout the whole project and measurable through the monitoring system of the Cooperation Programme.

d) any existing environmental problems relevant to the plan/programme, including those concerning areas of particular environmental importance under Directives 79/409/EEC and 92/43/EEC;

Annex I of the Directive requires a description of the particular environmental problems, in this particular section as repeatedly specified regarding the level of detail of information, it can be shown that there are no particular problems with respect to the programme implementation.

Around the areas of particular environmental significance (including the Reserves, Parks, and the SCIs and SPAs), there are different kinds of protected territories for their peculiar landscape and environmental characteristics. Large part of this territory, for its localisation in areas which

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The assessments involved the research of possible cause-effect relationships between the implementation of a proposed action and the environmental components described above.

The results of the analyses lead to determine, with some degree of approximation, that the programme has positive effects or in any case that it does not have any negative impacts.

The programme does not show significant adverse effects on the environment, rather it demonstrates a propensity to generate positive cumulative effects, in relation to risk management (reduction of accidents at sea), to biodiversity (improved protection and awareness among the population) and to the human population's quality of life (even through the strengthening of the services provided).

In a nutshell, potentially probable beneficial (but not significant) effects are expected on the general environment for the operations valid for Axis 1 and Axis 2, and on those intangible effects of Axis 3. Effects from positive to very positive, even though on a local territorial scale, for the implementation of the measures in Axis 3 are intended for the redevelopment of special protected areas (habitat).

Impact assessment (screening)

Article 10, paragraph 3 of Legislative Decree no. 152/2006 and subsequent amendments stipulates that, in the drafting of the Environmental Report, the SEA should include also the procedure for Impact Assessment in article 5 of Presidential Decree 357/97 and subsequent amendments "*Regulation implementing Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora.*"

The programme covers a very limited range of types of activities capable of producing effects on natural ecosystems.

The activities covered by the programme are aimed primarily, if not exclusively, to the preservation of the habitats and the protection of biodiversity, and only partly towards those complementary and/or diversified activities which can however be located in areas outside the Natura 2000 sites and in any case in areas that do not interfere with the habitats and with the protected species, pursuing the logics of sustainable territorial management.

The Study of Impact Assessment (or screening) has taken steps to evaluate the possible/probable interferences contained in and under the activities of the individual Natura 2000 sites.

For the whole programme, it can be objectively concluded that it is unlikely for significant effects to be produced on the individual Natura 2000 sites, and yet according to the information provided, it is likely that at the level of individual intervention (not at programme level) significant effects of local scale could be generated.

From this last statement, there is still a margin of uncertainty undetectable throughout the evaluation of the programme which requires any possible appropriate assessments to be carried out on the level of an individual intervention/project prior to its implementation.

Therefore, given the nature of the programme activities, the financial dimension and the level of detail of the information, **a more detailed assessment at this stage and at this level is considered unnecessary and virtually impossible.**

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g) measures planned to prevent, reduce and compensate, as completely as possible, the eventual significant negative effects on the environment caused by the implementation of the plan/programme;

From the previous paragraphs, no aspects emerge that will render necessary specific mitigation measures during the planning phase. However, it is reported how for the incorporation of any structures necessary to implement the predictions (residual and limited) of Axis 2, areas without any particular environmental merits should be chosen, giving priority to the recovery of areas which have already been cemented and serviced by networks (water, electricity, informatics, etc.) and avoiding the protected areas.

As stated, no adverse effects on biodiversity can be envisaged, even though presumptively one may predict insignificant temporary disturbance effects, to be considered in the design phase.

The programme's mitigation measures should be considered as guidance measures aimed at reinforcing the expected positive effects, in particular through the establishment of:

- selection criteria - indicated by the programme - aimed at identifying good environmental practices (no additional SEA criteria should be expected, this measure has proved difficult to implement in the previous programming cycle);
- coherence in the predictions with the planning documents also measured from an environmental point of view (management plans of Natura 2000 sites, communal regulatory plans or territorial management plans);
- mode of organisation of environmental monitoring (see below).

h) a summary of the reasons for the choice of the identified alternatives and a description of how the evaluation was carried out, as well as any difficulties encountered (such as technical deficiencies or lack of know-how) in compiling the required information;

The current version of the programme is a result of a long phase of preparation and consultation that as an effect has already produced the reduction of the activities operating a thematic concentration. In the absence of probable potential significant negative impacts, the financial resources division which gives more weight to the areas of research and environment rather than to "competitiveness", and the limited financial dimension of the programme allows the declaration of a substantial proof of lack of potential significant adverse effects on the environment. According to this logic it was felt that there was no need to define more favourable alternative scenarios.

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i) a description of the intended measures concerning the monitoring referred to in Articles 9 and 10.

The SEA regulations require the identification of specific monitoring measures "of the significant environmental effects of the implementation of the plans/programmes, among other things, in order to promptly identify unforeseen adverse effects and to be able to adopt corrective measures that are deemed appropriate " (Article 10 of the Directive).

The environmental monitoring plan envisages to provide updated information on the programme's environmental effects both in the eventual phases, in the reprogramming phases (in progress) and/or at the end of the programme. Monitoring therefore requires the definition of a set of environmental indicators as well as the description of the organisational arrangements adopted by the Managing Authority of the programme to monitor the environmental effects.

The environmental framework, reported in brief in this document has been obtained through the employment of measurements taken by Italian institutional sources (ARPASicilia, ISTAT, ISPRA) and Maltese sources (MEPA, MRA, NSO). The financial dimensions of the programme compared to the area of intervention have indicated a substantial "non-modification" of the environmental framework of reference through the activities of the Cooperation Programme.

For this reason, while deferring the final processing of the monitoring plan to the phases immediately following the programme's approval, the same indicators are envisaged to be used for the "trend" assessment of the Cooperation Programme, measuring the size and quality of the natural habitats and of the protected areas subject to intervention.

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