

REGIONAL JOINT STATEMENT ON PREVENTION OF PLASTIC POLLUTION, INCLUDING MARINE LITTER

We, the leaders from the Western Balkans:

RECALLING the political commitments undertaken within the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, followed by the Action Plan for its implementation till 2030;

READY to implement the Green Agenda Action Plan, the Circular Economy pillar Action 10: Conclude **and** implement a regional agreement on the prevention of plastic pollution, including specifically addressing the priority issue of marine litter;

READY to promote sustainable development, and high levels of environmental protection, through good governance, effective environmental laws enforcement, transparency, and inclusivity;

SHARING common aspirations to conserve and sustainably use water, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development;

COMMITTED to protect biodiversity and water ecosystems by addressing plastic pollution including marine litter, based on best circular economy practices to prevent, reduce, reuse, and recycle;

RECALLING the provisions of Directive (EU) 2019/904 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 June 2019 on the reduction of the impact of certain plastic products on the environment;

COMMITTED to coordinating, with a view to converging, our marine litter monitoring and assessment methodologies, reduction targets and measures as developed by our neighbouring EU Member States under Directive 2008/56/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 June 2008 establishing a framework for community action in the field of marine environmental policy and in the broader region, under the Barcelona Convention;

ACKNOWLEDGING the transboundary nature of marine litter issues for both sea-based and landlocked

RECOGNISING THE NEED for coordinated regional actions to address plastic pollution;

AWARE that regional cooperation would bring coherence to our individual and joint efforts to meet our international commitments, and to effectively engage with global and regional initiatives to prevent plastic pollution;

AWARE of the importance of reaching a global, legally binding plastic pollution agreement within the UN framework;

ENGAGING to support the EU efforts in reaching this global agreement in 2024;

COMMITTED to improving public understanding of plastic pollution consequences of marine litter, and of the importance of actions to prevent plastic pollution, and sharing best practices and scientific knowledge across the region;

HAVE AGREED to:

1. Take actions to effectively prevent a plastic, as defined by Regulation EC 1907/2006, from entering marine ecosystems by reducing and managing plastic waste, particularly focusing on waste items that make up the bulk of marine litter;
2. Adopt and implement a set of regulatory, economic, and information-based measures, incentives, and technically and financially feasible investments in systems and infrastructure to effectively address marine litter issues;
3. Cooperate to enhance regional actions of preventing both land-based and sea-based plastic pollution ending in marine areas, and to mitigate the adverse impact of plastic pollution;
4. Enhance regulatory environment, economic incentives, and technically and financially feasible investments in systems and infrastructure to address marine litter-related issues;
5. Those activities will address the full life-cycle of plastic, taking into account circumstances, needs, and capabilities at both the regional level and the level of individual parties;
6. This set of measures will be tailored not to jeopardise possible binding and voluntary approaches and processes at all levels, and between public and private sectors, particularly businesses manufacturing and distributing products that contain plastics;
7. Identify transport and distribution pathways and hotspots of marine litter where high litter concentrations are likely to affect coastal or marine biodiversity, and ways to clean up these hotspots in an environmentally sound way through cooperation at the party and regional levels;
8. Enhance extended producer responsibility schemes and explore feasibility and modalities for covering the cost of clean-up measures for products prone to littering;
9. Develop the regional action plan for implementation of this joint statement within the Regional Working Group on Environment, to identify coordinated actions to address the plastics through the lifecycle, in line with the Barcelona Convention Regional Plan against marine litter and relevant EU legislation;

10. Coordinate and engage with the European Union and other partners to support ongoing global and regional processes, and to forge a common approach to marine litter in the framework of the global legally binding plastic pollution agreement, foreseen by 2024;
11. Implementation of this initiative requires stepping up with domestic and international financial and technical resources;
12. Coordinate and engage with the European Commission to support implementation of this joint statement through the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans via Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance. We also invite other development partners, including IFIs and the private sector, to mobilise resources and investment to support the implementation;
13. Invite the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) to monitor and coordinate its implementation within the process of the Green Agenda Action Plan monitoring and reporting framework. We commit to working on improving data on and monitoring of plastic pollution in line with our EU obligations, standards, and best practices.