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## **Press Release**

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### **In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, Mediterranean islands plead for sustainability and international collaboration as the way forward for tourism**

**There will be no future for tourism if sustainability and international collaboration are not part of the solution. In a very peculiar time for tourism, an event organised by ACR+ and the European Parliament Intergroup on Climate Change, Biodiversity & Sustainable Development discussed the role that circular economy plays in the future of tourism and in the recovery phase after the COVID-19 pandemic.**

*Brussels, Belgium* – Islands are a natural laboratory for the circular economy. Their unique social, economic and environmental characteristics, such as relative isolation, limited land space and scarcity of material resources, together with their natural and biodiversity capital, make them invaluable hotspots of change. The over dependency of islands on mass tourism endangered the natural environmental capital of the whole Mediterranean area. Today the scenario is undergoing profound changes, as tourism, of all the major economic sectors, has been the most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Against a backdrop of heightened uncertainty, the time has now come to discuss concrete alternatives to prevent the recovery of the sector from being directed towards business-as-usual models.

If it is yet too early to voice concrete solutions, an online event, organised yesterday in the framework of the [Interreg MED BLUEISLANDS project](#), put forward the topic and outlined ways forward. Among these, sustainability and international collaboration are high on the agenda. Responding to the invitation of [ACR+](#) and [the European Parliament Intergroup for Climate Change, Biodiversity & Sustainable Development](#), MEPs Maria Spyraiki and Catherine Chabaud, representatives of Sicily, Balearic Islands, Crete and Cyprus as well as NECSTOUR and Interreg MED programme shared with over 200 participants their thoughts on tourism in the Mediterranean islands, focusing on waste prevention and circular economy.

#### **Sustainability is the future for Mediterranean islands**

The growing attention on the potential of sustainable tourism as a lever to promote circular economy is at the basis of BLUEISLANDS. The three-year long project highlighted that knowledge about the negative impact of tourism is out there and several small-scale pilot activities have been showing potential solutions to address it. As the speakers gathered by ACR+ agreed, it is now time to take a step further and join forces to come up with shared plans that can minimise the hidden costs of tourism and manage it in a way that is not burdensome for the environment and the local population. The Green Deal, despite being currently in troubled waters, must be kept high on the agenda. Together with circular economy, it is a potential key to link environmental and health and safety measures for tourism.

*“We can go much further with sustainable tourism. And the main tool for this is the Green Deal as well as alternatives to single-use plastic, sustainable transportation (especially in small islands), and waste management”, explained MEP Maria Spyraiki, host of the event.*

“There are five priorities to manage tourism while protecting the biodiversity of our ecosystems: networks and coordination; the development of marine protecting areas; marine transport; policies; resilient islands”, added MEP Catherine Chabaud.

## Tourism, islands and COVID-19: a call for international cooperation

Although waste prevention and improving sustainable resource management on these highly specific territories was the starting point, the current context could not be long ignored. The call for transformation generated by the COVID-19 crisis is even more true for tourism as coming back to business as usual once everything is over will be thorny if not impossible. It makes no doubts for the event’s speakers and participants that it is a clear opportunity to change the economic model by reviewing strategies and policies towards a new perspective of sustainability and climate change.

With a majority of the tourism industry closing down, there is indeed a pressing need to find concrete practices and policy tools – from tourism city taxes to engagement of local communities and tourists – in order to instigate a smart recovery where community and resources protection are in the centre.

“Decentralised authorities play a crucial role in the current situation. To build replicable models for the recovery of sustainable tourism, it is now urgent to gather experiences of those who are already working at local level to combine environmental and health policies” completed Francesco Lembo, ACR+ Managing Director, highlighting the importance of international networks like ACR+ in this vital exchange of good practices.

The different approaches presented during the event by the representatives of the Balearic Islands and the Region of Crete proved that a dialogue – between the territories themselves but also with the EU – will be key to improve coordination and reach the common goal of (re)building a more sustainable tourism industry. This clear call for international cooperation encompasses both the technical and political level. It will be crucial not only to exchange knowledge but also to advocate for keeping sufficient public funding for sustainable tourism.

The video recording of the event is available [here](#). A full report will be soon available on the [BLUEISLANDS](#) and the [European Parliament Intergroup](#) websites.

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*The **Association of Cities and Regions for sustainable Resource management** (ACR+) is an international network of cities and regions sharing the aim of promoting sustainable resource management and accelerating the transition towards a circular economy on their territories and beyond. The network, gathering around 100 members, is open to other key players in the field such as NGOs, academic institutions, consultancies or private organisations. Members’ needs and priorities define the network’s activities, which include facilitating the exchange of experiences between members, sharing technical and policy information and livening up the network. To strengthen the knowledge and capacities of the network and push for innovation in the field of material resource management, ACR+ is also involved in several projects at European level and in the Mediterranean region, in cooperation with its members. For more information visit our website: [www.acrplus.org](http://www.acrplus.org) or follow us on Twitter: [@ACRplus](https://twitter.com/ACRplus)*



Established in 1994 at EBCD's initiative with the support of IUCN, the **European Parliament (EP) Intergroup on 'Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development'** benefits from the support of the five most important political groups in the European Parliament, and constitutes the second-oldest as well as one of the most influential Intergroups throughout its 25 years of experience in the EP. The Intergroup brings together Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) from all political groups and Parliamentary Committees to find sustainable solutions to some of the greatest challenges of our time. This balanced forum of discussion allows MEPs to listen, debate and shape ideas and policies based on contributions from the different stakeholders (relevant experts, NGOs, private sector, researchers and academics) in the presence of the European Commission, EU Presidency, and EU Member States. More information: <https://ebcd.org/intergroup/>

**BLUEISLANDS** is an Interreg MED project, co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund, which aimed to identify, address and mitigate the effects of the seasonal variation of waste generation on Mediterranean islands as an effect of tourism, and establish the necessary conditions to fuel local loops of circular economy. More on <https://blueislands.interreg-med.eu/>