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OVERVIEW OF SMALL SCALE FISHERIES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN EU COUNTRIES

Small scale fisheries in the Mediterranean EU countries has been a central issue in the Common Fisheries Policy for many years and particular attention is also given to this fishery in the reform that is in the process of being finally approved (will enter into force on January 1st 2014). One of the targets that was put to the co-decision makers and the stakeholders for discussion, from the publication of the Green Paper (2009) with which the European Commission began the reform process and also during the long consultation process, was the differentiation between small-scale and industrial fisheries. The latter is generally considered to have a greater impact on resources, a lower social value and, in Europe at least, to be not competitive without public funding.

According to this approach, while all structural support for the industrial fleet should be excluded, small-scale fisheries should be sustained by means of a “preferential channel” that would foster economic and political support for this sector, in order to secure employment and generational change, to safeguard local traditions and culture and to facilitate the start-up of new companies.

The draft European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) that is under examination by the “trialogue” of the European Parliament, Council and Commission, contains clear indications of the tendency towards such differentiation. Although the possibility of generic aid to the fleets is taken into account (such as scrapping, temporary cessations), particular attention is reserved for small-scale fisheries that see measures such as training for sustainable young employment programmes, engine replacement and start-up programmes for young fishers.

The consideration given to small-scale fisheries in the CFP finds in the Mediterranean particular conditions, as it is clear that this kind of fishery is prevalent in the European fishery fleets in the basin (generally more than 80 %, more than 90% in SP,FR and GR)and also due to the socio-economic and cultural wealth of the sector, which is widespread among the coastal communities and is deeply rooted to their economies and traditions.



The debate that developed during the consultation on the reform was therefore particularly intense, and one of the main considerations was the redefinition of small-scale fisheries, which in the *acquis communautaire* is still calculated by taking into account overall vessel length alone (12 m), excluding towed gears. And this before opening a reflection about the opportunity of a specific policy for small scale fisheries with a differentiation between this policy and the general fishery policy (industrial fleet, aquaculture, etc.).

During this debate in the Member States, the widespread belief that the correct definition of small-scale fisheries will result from a mix of numerous characteristics and not one simple technical parameter (such as overall length). The problem, however, lies in the multiplicity of different characteristics considered in the various countries and without an agreement (which was above all due to the opposition to any form of differentiation that would have given preference to small-scale fisheries by all those who risked being excluded by the new definition) the result has been a return to the simple, bare, technical definition used in the past (12 m overall vessel length excluding towed gears).

Anyway, in spite of these difficulties, in the Mediterranean in particular it is interesting to recall the many different characteristics considered in the attempt to reach a more appropriate definition. These represent specific features relative to all aspects of the sector, that in the various Member States have different weight in national legislation and the search for the lowest common denominator is therefore a complex matter (the 12 m LOA is not representative of all the Mediterranean SSF fleet, for instance in SP there are 40% and in IT 20 SSF vessels longer than 12 m). However, these features are the reality of fisheries activities in all the Mediterranean EU ports:

- Fishing gear (gill nets, seine nets, lines, long lines, mechanical and manual dredgers, pots and traps)
- Characteristics of the vessels (length overall, gross tonnage, propulsion);
- Range of fisheries activities from the port and from the coast (6/12 miles)
- Length of fishing trips (within 24 h)
- Vessel owner on board
- Composition and organization of the fishing enterprise (family, cooperative, individual)
- Forms of contract in which part of the earnings from the sale of the fisheries products is divided between crew members
- Product sales (fresh product, local market)

There are then some more general characteristics relative to the legal definition of the fisher who is granted a fishing licence (and the way in which this licence is issued). It is clear that the status of “professional fisher” if not solely linked to the predominance in his/her income of sales from fishery activities, this could lead to obvious distortions with thousands of licences and vessels considered as professional but whose owners carry out other main activities.



But without considering the legal aspects, these characteristics together form a kind of genetic code for small-scale fisheries in the Mediterranean EU countries.

This is the framework for the management issues and the problems that are now facing this fishery sector, a sector that is often considered the remedy for all ills, but which is revealing its own critical points due to the fragility and low profitability of the micro and small companies that engage in these activities, their weakness in the marketplace, the density of operators in some areas, the lack of generational change and training, problems for the safety aspects (due to small size and high average vessel age), for the conflicts with other fishing activities and with recreational fisheries as well as the deterioration of the coastal areas, the environmental quality of which is crucial for small scale fisheries.

These are all critical issues that must be dealt with by means of *ad hoc* solutions for each single case. This can entail the need for structures on land, increasing the value of the products (for example, by means of the development of direct sales or fishery tourism), modernization of vessels etc.. It is clear, however, that some issues (such as the lack of generational change) are wide-ranging and need specific policies.

It is equally clear, although this sector utilizes highly selective gear and pressure on resources is lower, that it is not without impact. Furthermore its activities are concentrated in the delicate coastal area and therefore greater attention is required. Given this context, the tendency to transfer operators from industrial fisheries to small-scale activities through reconversion policies is a strategy that is extremely limited in terms of management and feasibility.

One thing is clear, among the many kinds of fishery carried out in the Mediterranean, small-scale fishery activities are the most multifaceted. This sector therefore deserves careful assessment, calibrated policies, actions to be designed individually for each different area, having been penalized by restrictive policies applied to EU fisheries in the past as a result of the lack of such specific consideration. It is therefore especially important that the GFCM pays particular attention to this sector, for which RAC MED hopes to develop specific collaborative activities in the near future in the framework of the Memorandum of Understanding that has been signed in 2012.

