THE VOICE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

An international declaration for coastal resilience

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“The Voice of the Mediterranean” is the outcome of a collaborative process, shaped through a series of workshops and declarations held across four Mediterranean regions.

Workshop in Marseille, France
Integrated water management
23 April 2024
Workshop in Alexandria, Egypt
Climate risk management in coastal cities
17 October 2024
Workshop in Nice, France
High-risk coastal areas
14 March 2025
Workshop in Muğla, Turkey
Risks and culture
6 and 7 May 2025

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Plan Bleu, the Intermediterranean Commission of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CIM-CRPM), MedCités, Mediterranean Experts on Climate and Environmental Change (MedECC), the French National Research Institute for Development (IRD), the four architecture schools of the Mélimed project, the Université Côte d'Azur, Barcelona Regional, the Agence d'Urbanisme Azuréenne, the Syndicat Mixte de l'étang de Thau, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, the Ocean & Climate Platform, the Municipality of Muğla, the Mediterranean Water Institute, PS Eau, the Conservatoire du Littoral.

'The Mediterranean is […] a thousand things at once. Not a landscape, but countless landscapes. Not a sea, but a succession of seas. Not a civilisation, but several civilisations superimposed on one another… For thousands of years, everything has flowed towards this sea, disrupting and enriching its history.' F. Braudel

Talking about a Mediterranean culture resonates with all of us and evokes a shared imaginary, the awareness of a common heritage built on the interaction between sea and land, and through the connection between our seas, rivers, coastlines, landscapes, resources, cultures, cuisines, diets, and more.

"The Voice of the Mediterranean" is a document produced collectively during four international workshops held over the past year with this sole objective in mind. Faced with the threats already weighing on the climate and the environment, its ambition is to reaffirm the Mediterranean region's global role as a pioneer of a resilient relationship between land and sea.

The growing number of worrying signs has undeniably led to increased questioning and sensitivity. Awareness has grown too—although still too often challenged by passivity, a lack of knowledge about alternatives, or, more commonly, the weight of habit. Those who now speak jointly through the "The Voice of the Mediterranean" are not only fully aware of the threat, but also eager to act without delay. This declaration marks the urgency of action—but not action driven by disorder or haste. It call for collective and imperative efforts, without ever sacrificing reflection and decision-making to urgency. Supported by Mediterranean local authorities, brought together beyond national borders, it firmly sets out a series of commitments and priority project initiatives that are meaningful at this scale. While modest, they are potentially inspiring for others.

"The Voice of the Mediterranean" carries a threefold ambition. The first is to bring our Mediterranean to life in global forums, including today at the UNOC. The second is to make both a specific and general contribution to the roadmap of the "Coalition of Coastal Cities and Coastal Regions of the World" through concrete proposals. And finally, to connect the global, Mediterranean and local levels with one single aim: to keep this common good alive, in a way that is both locally grounded and universally relevant.

1- A collective urgency to cooperate more effectively

1- A COLLECTIVE URGENCY TO COOPERATE MORE EFFECTIVELY

A brief look back at history reminds us, if necessary, of the vital role played by the sea in the rise of Mediterranean civilisations—Phoenician, Greek, Roman and Arab—both economically and culturally, through the exchange of goods and knowledge. The symbiosis between the sea, the coasts, the hinterland and the populations has been the driving force and the binding element of these civilisations.

Today, however, we are confronted with a completely different reality and its paradoxes. Our coastal areas still bear witness to a unique ecological and heritage richness. At the same time, they are areas of economic concentration driven by vital sectors such as tourism, agriculture, industrial and port activities, and an active residential economy. However, the vulnerability of these coastlines—exposed to both anthropogenic climate change and economic pressures—is not only increasing but also accelerating[1]. Our relationship with the sea, which has often become instrumentalised, carrying with it the risk of devastation, or even the disappearance of a resource that is still commonly perceived as inexhaustible despite repeated warnings: a sea turned into a rubbish dump, a sea to be consumed at will, a sea of risks, and a sea of graves.

Rethinking the Mediterranean future is no longer optional, it is both urgent and essential, especially when the present raises such grave concerns. That future will above all depend on a web of cross-interactions and on their quality. Interactions between humans and nature, between land and sea, but also, and let us emphasise this is where our greatest and most immediate power lies, between Mediterranean territories themselves.

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1. Firstly, pollution in all its forms: according to a WWF report (2018), the Mediterranean Sea is the most polluted in the world, not only by microplastics and plastics, but also by heavy metals and greenhouse gas emissions. In fact, the concentration of plastic is four times higher here than in the “plastic island” in the North Pacific (the “seventh continent”).

At the same time, temperatures and sea levels are rising. The air temperature has already increased by 1.5°C since the pre-industrial period and the sea temperature by +0.86°C (twice that of the global ocean). Projections for the middle of the century are 2.3 to 3.6°C for the air and 1.2 to 1.9°C for the sea (MedECC Special report on coastal risks, 2024). Sea level predictions are also alarming, as we could see a global rise of 43 to 84 cm above current water levels by 2100. It should be noted that if the situation worsens in Antarctica, these increases could even exceed one metre above current levels (source: MedECC Special report on coastal risks, 2024). This phenomenon is exacerbated by coastal land subsidence. *AGU Advancing Earth and Space Sciences* has published a study showing that nearly half of low-lying coastal areas in Europe are experiencing subsidence – sinking – of more than one millimetre per year on average. The phenomenon is more pronounced in port areas, where average subsidence is around 1.5 mm/year.

Let us be clear from the outset: the future of the sea depends above all on how we conceive, plan and develop our territories in a coordinated manner. **More than in any other area, we are bound together 'for the best... and to avoid the worst'. Rising to the challenge requires shared knowledge, connected strategies and a common Mediterranean commitment to joint projects.**

Local authorities have a major role to play in this: standing together for greater territorial resilience. They are undoubtedly the best placed to take the necessary collective action, closest to civil society and mobilised citizens.

The Coalition of Coastal Cities and Regions of the World, launched at UNOC 3 under the chairmanship of Christian Estrosi, Mayor of Nice and President of the Nice Côte d'Azur Metropolitan Area, is emerging as a valuable vehicle for cooperation. 'The Voice of the Mediterranean' could represent the founding document of its Mediterranean dimension. It is the synthesis of a co-production process organised in 2024-2025 during four workshops: the first in Marseille on drinking water management in the face of water stress, the second in Alexandria on coastal risks related to water, the third in Nice on territorial restructuring processes in the face of the inexorable rise in sea levels, and the last in Muğla on the cultural relationship between humans and the sea.

This collective intelligence process brought together around 400 participants from across the Mediterranean basin, including elected officials, executives, researchers and civil society actors. A clear consensus emerged: to take care of the sea, we must also redirect our actions on land, as this is where we have the greatest responsibility and the greatest capacity to act.

How? By uniting without delay around a few fundamental commitments. By promptly turning them into priority initiatives that will mobilise us all!

2- Commitments to be shared with determination

2- COMMITMENTS TO BE SHARED WITH DETERMINATION

Recent debates, beyond their specific issues and perspectives, have clearly highlighted three needs that have become commitments.

› Not worsen existing situations.

The injunction may seem obvious, but this obviousness is still far from being universally accepted, whether consciously or not. It marks the end of unbridled productivism and consumerism, in favour of a deliberately resilient and fair vision of development.

- Limit coastal urbanisation and prioritise urban renewal;
- Enforcement of coastal protection laws, integration of risk areas into urban planning documents;
- Multicriteria and multiscale spatial and temporal analysis of the impact of new infrastructures on the “life cycle” assessment model.

› Accelerate our transitions.

The economical management of our resources, slowing the rate of temperature rise and adapting to climate change are key factors in limiting coastal risks. Decarbonising economies is one of the priority measures. Taking action to accelerate the transitions:

- Decarbonise ports, industries, logistics, mobility and buildings, and make extensive use of renewable energies;
- Maintaining social and territorial equity in access to resources, particularly in the distribution of drinking water;
- Renaturation of cities and widespread adoption of nature-based solutions to combat urban overheating and coastal risks;
- Development of means of prevention and anticipation of the consequences of the disappearance of submerged or frequently submerged territories through proposals for spatial restructuring and support for the affected populations.

› Build a shared vision of the Mediterranean coastline of the future.

Let us transform the millennial common benefit we have derived from the Mediterranean – and today the response we are organising together to the existential threat hanging over it and over us – into a founding political pact!
Our unavoidable physical, social, economic, ecological and human connection to the Mediterranean must be based on common dynamics of action and exchange. Not globalising and incantatory rhetoric, but a system of values in which to embed common projects capable of rewriting the contemporary narrative of our neighbourliness.

- Relationships rather than cohabitation, within new frameworks and times for dialogue between institutional levels – international, national and local – researchers and scientists, civil society actors and citizens;
- Multiply and network short- and long-term resilience projects;
- Innovate new forms of risk management;
- Rebuild the cultural relationship between Mediterranean people and the sea.

3- Initial international and territorial cooperation initiatives to consolidate a Mediterranean policy of land-sea resilience

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The concept of project initiatives is essential in this new cooperation. It reflects a systematic commitment to action beyond shared analysis, coupled with a strong ambition and focus on quality, for example by accelerating collective learning at both local and Mediterranean levels through network dynamics, and strengthening the financial and human resources available for engineering.
The outlines of the first four project initiatives have already been agreed upon by the participants during the preparatory workshops.

PROJECT INITIATIVE NO. 1

An "Atlas of coastal risks in the Mediterranean"

Axis: Mobilisation and knowledge of the Coalition of Coastal Cities and Coastal Regions of the World

› Objectives and expected outcomes. The atlas responds to the unanimously recognised primary need to strengthen shared knowledge of Mediterranean coastal risks and their monitoring over time at multiple, adapted spatial scales. A large portion of the existing quantitative and qualitative data remains fragmented, either geographically or thematically. It is therefore ill-suited to both urgent response and anticipation. The Atlas of Coastal Risks in the Mediterranean identifies three main challenges: multi-risk consolidation and territorialisation of data, dissemination for the construction of a shared social risk culture, and scenario building, as a basis for forward-looking decision-making by local authorities.

A considerable and unprecedented effort must be made to connect local authorities with the various scientific and academic international research stakeholders and sectors across the Mediterranean basin. This effort must bring us together in a holistic approach to natural risk, integrating climate risks such as seismic and geophysical risks. Only then will it be possible to objectively assess environmental risk prior to coordinated public action and policy.

The first aim of the Risk Atlas is to establish a standardised and operational common methodology for producing knowledge at the territorial level that is interoperable with other databases; as well as to facilitate the transfer of experience on strategic topics such as scenario building.

Another key outcome is to make knowledge trully accessible—both practically and intellectually. The Atlas should therefore enable changes in the ways in which knowledge is disseminated, making data more immediately accessible to local decision-makers and easier to compare between territories. The Atlas could make use of certain media such as open-source interactive mapping, or even more sensitive media such as photography or storytelling. It is on this strong educational basis that political and civic commitments will be able to take shape in a fully transparent and accountable manner.

Beyond the value of establishing these dynamic observation series, the Atlas is expected to be used in scenario-building exercises covering different time horizons, short, medium and long term, to aid decision-making by political and other coastal stakeholders. From the same perspective, the aim is to be able to create links between knowledge and action and to ensure that one intelligently guides the other, always in a spirit of dialogue.

› Basic principles of operation

The coordinator of this initiative could be Plan Bleu, supported by a scientific committee.

The role of the coordinator – supported by associated experts – is to define a "specification" for knowledge production. This constitutes a minimum basis of interoperable open data, offering in particular a number of thematic cartographic representations. The format and choice of data (or indicators) are essential to ensure interoperability and use by a large number of partners. Their quality is key and must allow for long-term monitoring, which means, for example, defining fairly precise stations or locations where data will be systematically collected. The knowledge produced is then made available by Plan Bleu through its Observatory.

The coordinator will then assist the Mediterranean territories in producing their own atlases and will aggregate the data produced locally. In addition, the coordinator will organise workshops to transfer know-how, particularly on complex exercises such as scenario building. Each territory will organise its network of technical and decision-making stakeholders involved in knowledge to produce its atlas.

› Resolution - We affirm the need to strengthen risk knowledge through a Mediterranean Coastal Risk Atlas.

- Consider the outlines and functioning of the Atlas in a cooperative manner;
- Consolidate knowledge governance at the Mediterranean and local levels by mobilising ecosystems of scientific and institutional actors, most of whom are already data providers;
- Facilitate the sharing of and access to knowledge, which is recognised as absolutely fundamental to improving resilience to coastal risks;
- Territorialise knowledge as close as possible to the field using a referenced method which will enable inter-territorial comparison;
- Organise locally the connection between knowledge and awareness among the widest possible audience, and inform public and private decision-making.

PROJECT INITIATIVE NO. 2

Networks for coastal resilience

Focus area: Mobilisation, knowledge and finances of the Coalition of Coastal Cities and Coastal Regions of the World

The Barcelona Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Mediterranean was amended in 1995 to include the coastline in its title and sphere of application. The seventh protocol proposes integrated coastal zone management to Mediterranean coastal states in order to better manage and protect their coasts, taking into account the protection of areas of ecological and landscape interest and the rational use of natural resources. Five indicators reflect the main criteria of ICZM: land-sea integration; sectoral integration; governance, citizen involvement; sustainability (forward planning, monitoring); experience, progress of the ICZM process.

These approaches have made a significant contribution, particularly in terms of helping territories learn how to build multi-stakeholder governances, but evaluations highlight a 'vague and almost doctrinaire concept'[2] that is insufficiently operational.

2. ICZM put to the test in the field: first lessons from a French experience. Catherine Meur-Ferec.

We are proposing a new stage in the development of coastal resilience projects through the consolidation of networks.

› Objectives and expected outcomes. The fundamental shift towards decentralisation in the Mediterranean region has led to widespread use of the concept of territorial project. Mediterranean coastal cities, metropolitan areas and regions have designed their projects, often with a dual focus on participatory democracy and sustainable development, in line with the principles set out by international funding bodies. Risk consideration has been affirmed either through planning regulations, the programming of infrastructure protection projects (dykes, breakwaters, etc.), or more recently through new nature-based solutions (renaturation of wetlands, renaturation of cities, management of marine flows through sediment inputs, etc.) or digital crisis management models. However, regions remain fairly isolated and ill-equipped to deal with these existential phenomena, which could cause entire sections of our coastlines to disappear. The prospects require new political visions that strike a balance between growth and protection, strategic visions that combine solutions that can no longer be limited to reducing vulnerabilities through "grey solutions" but must now integrate new approaches combining greenhouse gas emission reduction and climate change adaptation, and tactical visions that conciliate urgency and anticipation.

The aim of this initiative is to **accelerate the exchange and transfer of these solutions by consolidating networks of territories**. These networks should enable us to design a **collective response to common challenges**, while **adapting solutions to their local specificities**.

› Basic principles of operation

This initiative proposes to facilitate three types of networks[3] aimed at local authorities around the Mediterranean who wish to exchange ideas and develop resilient coastal policies with the help of their peers, local actors and Mediterranean experts.

- **The strategic networks of the coastal project** aim to produce integrated strategies and action plans for coastal resilience through cooperation between several local authorities.
- **The experience transfer networks** are based on the identification, analysis and certification of strategies/actions assessed as good practices.
- **Innovation networks**, with the aim of designing joint territorial innovations, taking into account all political, technical and financial dimensions.

3. Resilience networks are inspired by the URBACT networks.

This approach must be based on the following methodological elements:

- Cooperation between local actors, amplified by Mediterranean cooperation;
- Learning by doing through peer-to-peer work;
- Shared tools made available to territories.

Political leadership for this initiative could be provided by the Coalition of Coastal Cities and Regions of the World, in a Mediterranean sub-group, possibly in association with the CIM-CRPM. Cooperation operators such as AVITEM, Medcités and the European network of coastal conservation agencies could take on (ideally in association) all the technical aspects, namely:

- Managing calls for projects from local authorities for each of the networks (launch, selection, communication, website management, etc.);
- Supporting projects in each of the networks and coordinating the networks;
- The development of shared tools such as a methodological guide containing a set of advice, methods, explanations and models to support local authorities in the design and implementation of coastal resilience projects, or a knowledge centre bringing together data, experiences and analyses on the theme of resilience.

Co-financing for this initiative needs to be stabilised. The European Union has a key role to play here. **Coastal resilience networks could be part of an expansion of the Urbact network across the Mediterranean.**

› Resolution - We affirm the need to strengthen networks of Mediterranean local authorities to accelerate the development of coastal resilience projects.

- Design future resilience projects through cooperation and peer-to-peer work;
- Accelerate the transformation of local action through the transfer of experiences;
- Collectively test resilience innovations;
- Consolidate participatory and cooperative governance of projects at local and Mediterranean levels;
- Facilitate the sharing of and access to knowledge through common shared tools: action guide and knowledge centre.

PROJECT INTIATIVE NO. 3

Mediterranean culture and design Biennial

Focus area: Mobilisation and knowledge of the Coalition of Coastal Cities and Coastal Regions of the World

Our development patterns have led to a certain degree of mistreatment of our environment, both land and sea, and accelerated climate change at an unprecedented rate, which is now well documented. Beyond technical solutions, our coastal resilience will depend on our cultural relationship and the quality of dialogue that Mediterranean people will cultivate with their sea. Will we be able to fully reintegrate ourselves as part of a complex and endangered living system? Will we have the ambition to build a fertile ethical relationship and a reciprocal relationship between ourselves, Mediterranean people, and our sea, so that it can regain its place in the process of civilisation?

› Objectives and expected outcomes. Culture, artistic creation and design have a major role to play. Since the 2010s, the concept of the Anthropocene has become central to artistic thinking, with a real awareness of the interconnection between all forms of life, particularly marine and terrestrial ecosystems, an issue that has been rapidly integrated into creative works. Similarly, cultural actors involved in dissemination and mediation with the public, often supported by local authorities, play a major role in raising awareness among citizens. The evolution towards a more demanding art form, in tune with socio-environmental emergencies, is already underway. Artists and cultural actors are now whistleblowers and producers of new, sensitive narratives.

In this perspective of a new relationship with the sea, culture could respond to three types of challenges:

- Raising awareness and knowledge of coastal risks, particularly through scientific culture, in order to work together;
- Research and promotion of local, sometimes ancestral, know-how in order to design paths to resilience and do better together;
- The re-establishment of a new culture, new imaginaries, new artistic and design creations, and new, less ethnocentric narratives, to give substance to new, more respectful and sober attitudes, in fact to do things differently together!

In order to reinforce this ambition of a Mediterranean cultural relationship with the sea, this initiative proposes a networked Mediterranean cultural event. A Mediterranean cultural and design biennial that addresses the three challenges mentioned above. A week-long cultural event that brings together all Mediterranean countries and develops their common bond with the sea.

> Basic principles of operation

The Mediterranean Cultural Biennial involves all voluntary territories around the Mediterranean, potentially represented by different levels of actors: local authorities, cultural, environmental or scientific associations, schools, and artists' collectives. It is based on three programme focus areas: scientific culture, the culture of traditional Mediterranean know-how, and the re-establishment of a contemporary culture. It is not so much a new event as a coordination of events already planned locally which, thanks to better connections, could take on a new dimension. **The Mediterranean Capitals of Culture and Dialogue** are the key players in this event. The biennial is designed as an incremental process that can begin with a few territories promoting a Manifesto of Territories of Culture and Ecology, and then expand to other territories and integrated actions across the Mediterranean.

It could be scheduled for the last week of September, as a way of extending the summer season.

This initiative proposes five types of action:

- The dissemination for endorsement of a **Manifesto of Territories of Culture and Ecology** supported by the 'Cultivated Territories"[4] decentralised cooperation project;
- The **Mediterranean Cultural and Design Biennial**, a networked cultural event bringing together all the Mediterranean territories around their relationship with the sea. A week built around shared values: our tangible and intangible heritages, an attentive connection to the sea between preservation and the projection towards contemporary Mediterranean landscapes;

4. The decentralised cooperation project Territoires Cultivés, coordinated by the AVITEM, aims to establish a network of Mediterranean territories engaged in cross-disciplinary reflection on ecological transition, land use planning and culture. It is structured around five main themes: Mediterranean cultural identities and their link to landscape; culture as a territorial connector, from the local to the Mediterranean scale; the place of living things in culture; the role of culture in the fight against climate change and resilience; and finally, multi-stakeholder cultural governance as a lever for sustainability in the sector.

- **Identifying, mobilising and encouraging exchanges between active people** in the cultural, environmental and territorial fields for collective action outside traditional silooperating models;
- **The organisation of artist residencies**, one or two per country, on the theme of risk alert;
- Ultimately, **the creation of Mediterranean cultural routes** such as, for example, a littoral path or a heritage path on a Mediterranean scale, punctuated by events to showcase them.

Project coordination could be carried out by a collective to be set up in coordination with the network of cultural institutes. The coordination team would launch the call for initiatives and lead a joint communication strategy (joint narrative, media dissemination tools, etc.).

Each territory is responsible for organising its own local biennial event and is committed to participating in the overall communication. A group of experts could evaluate the approach and process and contribute to the narrative of this cultural ambition.

This initiative must be very frugal in terms of human and financial resources. The essential part of the action, i.e. the local events, is already organised and financed.

› Resolution - We are committed to launching a Mediterranean cultural biennial.

- Build cooperation between Mediterranean territories for a networked cultural event;
- Promote the values of a fruitful relationship between land and sea set out in a Manifesto of Mediterranean Territories of Culture and Ecology;
- Create the conditions for new artistic creations on the theme of land and sea by organising artistic residencies;
- Ultimately, change scale to create Mediterranean cultural routes.

PROJECT INITIATIVE NO. 4
Mediterranean ERASMUS for professional mobility

Focus area: Skills upgrade for the Coalition of Coastal Cities and Coastal Regions of the World

Professional mobility in the Mediterranean is a key issue. Beyond our diversities, we have to face many common challenges. Thanks to our diversities, all Mediterranean territories share expertise in land-sea relations and resilience to risks. The southern Mediterranean has long experience in water management, particularly water stress, and has been confronted since Antiquity with the loss of territories submerged under the sea. Professional mobility can therefore be conceived in a reciprocal relationship!

› Objectives and expected outcomes. This project initiative aims to facilitate the international mobility of executives from Mediterranean local authorities in the context of continuing education. A first objective is to promote learning and exchange in an intercultural context. Knowledge of legal frameworks, governance methods, strategies and technical solutions are the main areas for skills development. A small group of 10 to 20 executives per year could benefit from this immersion system with a relatively short stay, estimated at a few months. The second objective is to establish a network of host local authorities that can pool the benefits of such an approach.

› Basic principles of operation

This Mediterranean Erasmus programme, an adult formation tool, is aimed more specifically at professionals in coastal local authorities working on the following issues: strategic planning, resilience to risks, new blue economies.

The Coalition of Coastal Cities and Regions of the World could be the project leader.

A technical coordinator for the project is to be appointed through a tender process. Their tasks will be varied: seeking cross-financing, certifying a network of Mediterranean operators responsible for organising the reception and follow-up of professional stays in host local authorities, selecting annual promotions, overall evaluation of the programme, communication and networking of professionals.

› Resolution - We are committed to launching a Mediterranean ERASMUS programme.

- Building cooperation between Mediterranean local authorities, sending and hosting professionals for professional mobility;
- Creating the conditions for exchanges and skills development for local executives;
- Ultimately, creating a network of Mediterranean professionals specialized in coastal resilience issues.

In conclusion, the Mediterranean Voice declaration was drafted through a participatory process that is still modest in scale. It is intended as a simple starting point for an active process of Mediterranean cooperation on a much larger scale.

The project initiatives, in the form of guidelines or proposals, are intended to be debated and refined before seeking broader support and commitment from the local authorities concerned. They therefore constitute one of the roadmaps for the Coalition of Coastal Cities and Regions of the World in the Mediterranean.

From the project initiative to the project itself, a great deal of operational work remains to be done, the first step being to call on international institutions, foremost among which are the European Commission, represented in particular by the new European Commissioner for the Mediterranean, or, in the longer term, the Euro-Mediterranean macro-region. However, this call will only really take on meaning if the 'Voice of the Mediterranean' grows, i.e. if a large number of Mediterranean voices, particularly those of local authorities, join in. The third United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC 3) in Nice represents a first opportunity to do so.

Coordinated by

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Agence des Villes et Territoires Méditerranéens Durables

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