



DEVELOPING CLOSER TIES BETWEEN TURKEY AND GREECE IN MONK SEAL CONSERVATION

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With the financial support of the EC, cooperation between NGOs in Turkey and Greece is gradually developing better monk seal conservation practices in both countries — which together host the largest surviving populations of the species. [MOM](#) in Greece and [SAD-AFAG](#) in Turkey, both leading organizations in monk seal protection and research in their respective countries, believe that effective conservation of the species and its habitat will remain limited if a functional cooperation cannot be achieved in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Cooperation between the two NGOs began in 2000 with the support of the Greek Ministry of Environment, following the “spring thaw” in relations pursued by politicians on both sides of the Aegean after many years of high political tensions. Previously, the members of SAD-AFAG and MOM only had the rare opportunity of communicating with each other during international meetings.

Turkey's intention to pursue EU membership has also fostered a better political climate with Greece, a member state, while Greece itself has also opened the door to its neighbour in the interests of improved relations and civic dialogue.

The first instrument provided to Turkey by EC / DG Environment was under “*Projects to Promote the Capacity of NGOs in Malta, Cyprus and Turkey, Through Twinning and Exchange Activities*” This operates under the PHARE 2003 multi-country programme on environment and enlargement, with the aim of improving the capacity of NGOs to play their full role in the implementation of the EU environmental acquis (the environment-related body of common rights and obligations which bind all the Member States together within the European Union) in their respective countries. Central to this aim is the transfer of best practice know-how from EU NGOs to NGOs in target countries. Through the programme, SAD-AFAG carried out a twinning project with MOM, for six months between January and June 2004. With the participation of 4 SAD-AFAG and 8 MOM staff members, a workshop and an evaluation meeting were held at MOM's head office in Athens. At these meetings, the administrative and financial management methods used by MOM and SAD-AFAG in various conservation situations were compared. The EU acquis on environment protection and MOM's experience within it, were also discussed.

The EC Delegation in Turkey provided the follow-up opportunity to strengthen the cooperation between NGOs from Turkey and Greece, with “*The Micro Project Program for Turkish – Greek Civic Dialogue*”. SAD-AFAG received approval under this programme for the project “*A comparison and experience exchange between the National Marine Park of Alonissos-Northern Sporades (NMPANS) (Greece) and the Foça Specially Protected Area (FSPA)(Turkey) involving the NGOs MOM and SAD-AFAG*”.



Alonissos: Greek and Turkish fishermen exchange experiences

This project, implemented in cooperation with MOM, focuses on experience exchange, and seeks to encourage dialogue between the pioneer monk seal conservation areas of both countries. The exchange will draw upon more than 10 years of both practical and theoretical experience obtained by the two NGOs, with fishing cooperatives and protected area management bodies being a high priority for study. The project will run for nine months between March and December 2004.

The cooperative project called for two workshops to be held in Foça and Alonissos, and also a separate evaluation meeting in Foça. The Alonissos workshop took place in July 2004, and the Foça workshop in early September. The concluding evaluation meeting was held in Foça at the end of October.

During these workshops, participants discussed the geographic, demographic and economic aspects of Foça and Alonissos; legal tools for nature conservation in Greece and Turkey, including Natura 2000 experience in Greece; fisheries management in both countries, with an emphasis on Foça and Alonissos; the multiple aspects of the Foça and Alonissos marine protected areas, and the status and distribution of the monk seal in these MPAs. The workshop participants included representatives of SAD-AFAG and MOM and their respective staff members based in Alonissos and Foça, the Mayor of Alonissos, officers from the Foça Municipality, an expert from the Turkish Ministry of the Environment and Forests / Authority for the Specially Protected Areas, the presidents of the Alonissos and Foça fishing cooperatives, the vice-president of the Alonissos fishing cooperative, the president of the Alonissos fishing association, and a founder member of the Foça fishing cooperative.



Greek and Turkish project participants visiting the mayor of Foça, Gokhan Demirag (second from right, back row), including the mayor of Alonissos, Orestis Papachristou (third from right, back row)

Perhaps the most significant element of this project was the inclusion of local fishermen and the responsible staff of the municipalities. Turkish and Greek fishermen from Foça and Alonissos, who have experienced monk seal conservation firsthand for more than 10 years simultaneously, and who are currently supporting such conservation initiatives, met for the first time ever.

"Sharing common problems but also dreams, our two communities, Alonissos and Foça, are strongly trying to develop, following the principals of sustainable use of natural resources. I believe that colloborative initiatives between the two communities will lead us faster towards a safer and better future for our communities' citizens and their children."

– Orestis Papachristou, Mayor of Alonissos.

In getting to know each other, and in discussing various fisheries issues, the fishermen realised that they shared similar fisheries problems. As a result, they steered a more or less parallel route when discussing monk seal protection in their areas, and the real and potential benefits that can be accrued from it. The mayors of Alonissos and Foça declared that their communities had also benefited from seal conservation, and that it was important for the future of fisheries and the quality of life in Alonissos and Foça generally, since both are dependent upon the health and integrity of the natural environment.

The second workshop in Foça was scheduled to overlap with the IV Rastgele International Fisheries and Sea Documentaries Festival held on 1-5 September 2004. The fishermen from Alonissos competed with the fishermen of Foça in hook tying and net mending contests with

obvious enjoyment and goodwill. During the last day of the Festival, workshop participants took centre stage as speakers in the panel discussion “After 10 Years of Experience, Fisheries and Monk Seal Protection in Foça and Alonissos”. The panel’s main conclusion was that neither the fishermen nor the mayors would like to turn back to pre-protection days in Alonissos and Foça, and they were ready to further relations developed by this project by increasing their level of cooperation in the future.



Greek and Turkish fishermen compete in the Foça Festival net-mending contest



Turkish-Greek panel discussion within the ancient walls of Foça

MOM and SAD-AFAG, finding these reactions more than encouraging, have since decided to pursue projects and seek further funds to develop the relations between the fisheries cooperatives and the municipalities of Foça and Alonissos.

The EC Delegation in Turkey opened the second phase of “*The Micro Project Programme for Turkish – Greek Civic Dialogue*” in 2004, and this time MOM was awarded the project “*The Mediterranean monk seal: Confronting emergencies in the Eastern Mediterranean through exchange of know-how and network building*”, to be carried out with SAD-AFAG from July 2004 to July 2005.

This project aims to:

- Develop a methodology to successfully deal with emergency cases of sick, injured and orphaned monk seals in the Eastern Mediterranean.
- Establish a Monk Seal Information Network in Turkey.
- Develop an agreement on an operational basis on how to react in case of an environmental disaster or mass mortality event (infectious diseases within the monk seal populations, oil spills, etc.) in either part of the Aegean, affecting one or both countries.

In addition, the project aims to promote joint/complementary methodology in the work of the two environmental NGOs (MOM and SAD-AFAG), in order to:

- Increase the survival possibilities of the species in the Eastern Mediterranean by operating according to adjusted protocols in each country on rescuing animals in need and on conducting necropsies.
- Enhance awareness among the local public and of key stakeholders in both countries on the endangered status of the species, the reasons for its decline and the uniqueness of the existence of the monk seal in their area, in order to encourage pro-conservation attitudes and direct involvement in conservation efforts.

The start-up meeting of the project was originally planned for October in Foça but it has since been postponed due to the rescue of orphaned monk seal pup “Hippocrates” on Kos, Greece [See [Greeks and Turks join forces in rescue project](#), this issue].