PRESS RELEASE

The circular economy in action in the Mediterranean

• On the 13th of November at the Recinte Modernista de Sant Pau, the SwitchMed Initiative will present the first exhibition that showcases the success stories of small and medium sized enterprises and entrepreneurs that implement circular economy principles in the Southern Mediterranean countries.

• The launch of this exhibition is part of the SwitchMed Connect, the largest and the unique gathering of eco and social innovators from the Southern Mediterranean region, which will be celebrating its third edition in the City of Barcelona.

Barcelona, 13th of November 2018. – The SwitchMed Programme has the pleasure of presenting the exhibition "The Circular Economy in the Mediterranean", which will be launched on Tuesday, the 13th of November at the Recinte Modernista de Sant Pau in Barcelona. Mr. Maciej Popowski, Deputy Director-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations of the European Commission, representing the European Union – main funding partner of the exhibition – will be present at the opening together with some of the change agents showcased.

Mr. Popowski commented: “Green and circular economy is the only way to maintain sustainable economic development in the long run. This requires institutional, regulatory, technical and financial innovations. Through the EU funded programme SwitchMed we are demonstrating that these innovations are possible, and that it is feasible to leave future generations both a clean environment and improved socioeconomic conditions and job opportunities for the youth. SwitchMed also contributes to regional cooperation amongst partners in the Southern Neighbourhood. The European Union is committed to promoting green and circular economy and continuing to be a leader in climate action, and I hope that efficient use of resources, recycling, and reuse become the norm in our societies.”

The exhibition, which can be visited until the 14th of December, revolves around the main principles of the circular economy such as resource efficient and cleaner production, eco-design practices, reduce-reuse-recycle (3R) strategies, service based business models. The exhibition invites attendees to get to know twenty-two inspiring stories of change agents from the Southern Mediterranean, who are implementing sustainable consumption and production practices.

All of the protagonists of these success stories, coming from 8 countries, Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia, are beneficiaries of the SwitchMed Programme, who have turned environmental challenges into opportunities. The success stories that can be seen range from recycling single-use plastic bags in order to turn them into stylish purses, to improvements in the eco-design of couscous packaging, to the valorisation of downgraded dates. The exhibition also aims at emphasising best practices and inspiring others to switch to sustainable consumption and production practices.

The SwitchMed Programme is funded by the European Union
The launch of this exhibition is part of the SwitchMed Connect, the largest and the unique gathering of eco and social innovators from the Mediterranean region. On the 13th, 14th and 15th of November, the third edition will be celebrated in the City of Barcelona. In fact, this gathering marks the end of the first phase of the SwitchMed Programme, hence, during these three days, exchange of best practices, recommendations and examples on how to make the circular economy a reality in the Mediterranean region will be discussed in detail. Furthermore, the achievements of the SwitchMed Programme will be presented and how these practices can be more widely spread and replicated will also be discussed.

The SwitchMed Programme funded by the European Union, works with the objective of achieving productive and circular economies in the Mediterranean. In this sense, 125 industries in the region were advised on how to become more resource efficient and competitive by saving water, energy, raw materials and waste. In the MED TEST II project, industries were introduced to eco-innovative technologies and production practices that will improve their production to become more efficient, clean and competitive. The final results have been impressive: The identified resource efficient and cleaner production measures will allow the participating industries to annually save 3.6 million m$^3$ of water (the equivalent of 2,618 Olympic swimming pools), 707GWh of energy (approximately two months of electricity consumption in Tunisia) and 33,600 tons of raw materials. In addition, they can annually reduce 197,525 tons of CO$_2$ emissions, which is equivalent to what 42,297 cars emit in a year and 3,400 tons of solid waste, which is almost the same amount of solid waste produced by 2,400 people in 1 year in Algeria. In this sense, the industries have been able to save 41.3 million Euros per year in production costs. “The MED TEST project is not only about preserving natural capital for future generations, it's also about securing the supply of raw materials, energy, and water so that businesses can produce at competitive price levels” said the Chief Technical Advisor, Roberta de Palma from the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO).

In addition, the SwitchMed Programme enables sustainable entrepreneurship that contributes to the creation of employment and supports viable and scalable environmental and social innovations in order to foster sustainable growth. As part of the programme, 2,300 entrepreneurs (38% women and 62% men), of the 6,000 who applied to enter in the programme, were trained and 200 of those that were trained managed to launch their sustainable businesses. Moreover, in order to be able to create a greater impact, 123 local trainers were trained. Out of those 200 newly launched businesses, 50 qualified to enter into the incubation phase during which they received technical assistance to further develop their business models and gain access to finance. Moreover, by the end of 2018, a total of 2.2 million Euros potential investment is expected to be raised by the entrepreneurs through the facilitation of the Programme. Mr. Josep Maria Tost, director of the Catalan Waste Agency, one of the SwitchMed programme implementing agents, said that “The SwitchMed Green Entrepreneurship Programme that is managed by the Regional Activity Centre for Sustainable Consumption and Production (in short SCP/RAC) hosted by the ARC is the first of its kind ecosystem support services for entrepreneurs that want to apply Circular Economy approach in business development. This Programme has contributed to the creation of +200 Green Businesses and +1,000 jobs till today and we hope to collaborate further with local partners to scale this impact.”

On the policy level, SwitchMed has worked to provide an enabling environment for the private sector to adopt sustainable production and consumption practices. A Regional Production and Consumption Plan for the Mediterranean was approved by 22 Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of
The SwitchMed Programme is funded by the European Union and the Mediterranean. In follow-up, 8 national action plans were developed and 20 pilot projects were implemented.

**Concerning the SwitchMed Programme**

The EU funded SwitchMed Programme is implemented under the coordination of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and is executed in collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment), Economy Division; and the Regional Activity Centre for Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP-RAC) a component of the United Nations Environment Programme-Mediterranean Action Plan (UN Environment/MAP), in close coordination with the European Commission.

**Press contacts**

For any queries related to the organization of interviews and the press conference please contact:

aPortada Communication Agency
Judit Cabana
judit.cabana@aportada.com
T. + 34 93 318 26 50
M. + 34 609 77 91 45

For any queries related to the content of the SwitchMed Programme regarding the activities, stories of beneficiaries and impact please contact:

SwitchMed Networking Facility Communications Manager
Roser Gasol
rgasol@scprrac.org
T. +34 637545138
M. +34 637545138

**Additional Information**

www.switchmedconnect.com
www.switchmed.eu
www.theswitchers.eu
www.theswitchersfund.eu
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