



# **European Union's stress test for its multilateral approach: prospects for fostering regional cooperation**

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*EU's Strategy on Maritime and Environmental  
Issues  
in the Four Seas: Multilateral approaches*

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# EU's Strategy on Maritime & Environmental Issues in the Four Seas: multilateral approaches in the Baltic, Black, Caspian & Mediterranean Seas

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## Abstract

*In its European Security Strategy, the EU states that the primary objectives is to craft a ring of well-governed countries around its borders. This 'ring of friends' is fundamentally forged through the European Neighbourhood Policy, the Eastern Partnership and the Union for the Mediterranean, and apply not only to land areas but also to the large enclosed or semi-enclosed water bodies which are the Baltic Sea towards the North-East, the Mediterranean Sea towards the South, and the Black and Caspian Seas towards the East. Because they are surrounded by land, the efficiency of an integrated maritime policy in these "inland seas" will strongly depend on the environmental state of surrounding lands and coasts, i.e. the capacity of maintaining or improving it through a coherent use of a number of EU policies. Amongst them, the Trans-European Networks, the Structural Funds, the Common Agriculture Policy, the Environment Policies, and the Research Framework Programme are more particularly scrutinized for putting them into synergy, while possible partners and existing cooperation mechanisms are identified for a coordinated implementation hence enhancement of the EU strategy in each of the four seas. From the previous argumentation, a set of recommendations are made for the EU' political strategy towards these regions to reinforce the multilateral cooperation in those issues where it can be an effective complement of the already existing EU policies.*

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## 1. Introduction

In its 'European Security Strategy' (European Council, 2003), the EU clearly acknowledged that as a union of 25 states with over 450 million people producing a quarter of the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), it is inevitably a global player. The same strategy states that the primary objectives of the EU are to craft a ring of well-governed countries around its borders and to strive for more 'effective multilateralism', a rules-based international system predicated on the rule of law. This 'ring of friends' is fundamentally forged through the European Neighbourhood Policy, the Eastern Partnership and the Union for the Mediterranean, and apply not only to land areas but also to almost enclosed or semi-enclosed large water bodies which are the Baltic sea towards the North-East, the Mediterranean sea towards the South, and the Black and Caspian seas towards the East. All of them are located at the boundaries of the European Union with therefore great significance from the geography and geopolitics point of view, particularly because they belong to the maritime domain hence represent gateway between the various continental and coastal powers of the "Eurasian coastline" (Rogers, 2009) composed of seven of the fifteen biggest trading partners of the EU (China, Japan, South Korea, India, Taiwan, Singapore and Saudi Arabia).

Working at coherent and efficient strategies is essential to each regional sea sustainable and coordinated development hence to the stability and security of the region and of the EU as a whole.

## 2. From coast to coast: Making synergies between EU Policies

More than ever for semi-enclosed seas, ecological and geopolitical consideration of the continuum from the water basin to the coastal zone and the maritime area should underpin the development of an EU strategy in these regions.

Depending on the issues at stake, one should look at it both ways: from the sea to the land and vice versa. Undoubtedly, the new Integrated Maritime Policy with its main governance tools (integrated coastal management and maritime spatial planning, marine and maritime research, surveillance of operations at sea) is a strong policies integrating framework that should be applied to the four seas, though its efficiency will strongly depend on the state of the coastal zones, i.e. the capacity of making synergies between a number of EU policies (European Communities, 1999) as follows:

**Trans-European Networks (TEN):** in the areas of transport, telecommunications and energy supply infrastructure. In order to fulfil this mandate, the integration of national networks, as well as access to the networks, should be improved, particularly by connecting "insular seas" and peripheral areas to the central areas. Transport infrastructure networks, traffic management systems, positioning and navigation systems, and the production and transmission of energy influencing the spatial organisation, are particularly relevant to the four semi-enclosed seas at stake while being crucial to Europe's energy supply. The two northern (Baltic Sea) and south-eastern ways (Caspian-Black Sea Region prolonged by the Mediterranean Sea region) are both keys to diversifying Europe's energy supplies (Magnusson, 2009) while maintaining the quality of the environment.

**Structural Funds and European Regional Development Fund (EDRF):** they follow the objective of economic and social cohesion. Regarding the four maritime basins,

they more particularly apply to urban centres as parts of a wider regional space, and to coastal areas subject to intense pressures and conflicts between competing land uses. In this regard, the integration of fisheries-related funds into the Structural Funds and other initiatives related to the eligibility of Fishery Dependent Areas (FDAs) and Community initiative PESCA contributing to the conversion of people and firms towards new activities, are in favour of a more integrated policy in coastal areas. The new Common Fisheries Policy in preparation will have to incorporate this important funding mechanism aspect while heading towards an ecosystem-based approach that should regulate human exploitation of marine resources from the much wider perspective of ecosystem services.

Community initiative INTERREG is a very significant measure of the structural funds, where priority is not given to individual sectors such as maritime transport but is given to the relation between the factors influencing spatial organisation in border regions and larger trans-national cooperation areas like in the case of the four regional seas.

**Common Agriculture Policy:** the intensification, concentration and specialisation of production in agriculture have negative effects on spatial development and the environment. In all four sea basins, nutrients overloading and eutrophication phenomena, not to mention the largely ignored impact of pesticides, is a permanent and highly detrimental issue.

**Environment Policy:** the last European Environment Agency report on the state of the European environment (European Environment Agency, 2010) emphasizes nutrient enrichment and overfishing as major problems affecting the quality of the marine environment. It also emphasizes the fact that environmental challenges in Europe and the rest of the world are intertwined, i.e. changes in other parts of the world are increasingly felt both directly through the regional and local impacts of global environmental changes (climate change, biodiversity decline), or indirectly through intensified socio-economic pressures. In this respect, the four seas areas are worth particular attention due to the strong socio-economic and environmental links and their importance in EU external policy. To tackle the key environmental issues in these regions (European Environment Agency, 2007), the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is a crucial dialogue and action based tool, particularly through fostering technology transfer and helping to build institutional capacity.

The many EC environment-related directives like Birds and Habitats (Natura 2000), Nitrate, Water and Marine Strategy Framework Directives, to mention but a few, apply only to EU member-states while their substance should be discussed with the other four seas riparian countries in order to pretend making any meaningful progress at the sea basin scale.

When launching its strategy to implement the EU Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) Recommendation, the Commission indicated that coastal areas are particularly in need of an integrated territorial approach but, notwithstanding the continued need for ICZM on shore, further emphasis should be placed on the implementation of ICZM across the land-sea boundary and in a regional seas context (European Commission, 2007) The EU integrated maritime policy and its environmental pillar, the EU Marine Strategy, should give new impetus to the ICZM policy that has to be re-oriented to its fundamentals which embraces the three components of sustainable development (environment, economy, society) and not only environmental policies. This is a crucial step that should stop the crouching and counter-productive confusion, if not rivalry, between the Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) approach and the Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) tool. This

consideration is particularly important while ICZM is nowadays a popular concept that is under implementation in many locations and riparian countries of the four seas, sometimes supported by the European Commission itself (e.g. SMAP-Short and Medium Term Priority Environmental Action Programme, 1997-2009, as the environmental component of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership), including non EU Member States as well (Seddigh, Abdolmaleki, Baraough and Ahmadi, 2010) Moreover, in a region like the Baltic Sea, ICZM initiatives are increasingly getting transboundary thus enhancing the joint regional cooperation between the Baltic Sea regional users<sup>1</sup>. These numerous ICZM projects represent a regional potential capital provided they are given the opportunity and the means to get networked together.

**Research Framework Programme:** the 7th Framework Programme supports the development and implementation of various Community policies, including those having a clear maritime dimension like for example, KnowSeas<sup>2</sup>. *Knowledge-based Sustainable Management for Europe's Seas*, including case studies related to the Baltic, Black and Mediterranean seas EEZs. This project is typical of a new generation of sea and coast-related projects that aim at integrated knowledge (natural and social sciences) and practical guidance development for the application of the ecosystem-based approach to the sustainable development of Europe's regional seas.

As part of the European Research Area (ERA), the Marine and Maritime Research Strategy (European Commission, 2008) has as well a significant role to play in European research policy focusing on improving interactions between marine and maritime research disciplines like cleaner and more efficient marine engines, better vessel design, optimal logistics of traffic flows, safety and security of maritime activities, intermodal freight operations, improved port operations, etc., topics highly relevant to the four seas current situation. Besides integration across established marine and maritime research disciplines, multidisciplinary capacity-building and synergies between Member States, regions and industry sector are addressed, all aspects the four seas riparian countries and their institutions are deeply in need.

From what is developed above, three main priorities may be highlighted: i) making synergies between sectoral and cross-cutting EU policies; ii) looking for convergences with non EU member-states' own policies; iii) expanding integrated coastal zone management as a core component of the EU maritime policy.

### 3. Working with whom?

#### **Strengthening the role of the regional seas conventions and action plans**

Three of the four seas (Baltic Sea, Mediterranean, Black Sea) are under a Regional Sea Convention and Action Plan along United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Regional Seas Programme to which the EU is contributing as a Party. Under the UNEP global strategic directions (United Nations Environment Programme, 2007), their major concerns and priorities (which could be applied to the Caspian Sea as well) are in good agreement with a number of EU initiatives like Horizon 2020 in the Mediterranean :

- Land-based sources of marine pollution with particular emphasis on responding to pollution resulting from municipal wastewater;

- Ship-generated marine pollution, oil spill preparedness and response, and construction of port reception facilities for ships' wastes (a major concern in the four seas);
- The impact of increasing urbanization and coastal development on marine coastal ecosystems, requiring capacity building in support of integrated coastal management (the first regional protocol on ICZM in the Mediterranean has been signed and ratified by the EU);
- Conservation and management of marine and coastal ecosystems, including protected areas. Although over-exploitation or depletion of living marine resources including fisheries is a major concern, this aspect is mainly in the Regional Fisheries Management Organizations' hands;
- Monitoring, reporting and assessment for the marine environment, to fill the need for more accurate and technical information.

In spite of their sometimes heavy bureaucracy hence slow decision process, the Regional Seas Programme in the Baltic, Mediterranean and Black seas provide regional platforms for tackling environmental issues in the frame of sustainable development principles, but their role does not go as far as dealing with maritime policies at regional and national levels as the EU maritime strategies for the Baltic and Mediterranean seas regions do. As an example, a report from the European Parliament (2010a) recommends that *"the Commission ensures effective cooperation and coordination with HELCOM and the Member States of the Baltic Sea Region, in order to secure a clear delineation of tasks and responsibilities as regards the implementation of the 2007 HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan and the EU Strategy and Action Plan, and thus to ensure an effective overall strategy for the Region"*.

In the Mediterranean, an increasing compatibility between sub-regional agreements and EU initiatives have been observed in the last years though the resulting division of labour does not necessarily guaranty the operational side since objectives (the depollution of the sea by 2020, as decided under the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership) and methods (projects identified under the National Action Plans of the Land-Based Pollution Protocol) are very much path dependent (Costa, 2009).

### **Working with sectoral regional/international organizations**

If, because of their specific protocols, the three regional conventions and their action plans maintain a close link with the International Maritime Organization (IMO), it is not the case of most of the Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) the EU should approach under its new Common Fisheries Policy. Given the overfishing in the three seas (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea does not apply to the Caspian Sea), it is essential to link the Common Fisheries Policy, itself part of the EU maritime policy, to these regional fisheries organisations.

Other international organisations like United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank have their own development programme as well, with sometimes very similar objectives like it was the case in the Mediterranean with the Mediterranean European Technical Assistance Programme (METAP) which was terminated a few years ago.

## **Security and good governance**

In the four seas, with a special emphasis on the Mediterranean, Black and Caspian seas, the European Parliament (2010b) recommends that the EU can and should play a more active role in shaping their security environment through an enhanced EU cooperation with its strategic partners like the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in the areas of institutional building, the rule of law, election observation, media freedom and democracy and human rights. Creating linkages between security and environment observation systems could be very beneficial to the development of appropriate strategies.

## **Global Environment Facility Partnerships**

The EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive is talking about “*marine ecoregions*”; the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and its partners (UNDP, UNEP, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) are talking about Large Marine Ecosystems (LME). The three seas, the Baltic, Mediterranean and Black seas, are considered as large marine ecosystems.

The fact that the LME approach involves both a mapping unit and an information database, organised systematically into five modules (biological productivity, fish and fisheries, pollution and health, socioeconomics, and governance) makes it an important framework for consistent information for GEF/LME methodology of Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis, followed by Strategic Action Plan development which generates the strategy for each LME.

This approach has been reinforced in the four seas by a partnership with the International Waters Learning Exchange and Resource Network (IW:LEARN) to strengthen transboundary waters management through information sharing and learning among stakeholders to which UNDP, international and national NGOs, and the World Bank (projects funding) are contributing.

Closely linked to the Regional Conventions’ Coordination Unit, the GEF Partnerships are therefore representing an important technical and financial platform that, among others, may facilitate the introduction and implementation/adaptation of the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive, strengthening the environmental pillar of each regional sea strategy.

## **Working with regions and macro-regions**

On many occasions, the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe (CPMR) emphasized the peripheral Regions’ capacity as outposts and the important role they can play in contributing to the EU Neighbourhood Policy at the EU’s borders<sup>3</sup>, which is the case of the four seas. Real consideration should therefore be given to the territorial approach in the future neighbourhood policy working at stepping up cooperation between each basin regional authorities. Overall, the EU 2020 strategy, through possible macro-regions<sup>4</sup>, will need to be built on a multi-level or “nested” governance system.

Beyond the simple acknowledgement of functional interactions and the development of the resulting synergies, a number of Community initiatives like INTERREG IVC may be used to develop integrated and multisectoral approaches with a strong maritime spatial dimension.

As regards the implementation of the EU integrated maritime policy, there are a number of sectors and areas where the regions have responsibility whilst some of them are already engaged in integrated initiatives such as interregional coastal waters management plans and maritime competitiveness clusters. From the maritime perspective, the future debate on potential macro-region in each of the four seas will probably go hand in hand with the implementation of the Maritime Strategy framework directive, which itself recognises the major role local and regional authorities will have to play (Lochet, 2009). Again, the support of an INTERREG project like the ongoing Channel Arc Manche Integrated Strategy (CAMIS) in the English Channel area could encourage the four seas' riparian regions to exchange and build up their own common regional vision and strategy.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

From the above, a number of preliminary recommendations can be drawn out provided they are adapted to each of the four seas specific context:

- Given their strategic importance at the boundaries of the EU, each of the four seas strategy should be an integral part of the EU's broader **foreign and security vision** where security, good governance, energy, transport, environment, socio-economic and human development shall be considered as priority actions;
- In the three basins concerned (Baltic, Black and Mediterranean seas), the EU has the status of Contracting Party under the respective **Regional Conventions** and as such should secure a clear delineation of tasks and responsibilities as regards the implementation of the Regional Convention Action Plan and the EU Strategy and Action Plan, with the aim of ensuring an effective overall strategy for the Region;
- The development of synergies between the various **EU policies** that come into play in each of the four seas strategy should be systematically promoted, particularly the Trans-European Transport and Energy Networks, the Structural Funds, the Environment policies including the agriculture and fisheries related ones, and the Research and Development Framework Programme, in order to ensure the coherence and the sustainability of the actions financed, such as opportunities created by one economic development initiative can be taken by another, complementary initiative;
- Since the state of the four seas is highly dependent on the state of their coastal areas, there should be a clear operational link established between the **EU Integrated Coastal Zone Management Recommendation** and its **Integrated Maritime Policy** as an essential building block for further work on maritime spatial planning in the double context of the EU Marine Strategy framework directive and the GEF Partnerships' initiatives including its Large Marine Ecosystem (LME) main components;
- As a component of the Integrated Maritime Policy and in close collaboration with the **Regional Fisheries Management Organisations** (RFMOs), the **Common Fisheries Policy** (CFP) should be considered in each of the four seas strategies on an equal footing with the other European basins, including provisions to encourage the riparian states outside the EU to comply as closely as possible with the principles of the CFP;
- The existing Baltic and Mediterranean Seas **maritime corridors** as the future ones for the Black Sea Region, should be closely integrated into the TEN-T priority axes, in particular with regard to **the Motorways of the Sea** (TEN-T 21), completing the interconnections between each regions and other European regions like in the case of the Baltic-Adriatic corridor;

- In the name of the European Strategy for Marine and Maritime Research, each regional sea should benefit from the establishment of a specific **Marine and Maritime Research Forum** used as a forum for dialogue and partnership involving existing networks and all key partners in the marine and maritime research and industrial sectors;
- **Cross-border cooperation between regions** should be enhanced using frameworks such as the European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) and structured networks supported by, among others, the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe (CPMR) for developing multi-level forms of governance;
- The **exchange of best practices** between regions should be encouraged in all areas of cooperation, considering that regions with long experience of developing and implementing projects could help other regions to improve their performance;
- Improvement of the **administrative capacity** of all local and regional stakeholders should be considered as a priority in order to ensure the efficient implementation and sound financial management of EU projects, greater transparency and accountability, and balanced territorial development across each of the four regions and seas.

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## Biographical notes

**Yves Henocque** first trained as a scientist (marine ecology) who then acquired management and international cooperation skills (to start with in Japan and South-East Asia) through technical training and professional practice, it was from the very beginning of the 90s that Yves Henocque settled in the Mediterranean to start a new coastal environmental laboratory within the premises of the French Research Institute for the Sustainable Development of the Sea (IFREMER) in Toulon. After a dedicated vocational training in the United States in 1994, he started to practice integrated coastal management (ICM) and strategic planning in the Mediterranean and other marine regions like the Indian Ocean (1995-2000). More recently, he expanded his experience in Thailand (Department of Fisheries) as Team Leader and Co-Director of CHARM (Coastal Habitats and Resources Management), a 5-years and 16M Euros project (2002-2007) co-funded between the Thai Government and the EU. Since 2008 he is the Nature & Society theme leader within IFREMER Prospective and Scientific Strategy Division where, among others, he is contributing to the building up of national maritime strategies with local governments and stakeholders.

**Xavier Lafon** is a civil servant & PhD student in Sociology, graduated from Ecology Department, Ecole Normale Supérieure, in 2003. Hired as high level civil servant, he passed a M.Sc in Environmental Management (2005) and an Advanced Master in Public Administration (2006), both from ParisTech, France. Since October 2006, he has been appointed as key expert for marine and coastal zones issues at the Research Department of the French Ministry for Ecology and Sustainable Development. He has been in charge of more than 30 research projects dedicated to the improvement of environmental public policies. He has published several books as editor and book chapters as author, as well as contributed to international and national conferences.

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## NOTES

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