

Towards a renewed and strengthened EU Integrated Maritime Policy

With more than 20 million square kilometres, the European Union (including the outermost regions) has the largest maritime economic zone in the world, with a coastline seven times longer than that of the US and four times that of Russia. Almost half of Europe's citizens live within 50 kilometres of the coast, 40% of GDP is generated in maritime regions and 80% of the EU's external trade is carried by sea.

The maritime economy of the European Union (EU) employed around 4.45 million people and generated a gross value added (GVA) of €183.9 billion in 2019 (EU Blue Economy Report, 2022), particularly in the living resources and marine renewable energy sectors. Europe's security in terms of fish protein, minerals and renewable energy is critically dependent on marine resources (Salvador, 2018).

Recognising that all issues relating to the oceans and seas are interlinked and that, to achieve results, all synergies between the different areas must be exploited, and that it is essential that all policies relating to the sea are articulated, the European Union launched the Integrated Maritime Policy (IMP) in 2007, following an extensive process of consultation and analysis.

The IMP aims to provide a more comprehensive approach to the many issues affecting Europe's oceans and seas. The IMP covers areas such as the environment, shipping, fisheries and coastal management, with the aim of promoting sustainable growth, developing innovative maritime technologies and research, and creating more jobs.

Yet IMP is one of the most underestimated EU policies. Public awareness seems to be very low, and data is very difficult to obtain, as there are practically no Eurobarometer on 'sea' or 'ocean'. The sea and oceans are only assessed by the EU public when it comes to seafood consumption, transport or, more recently, defence and security. Nothing has ever been asked about the IMP itself. The IMP budget is small compared to other horizontal policies, and it is also difficult to communicate because its components are scattered: environment, transport, fisheries, research, security, tourism. By presenting itself as a comprehensive approach to sea-related policies, it has not achieved the political and institutional relevance that cohesion or environmental policies, for example, have already achieved.

The priorities of the political guidelines of the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, focused on the sea only in the security and environmental dimensions (Leyen, 2019), and there was no reference to seas and oceans in the Strategic Agenda for the EU for 2019-2024 adopted by the European Council. This issue has undoubtedly diminished the IMP for the current political and financial cycle, hence the importance of the upcoming European Parliament elections on 6-9 June.

Nevertheless, the IMP has achieved some successes. The sustainable blue economy, as defined by the European Commission in 2021, encompasses all sectoral and cross-sectoral economic activities related to oceans, seas and coasts. It includes emerging sectors and economic value based on natural capital and non-market goods and services, such as the conservation of marine habitats and ecosystem services.

Another example is the European Marine Observation and Data Network (EMODnet). It consists of more than 160 organisations working together to collect, harmonise and make more accessible marine data, products, and metadata to all public and private users, such as the European Atlas of the Seas. Members are national and regional marine and oceanographic

data repositories and data management experts from across Europe. In addition, the Common Information Sharing Environment (CISE) integrates existing information exchange and sharing systems and platforms, ensuring the flow of information between maritime authorities, and enabling the fight against crime, the protection of merchant and fishing vessels from possible threats and the improvement of rescue operations.

But the most interesting solution, as with the blue economy, is the introduction of strategies for different sea basins. In terms of ecosystems and economies, Europe's sea basins are very diverse, given the variety of geographical, climatic, historical and political influences. Although the IMP has general principles (e.g., subsidiarity), its implementation requires strategies adapted to the reality of each sea basin. This approach is similar to that implemented by the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (Soares, 2013).

In 2009, the EU's maritime territory was divided into eight sea basins (Baltic Sea, Black Sea, Mediterranean Sea, Adriatic and Ionian Seas, North Sea, Atlantic Ocean, Arctic Ocean, and Outermost Regions) and development strategies were defined for each of them to address the specific issues relevant to these unique environments. (European Commission, 2009).

The results of the EU elections on 6-9 June this year can provide an important impetus by putting maritime affairs back on the EU priority list: to consolidate the successful model of macro-regional strategies (MRS) or, on the contrary, to continue to focus solely on the sustainable blue economy, the path taken so far, limited to being part of the European Green Deal. (European Commission, 2021).

An MRS is an integrated framework, endorsed by the European Council, supported by Cohesion Policy funds to respond to common challenges in a defined geographical area, involving Member States and neighbouring third countries. The MRS provide a platform for multi-level, cross-sectoral and transnational governance, open to third countries. They thus play an essential role in mitigating any negative impact on the EU's external borders (European Commission, 2019).

Since the European Council endorsed the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region in 2009, three more have been developed: the EU Strategy for the Danube Region in 2011, the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Sea Region in 2014 and the EU Strategy for the Alpine Space in 2016. They involve 19 EU countries and eight non-EU countries.

Last December, ESPON launched a call for tender to obtain guidelines for the development of an Atlantic macro-region (AtlanticMRS), contributing to the strengthening of actions to address common territorial challenges and supporting actions to further define the contours of an Atlantic macro-region. The European Parliament and the European Committee of the Regions have called in 2021 for the Atlantic Strategy to be developed into an Atlantic macro-regional strategy, in order to improve coordination between actions on land and at sea, ensure multi-level governance and rationalise sources of funding.

The future of the EU's Integrated Maritime Policy is both promising and challenging. Under the right conditions, the marine energy sector has the potential to meet up to 10% of the EU's energy needs by 2050, making Europe the first climate neutral continent (ETIP Ocean, 2019). Tackling marine pollution by improving water quality through the reduction of waste, plastic litter at sea (by 50%) and microplastics in the environment (by 30%), as set out in the EU Action Plan: 'Towards Zero Pollution for Air, Water and Soil'. Not to mention that increased use of digital technologies can improve maritime management, safety, and security, as

demonstrated by some EU-funded projects or the creation and reinforcement of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), as here in the Azores.

These are just a few examples that may be relevant to EU maritime policy. Ongoing or planned marine and maritime actions will be taken forward, whether they are part of the IMP or sectoral policies, or both. As sea basin strategies and macro-regional strategies could work and function as regional or national IMPs, they could be a tool to enhance effective policy integration and to create a vision for their common way forward in the form of a strategy (ESPON, 2020).

Through documentary analysis, this presentation aims to provide alternative views and options on what this policy could look like in the future. Institutional sources such as EU legislation, documents and reports as well as a selection of research papers will be the main sources.