



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

*Brussels, 13.12.2021
C(2021) 9436 final*

Dear President,

The Commission would like to thank the Camera Deputaților for its Opinion relating to the Communication on the new approach for a sustainable blue economy in the EU — Transforming the EU Blue Economy for a sustainable future {COM(2021) 240 final}.

The Communication is an integral part of a broader package of ambitious measures designed to respond to the green transformation the European Green Deal calls for, where a resource-efficient and competitive economy grows. It sets a vision for a transformation of the blue economy under the Green Deal axes of decarbonisation, zero pollution, circularity and biodiversity to guide public and private initiatives and investment, while being complementary to the EU biodiversity strategy, Farm to Fork Strategy, Circular Economy Action Plan and the Bioeconomy Strategy.

The Communication sets a vision as well as a concrete agenda that:

- calls on all maritime players to base their activities on the responsible use of natural resources, on decarbonisation and on circular economy concepts;*
- sets out a detailed agenda for greening the blue economy, underpinned by international ocean governance;*
- facilitates the coexistence and synergies of economic activities in the maritime space through Maritime Spatial Planning, without damaging the environment;*
- proposes a series of actions to boost investment in research and innovation, and mobilizes financing opportunities under the new European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF), and other EU Funds and Programmes.*

*In concrete, to become **carbon neutral**, the EU needs clean and renewable energy. The ocean can deliver that energy, through offshore wind, wave or tidal energy. The EU needs to ramp up its production capacity from 12 GW today to over 300 GW by 2050.*

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To reduce the **environmental footprint of our food system**, the EU needs to find low-impact alternatives. Sustainable food requires responsible fishing to bring stocks to sustainable levels, sustainable aquaculture and new sources of food and feed, for instance from algae production. We need new marketing standards aiming to enhance transparency on specific sustainability aspects giving consumers the possibility for more informed purchase choices.

To reduce **pollution and promote circular economy**, the EU needs to find replacements for plastics, of which we find 27,000 tonnes in European seas each year, and reduce nutrients and contaminants, and underwater noise. Ship recycling in the fisheries sector and the use of renewable aquatic resources, including the use of waste, in aquaculture will also contribute to the circular economy.

Marine biodiversity is essential for fisheries and our coastal economies. Marine protected areas have led to increased biodiversity and larger fish stocks and contribute to climate mitigation and resilience. They offer opportunities for sustainable tourism and new activities such as biotechnology and the aim is to reach 30% of marine protected areas by 2030.

Climate adaptation activities, such as developing green infrastructure in coastal areas and protecting coastlines from the risk of erosion and flooding will help preserve biodiversity and landscapes, while benefitting tourism and the coastal economy against the cost of inaction amounting to €350 billion per year.

These transformation paths engender investment in the recovery of Europe, because blue economy is often highly technological, highly driven by innovation and digital transformation. In order to fully realise this potential and deliver sustainable economic growth, **significant investments in innovation** are needed.

To facilitate access to finance and support investment readiness for early-stage businesses, the Commission has launched the 'BlueInvest platform'. It provides customised support, investment-readiness advice and visibility to innovative small and medium sized enterprises and start-ups in the blue economy as well as access to investors, and it helps to create a financing ecosystem geared to support such operations through setting up dedicated financial instruments.

In response to the more technical comments in the Opinion, the Commission would like to refer to the attached annex.

The Commission hopes that the clarifications provided in this reply address the issues raised by the Camera Deputaților and looks forward to continuing the political dialogue in the future.

Yours faithfully,

Maroš Šefčovič
Vice-President

Virginijus Sinkevičius
Member of the Commission

Annex

The Commission welcomes the broad support of the Camera Deputaților to the Communication on the new approach for a sustainable blue economy in the EU and is pleased to provide some additional information on the specified points.

*The Commission is currently working on developing an **EU Algae Strategy** to unlock the potential of algae in providing sustainable solutions. This initiative will set out how the EU can increase the sustainable production, safe consumption and innovative use of algae and algae-based products. Algae represent a largely untapped resource that can be used – with a limited carbon and environmental footprint – to produce food, feed, pharmaceuticals, bioplastics, fertilisers, biofuels etc. In addition, it offers other benefits such as bioremediation. Algae farming is also considered by many as a valuable way of “sea reforestation” which would help with biodiversity and to mitigate effects of climate change in the marine environment. The Commission expects to have this strategy adopted in the first half of next year. Romania is invited to harness this opportunity and consider the support to the algae sector in its vision for aquaculture in the coming years, through its Multiannual National Strategic Plan for Aquaculture 2021-2030. The national European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund Programme could also envisage specific support, if necessary.*

*On the **Union-supported research and innovation** results made available at local level to the broader stakeholders, the Communication invites them to join forces and invest collectively in ocean data, research and innovation, blue skills and mobilize public and private funding. The BlueInvest Platform provides small and medium sized enterprises and start-ups with customised support, visibility, access to investors and investment-readiness advice to bring the results of the research up to the market. In addition the BlueInvest equity fund will combine financial contributions from the EU budget with private venture capital to finance blue tech start-ups.*

*Applying research and innovation in blue economy sectors to boost competitiveness and circular paths demands important efforts in terms of **reskilling and upskilling**. In this line, the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund includes dedicated funding for career development in the blue economy and supports skilling efforts in diverse sectors. Member States are invited to focus their specific priorities in the national programmes of the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund.*

*Finally, **Smart Specialisation Strategies** are a valuable tool to support innovation and transition towards a sustainable blue economy harnessing growth opportunities and creating the necessary innovation ecosystems in Member States and regions. In the 2021-2027 period the Commission is keen to see as many Member States and regions as possible include blue economy in their Smart Specialisation Strategies and will support blue economy related interregional partnerships and value chains to boost innovation investment.*

Accordingly, a *Smart Specialisation thematic platform for sustainable blue economy* will be launched in 2022 and will be fully operational in 2023. The platform will allow a structured permanent support to the stakeholders, with a set of services, including advice to Member States and regional authorities on how to design and implement their smart specialisation strategies through the promotion of the 4 helix approach for stakeholders' involvement (public authorities, business, academia, civil society). This will facilitate mutual learning, local and interregional networking and partnerships opportunities, etc.

In the framework of the EU regional sea basin strategies, the **Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea**, endorsed in the 2019 Bucharest Declaration by the six riparian countries and the Republic of Moldova, promotes a joint vision and goals to support the potential of the blue economy sectors, while tackling the challenges linked to the sustainable exploitation of the marine resources.

Regional cooperation frameworks such as the Common Maritime Agenda can function as pilots of the new approach, which the Communication on the new approach for a sustainable blue economy delineates, thus promoting it beyond the EU. The green transition and recovery challenges of the blue economy have no borders. While in the blue economy sectors 'the environment is the economy', the regional dimension can complement the national efforts providing needed solutions at sea basin level.

In particular, the Common Maritime Agenda includes a specific priority that promotes **transport and digital connectivity** of the Black Sea, with actions tackling **sustainable and safe shipping**, protecting the marine environment through the development of modern navigation systems, environmentally friendly and carbon emissions efficient and safe ships, sustainable and competitive interconnections for multimodal transport, use of liquefied natural gas (LNG) and compressed natural gas (CNG) as an alternative to oil-derived fuels for ships.

The Commission appreciates the active role of Romania in the framework of the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea and its efforts to identify bankable regional and national projects while embedding the priorities of this Agenda in the 2021-2027 national and regional programmes. The Commission calls for enhanced cooperation with Bulgaria, as the two EU Member States have a key role to forward EU policies. Romania and Bulgaria could thus lead by example vis-a-vis the other Black Sea coastal states.

The pandemic has further boosted the demand for "slow tourism" and outdoor tourism. This can be a possibility of new economy niches for the **small port cities** that can **diversify their attractiveness by developing also sustainable tourism destination packages**, linking inland, coastal and maritime tourism.

The framework provided by the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea can facilitate the regional cooperation and networks on all kinds of diversified forms of sustainable tourism and promote new ones: leisure and business, leisure and sport-related and cultural tourism, underwater cultural heritage itineraries, cruising including small-scale cruising/yachting, pescaturism and nature tourism.

To ensure that offshore renewable energy can help reach the EU's ambitious energy and climate targets, the Commission published in November 2020 a dedicated EU strategy on offshore renewable energy that assesses its potential contribution and proposes ways forward to support the long-term sustainable development of this sector.

*Europe has the largest maritime space in the world and is global leader in **offshore renewable energy with 90% of the world offshore wind capacity** and strong technological leadership for wave and tidal technologies. To that end, there are good examples of regional cooperation, for instance, the Baltic Sea.*

*Regarding the Black Sea, there are interesting studies that confirm the potential interest in investing in this sector in order to **complement the mix of renewable energy resources**. In fact, the research in **marine renewable energies** is promoted in the framework of the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea, in order to provide better scientific knowledge and understanding for the potentialities of this alternative energy sources also in terms of emerging blue economy sectors, triggering new growth and job opportunities.*

*The **pollution of the Black Sea** is one of the main challenges of the region. Obviously, the challenge requires efforts at national level and in terms of reinforced regional cooperation. To this end, the seven countries of the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea have identified a specific goal tackling **“Healthy marine and coastal ecosystems”**. This goal includes priorities covering the protection and sustainability of the marine ecosystem, marine pollution and plastic litter, innovative marine research infrastructures, production, management and sharing of marine and coastal environmental knowledge for effective environmental monitoring and observation.*

In complement, the Commission implements in the region the 4th phase of the EU4EMBLAS project whose overall objective is to help improve protection of the Black Sea environment, while the World Bank will soon launch the Blueing the Black Sea programme whose Pillar 1 “Save the Sea” aims at reducing pollution in the Black Sea.

It is thus crucial that the riparian countries of the Black Sea keep high on their political agendas the depollution objectives, while cooperating at regional level to upscale the impact of the current initiatives and framework.

*Finally, the Commission is pleased to inform that on 29 September 2021, **the Communication on EU Missions** was adopted, launching five new EU Missions. These Missions are a main novelty of the new research and innovation programme, Horizon Europe and a commitment to solve major societal challenges. In particular, the **Mission “Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030”** aims to scale up solutions and accelerate the transition towards restoring the health of our ocean, seas and inland waters. It will deliver on the European Green Deal by restoring ecosystems and biodiversity, eliminating pollution, and making the blue economy carbon-neutral and circular. In its first phase, the Mission will launch area-based lighthouses including a restoration lighthouse in the Danube river basin. In the second phase after 2025, the Mission will support the scale-up of projects throughout the EU.*