



DG MARE

Charlina VITCHEVA, Director General

**EU Macro-Regional and Sea Basin Strategies Days
Opening Session
([The Egg](#), 12 June 2024, 13:00-14:00)**

BRIEFING NOTE

Scene setter / Context:

The event “EU Macro-Regional and Sea Basin Strategies Days” will take place from 12 to 14 June 2024 at “The Egg” in Brussels. For the first time this year, it is jointly organised by DG REGIO and DG MARE with the objective to showcase synergies and communalities between the macro-regional strategies and the sea basins strategies.

The event will serve as a communication and networking platform, enhancing coordination among participating countries, pillars coordinators, stakeholders, presidencies’ strategies and representatives of the EU institutions.

You will intervene at the event’s official opening on 12 June at 13:00-14:00. You will be the second speaker, after the Director-General of DG REGIO Ms Themis Christophidou.

The following speakers will also intervene after you:

- Ambassador Dr Harald Stranzl, National coordinator for the EU Strategy for Danube Region (EUSDR), Head of the Department for Foreign Trade and Trade Policy, Austria.*
- Marisa Lameiras da Silva, Director General for Maritime Policy, Representative of the Portuguese presidency of the WESTMed Sea Basin Strategy*

The agenda of the event is annexed to the briefing.

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Speech - Opening Session:

- Good afternoon and thank you for coming to this important event.
- I'm very pleased that MARE together with DG REGIO, are here together with you today to exchange knowledge, create synergies and bolster our efforts around our four macro-regional strategies and three sea-basin strategies.
- These strategies have been working side by side since 2011, when the Atlantic Strategy was launched.
- This was the first large framework for cooperation on maritime affairs at regional, national and sea basin level in Europe.
- 13 years on, two more sea basin strategies are now promoting a sustainable blue economy: the WestMED in the Western Mediterranean and the Common Maritime Agenda in the Black Sea region.
- A total of 8 EU Member States and 9 non-EU countries are involved in these sea basin strategies; and the numbers speak for themselves:
 - more than 180 project ideas supported, primarily targeting environmental protection, sustainable activities and social inclusion;
 - nearly 90 billion euro invested, coming from EU, national, regional and private sources, raising the profile of local businesses and supporting coastal communities.
- The strategies have also established:
 - a solid governance mechanism that strengthens cooperation at all levels - among countries but also among regions and stakeholders;
 - a clear thematic focus. The last decade brought along new imperatives of sustainability, carbon neutrality and resilience. Imperatives that confirm that we need to work together.

- The EU Member States in the Atlantic are working on a crucial objective - the energy transition of the maritime sector. They are increasing knowledge and supporting the development of innovative technologies for vessels and port infrastructure. Last year they adopted a new Ministerial Declaration to this effect.
- In so doing, they are bringing us closer to the goals of the European Green Deal, and – importantly – they are promoting the EU’s strategic autonomy in the field of energy.
- Also last year, the new Ministerial Declaration of the West MED Initiative allowed to deepen the cooperation between EU and non-EU countries along the Northern and Southern shores of the Western Mediterranean, helping dialogue and moving forward with concrete projects.
- We are happy to report progress in the different thematic strands, such as green shipping and ports, innovative aquaculture and the alliance of maritime clusters.
- In the broader Mediterranean, regional cooperation in the maritime domain continues under the Union for the Mediterranean.
- In the Black Sea, the Common Maritime Agenda has set up concrete collaboration among countries.
- Great effort has been put into promoting investment in innovative and high-tech startups in collaboration with our BlueInvest initiative.
- This is obviously crucial, as projects and initiatives can only develop and evolve if adequately supported.
- And here too, there is progress despite the geopolitical challenges in the region.
- Indeed all of the sea-basin strategies deserve praise. In the last few years, these have faced Brexit, the COVID pandemic, and the war in Ukraine.

- Yet they have kept functioning and delivering results. They are now so mature that their annual events and activities attract all stakeholders.
- And their success story has inspired a new sea basin initiative now in the making: the Great North Sea Basin Initiative.
- At our annual European Maritime Day held recently in Svendborg, Denmark, we organised a high-level panel with the Presidencies of the Atlantic Sea-Basin Strategy, the West-Med Initiative, the Black Sea Synergy, and the emerging Greater North Sea Basin Initiative.
- The representatives of each sea basin strategy shared their experiences and reflections on the challenges they face in developing a sustainable blue economy in Europe.
- Given its success, we decided to repeat this every year during the EMD.
- DG MARE is also supporting maritime regional cooperation through the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund.
- We are supporting several successful projects in our sea basins: on tourism, green transport and ports, diversification in fisheries, response to marine pollution, and maritime clusters.
- The Mission Restore our Ocean and Waters is also regionalised. There are four hubs where Mission solutions are deployed, and these are the Atlantic-Arctic, the Baltic-North Sea, the Danube - Black Sea, and the Mediterranean Sea.
- Moreover, the “associated regions” can join specific projects and replicate the solutions developed in their own area.
- This Mission and its Charter are acting as a catalyst for synergies and complementarities across different EU, national and regional programmes.
- We are already in touch with the Danube Strategy coordinators for the priority area on water quality; exchanging on the Baltic

Strategy Action Plan; and, of course, contributing to the sea basin strategies in the Atlantic, the Black Sea and Mediterranean.

- I'd like to see how we can further align the macroregional and sea-basin strategies with the Mission Restore our Ocean and Waters, so that the Mission can boost the implementation of the relevant actions in all basins.
- The R&I support also aims to develop and demonstrate innovative solutions with high replicability potential within each basin and beyond.
- That is where smart specialisation strategies come in.
- DG MARE has put a lot of effort into encouraging the implementation of S3, and in cooperation with DG REGIO we have set up a new S3 thematic platform on the sustainable blue economy.
- The first S3 partnerships under this platform have just been approved: "*Circular Smart Aquaculture*", "*Maritime Sustainable Blue Bio-Economy*", and the newest one, "*Blue4Change*", addressing marine renewables.
- It would amiss if I didn't give you an important and exciting piece of news:
- Tomorrow, at the Digital Ocean Forum 2024, we will unveil the prototype of the EU digital twin of the ocean and show how it can: help us develop our blue economy sustainably; help us manage our ocean resources responsibly; and help us implement EU policies, as well as the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.

Conclusion

- In conclusion, the sea basin strategies are incredibly useful to help us reach our policy goals but also to enhance cooperation both within the EU and with our neighbouring countries.

- But we cannot live in a void. Faced as we are by challenges that know no limits and no borders, it is crucial that we build and maintain a strong link between land and sea.
- Closer cooperation between macro-regional and sea-basin strategies, for example through crosscutting working groups or by participating in each other's governing bodies, allows for this sea-to-land approach.
- And it allows us to promote our policy priorities of a green and digital transition.
- That is why "*Strategies4cooperation*" is our motto.
- Thank you for your attention. I wish you all a successful event!

Background information

Sea Basin Strategies (SBS)

The European Commission has been supporting the establishment and implementation of three sea basin strategies in the Atlantic, the Western Mediterranean and the Black Sea for an innovative and sustainable blue economy. A new initiative for the North Sea is under preparation.

The EU approach on Sustainable Blue Economy, proposes:

- An agenda for the decarbonisation of the blue economy sectors, the conservation of our natural capital, the circular economy and responsible food production (with a particular focus on the sustainable performance of maritime transport, shipbuilding/repairing, port activities, fisheries, marine aquaculture, coastal/maritime tourism, blue biotechnologies, and marine renewable energy, among others).
- A set of tools (i.e. ocean knowledge, research and innovation, investments, blue skills & jobs) and a series of enablers to support the sustainability of the Blue Economy (including Maritime Spatial Planning, citizen engagement and ocean literacy, regional cooperation at sea basin level, maritime security, and international ocean governance, among others).

The European Commission recognised the benefits of cooperation through the three sea basin strategies, for a coherent policy framework based on regional cooperation and involvement of all stakeholders.

Atlantic Strategy

The Atlantic Maritime Strategy, born in 2011, was the first sea-basin strategy in Europe. In 2013 an action plan was added to it, and was then revised in 2020, after a mid-term review revealing some shortcomings. The new Action Plan (AAP 2.0) proposes actions to develop the sustainable blue economy in the four participating countries (ES, PT, IE FR), addressing challenges and opportunities with a thematic focus based on four pillars: 1) Atlantic ports as gateways & hubs for the blue economy 2) Blue skills and ocean literacy 3) Marine renewable energy 4) Coastal resilience and healthy ocean A cross-cutting theme centred on the All Atlantic Ocean Research Alliance (AORA) brings an international dimension to the Plan.

Every year, a Stakeholders' conference is organised, gathering public authorities, academia, regional representatives, researchers and businesses from relevant blue economy sectors. The purpose of this event is to take stock of relevant thematic priorities and funding opportunities, while promoting business matchmaking

Last year and for the first time, a High-Level Ministerial meeting took place on 18 October 2023 in Porto to co-sign a Ministerial Declaration. Under the lead of the Portuguese Presidency, the 4 Atlantic MS (PT, ES, FR, IE) agreed to put the emphasis on decarbonisation, marine renewable energies, tackling marine pollution, biodiversity protection, blue skills and technology transfer.

In particular, the Atlantic countries jointly commit to pave the way for the further expansion of offshore renewable energy, for example by taking measures to deploy wave or tidal pilot farms in Atlantic waters before 2025, in order to meet the intermediate target of 100MW as set by the EU offshore renewable strategy.

Common Maritime Agenda (CMA) for the Black Sea

In 2019, the Black Sea coastal countries and the Republic of Moldova committed to working together to support the blue economy at sea basin level under the Common Maritime Agenda

for the Black Sea (CMA). In response to Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, the participation of Russia in the CMA has been suspended, as well as all forms of cooperation at regional and national level with Russian stakeholders. Nowadays the initiative sees 6 countries cooperate at regional level: 2 MS (BG, RO) and 4 EU-candidate countries (TUR, MD, UA, GE).

The CMA is developed in the wider framework of the Black Sea Synergy and is considered one of its flagship initiatives, along with the Black Sea Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA), the CMA's scientific pillar.

The CMA sets 3 main goals to help generate sustainable growth in coastal regions:

1. Healthy marine and coastal ecosystems
2. A competitive, innovative, and sustainable blue economy for the Black Sea, and
3. Fostering Investment in the Black Sea blue economy.

These goals are further declined into 10 priorities and concrete actions (e.g., projects).

The CMA is a voluntary, bottom-up initiative, owned and driven by the participating countries.

Since its establishment, it has contributed to reinforcing regional dialogue and enhanced cooperation on maritime affairs among participating countries and stakeholders. It has set in place a stable and reliable regional framework to address the challenges and opportunities of the blue economy sectors in the Black Sea sea-basin, while ensuring environmental sustainability, fostering growth, and promoting joint blue economy initiatives. One of the key objectives of the initiative is to identify and support projects that have a concrete impact on the Black Sea countries, involving multilevel stakeholders of the blue economy sectors and aligning to the extent possible relevant EU, international and national funding opportunities.

Its governance rests with CMA Steering Group, which provides guidance and necessary support to ensure that expected results are achieved and is responsible for the strategic decision-making related to the implementation of the initiative. The Group comprises representatives from the countries (competent ministries) and the European Commission (DG MARE). Regional and international organisations active in the Black Sea act as observer bodies, mutually reinforcing the work of the Steering Group. The Group is chaired on a rotating basis by the participating countries.

There are no direct funds allocated to the CMA, but in 2020, the Commission launched an Assistance Mechanism to provide capacity-building support to participating countries. The Assistance Mechanism facilitates awareness and capacity of local and regional stakeholders by providing the Black Sea community with expertise on blue economy, a network across borders to help project leaders find the right partners, as well as support with project idea development and identification of funding opportunities. It is supported by a network of National Hubs, teams of national experts with an extensive network and solid knowledge of funding opportunities. These offer tailored guidance to stakeholders on project development, funding opportunities and partner matchmaking. They regularly organise national events on blue economy topics.

The normal running of activities under the CMA was deeply impacted by the war in Ukraine. Cooperation at the regional level was suspended from February until November 2022. During this period, the focus shifted to national activities with the active engagement of National Hubs and promotion of blue economy at national level with the organisation of online events, except in Ukraine. This allowed to relaunch regional cooperation in December 2022 under the excellent coordination of Romania (authority in charge: Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Romania made great progress under its 2023 coordination of the CMA, including by organising of a successful 2-day stakeholder conference in Bucharest attracting more than 200 stakeholders from the region, partner initiatives and project representatives, and by

launching the first-ever technical group of national experts on sustainable aquaculture in the Black Sea.

These developments pave the way for more progress to be achieved this year by Moldova (2024 coordinator). Moldova has set up a workplan of activities and events revolving around the following priorities: fight against marine and riverine pollution, green and innovative maritime infrastructure, marine knowledge and observation, funding opportunities and investment. Synergetic work will continue with strategic initiatives such as BlueInvest and international partners like the World Bank. Moldova will host the annual stakeholder conference in Chisinau, in September, with a focus on EU enlargement and prospects this might bring to the regional blue economy.

Next year, according to alphabetical order, coordinator of the initiative should be Ukraine (still tbc).

WestMED Initiative

The WestMED initiative is the result of years of dialogue between ten countries in the western Mediterranean region involved in the ‘5+5 Dialogue’: five EU Member States (France, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Malta), and five Southern partner countries (Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia).

The Initiative for the sustainable development of the blue economy in the western Mediterranean region was adopted by the European Commission on 19 April 2017 and endorsed by the Council of the EU on 26 June 2017.

These countries are ready and willing to work together on their shared interests for the region:

- to increase maritime safety and security,
- promote sustainable blue growth and jobs,
- and preserve ecosystems and biodiversity.

In February 2021, the Second Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Blue Economy of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) recognised the WestMED initiative as a successful example of cooperation and a catalyst for the development of sustainable blue economy.

In January 2023 the EC published a report on the implementation of the sea basin strategy, based on the reporting from the countries. It concluded that the Initiative is a successful factor of soft diplomacy and technical cooperation in the area, with strategic partnerships ongoing. It also recommended to ‘reconfirm and streamline priorities.

So, in June 2023, a Third Ministerial Declaration reassessed and updated the priorities, stating to focus on:

- Sustainable production and consumption (in particular, through the support of the energy transition of Maritime Transport and Ports, Innovative and restorative aquaculture and fisheries and Coastal and maritime eco-Tourism).
- Maritime Clusters
- Blue skills and jobs/Ocean literacy and youth/ Promoting training and technology transfer
- Promoting Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP)
- Decarbonisation of the blue economy and, importantly, boosting the Marine Renewable Energy sectors
- Stepping up the efforts to tackle air and marine pollution
- Increasing ambition for preserving marine and coastal biodiversity in the Mediterranean
- Developing coastal resilience solutions and early warning systems

- Maritime security and surveillance as a pre-condition for a prosperous and sustainable blue economy in the Mediterranean.

The Mission “Restore our ocean and waters by 2030”

European Missions are a new instrument to bring concrete solutions to the big challenges of our time. Such as fighting cancer, adapting to climate change, protecting the ocean, living in greener cities and ensuring healthy soil and food.

The Mission “Restore our ocean and waters by 2030” is our commitment to reverse the deterioration of the ocean, seas, rivers and lakes, which are ultimately one single system. With a 2030 horizon, we target three main challenges for our Ocean and waters: biodiversity degradation, pollution and carbon emissions.

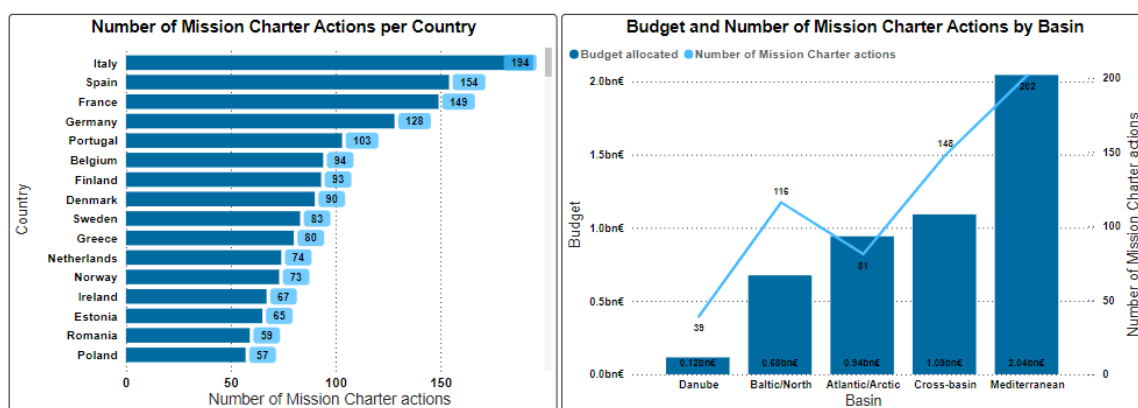
The targets we want to achieve are not random and disconnected from what the Commission is working on, but fully in line with strategies under the European Green Deal, namely the Biodiversity Strategy, Zero Pollution Action Plan and Sustainable Blue Economy.

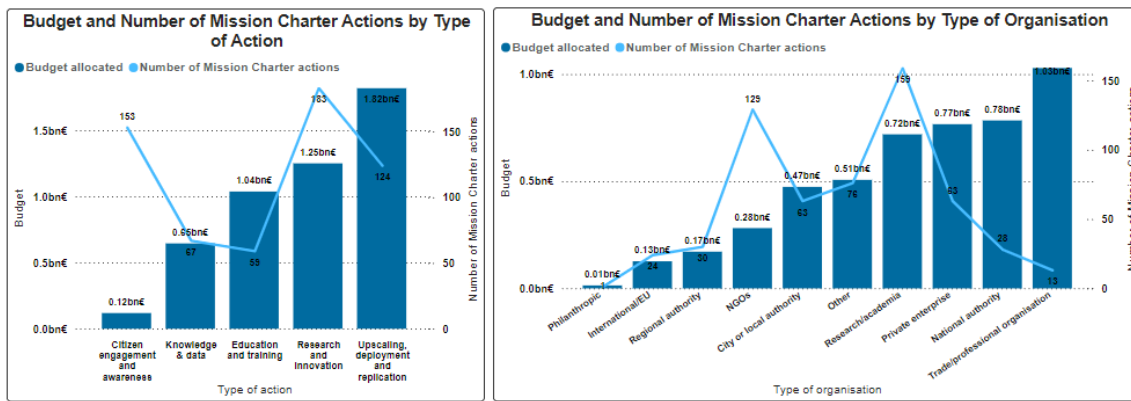
This Mission seeks to speed up these strategies implementation by utilising two factors: knowledge and people. Knowledge to build the European Digital Twin of the Ocean as a platform allowing us to make management decisions based on the best available evidence. People to apply from day-to-day changes to a whole new environmental behaviour.

The Mission is pooling funds from:

- o EMFAF national plans (26 MSs explicitly referring to the Mission in their operational programme and 17 in their Partnership agreement),
- o BlueInvest with EUR 1.5 billion in risk finance
- o The “Blue champions” pilot scheme with the EIB to support 20 innovative companies with financial advice, which were announced last month at the EIB Venture Debt Summit.
- o the European Solidarity Corps allowing young people to volunteer for the restoration of the ocean (EUR 16.5 million investment for the five Missions).
- o Recovery and Resilience Funds, with EUR 11.7 billion of investments in Mission related activities, Interreg and Copernicus.

Charter results





Smart Specialization

In the 2014/2020 period, the smart specialisation approach has progressively evolved from an ex-ante conditionality for using ERDF funds, into a bottom-up process that involves the quadruple helix of stakeholders – public authorities, business, academia and citizens - in the identification of regional and national sectors with a competitive advantage, in order to prioritise accordingly R&I investments.

More than 40 regions had selected blue economy sectors/subsectors as Smart specialisation strategies priorities in the 2014/2020 programming period.

Building on the inclusion of blue economy in some regional and national S3 in 2014-2020 and 2021-2027, last year DG MARE organised a series of brokerage sessions on key blue economy sectors (blue biotechnology, marine renewable energy, coastal and maritime tourism, fisheries, and aquaculture) to mobilise and inform blue economy stakeholders of the potential of Smart Specialisation.

These sessions helped identify the key services needed for regions and stakeholders to engage in future S3 blue economy partnerships, as well as specific areas of expertise (sub-topics) with innovation potential, on which these could focus.

In close collaboration with DG REGIO, in the last quarter of 2022, DG MARE launched a new Smart Specialisation Thematic Platform for a Sustainable Blue Economy. This Platform joins the three already existing platforms, which represent important tools for the effective implementation of Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3) set by EU Member States and regions in programming their research and innovation investments.

The new Thematic Platform is now fully operational, encouraging regions and their stakeholders to collaborate in designing their innovation strategies, boosting investment and allowing blue economy sectors to develop smart, sustainable business models.

Further development and operationalisation of the Thematic Platform, as well as the services offered (including support for partnership creation, capacity building, training, animation, etc.), are being coordinated with DG REGIO and their external contractor, responsible for the management of the new S3 Community of Practice and the other existing thematic platforms.

On 30 March 2023, DG REGIO formally launched the new S3 Community of Practice (S3 CoP), the central knowledge and information hub for Smart Specialisation in the EU. The S3 CoP provides practitioners with a broad set of strategic services, such as guidance, networking, support and peer learning on S3 (e.g. via an expert group, several working groups, including on interregional cooperation, ad hoc support to regions, etc.). Blue economy stakeholders interested in joining a S3 thematic partnership will have access to the S3 CoP and its services, including the S3 Thematic Platform on Sustainable Blue Economy.

Following the decisions of the assessment panel including DG REGIO, DG MARE, and the Smart Specialisation Community of Practice (S3 CoP) Secretariat, three thematic S3 partnerships on Sustainable Blue Economy have been approved: (1) Circular Smart Aquaculture , (2) Maritime Sustainable Blue Bio-economy and (3) BlueXChange addressing marine renewable energy.

The first two have already become members of the S3 Thematic Platform for Sustainable Blue Economy and have been presented to the Steering Committee meeting took place on 29 November 2023 in Barcelona, back to back with the S3 Forum on 28 November 2023. The 3rd one, very recently accepted, will be presented to the next Steering Committee meeting taking place on line on 11 June 2024.

BIOGRAPHIES

THEMIS CHRISTOPHIDOU



Themis Christophidou is the Director-General for Regional and Urban Policy of the European Commission, since September 2023. She is a civil engineer with 38 years of experience in private and public sector management.

After having worked in the private sector for 15 years, she joined the European Commission in 2001. Having held various positions in the Directorate-General for Regional and Urban policy, she worked as Deputy Head of Cabinet of Androulla Vassiliou, Commissioner for education, culture, multilingualism, youth and

sport in 2010-2011. From 2011 to 2014, Themis Christophidou worked as Head of Cabinet of Maria Damanaki, Commissioner for maritime affairs and fisheries, and from 2014 to 2018, she was Head of Cabinet of Christos Stylianides, Commissioner for humanitarian aid and crisis management. She became Director-General for education, youth, sport and culture in March 2018.

Themis Christophidou is an alumna of the civil engineering school of the Athens Polytechnic Metsovio, specialised in transport infrastructure and urban transport. Born in Famagusta, Cyprus, she is trilingual Greek, French, English.

Ambassador Dr HARALD STANZL



Dr Harald Stranzl is the National coordinator of the EU Danube Region and EU Alpine Region Strategy, head of the Department for Foreign Trade and Trade Policy, as well as Economic Security at the Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs, Vienna.

He is the Head of Department - Foreign Economic Relations and Trade, Economic Security - Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs, Austria