

Key take-away messages from the “Synergies among the strategies; taking stock and looking ahead”

Panel discussion

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Speakers:

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- Ms Andra Kuzmina, Latvian Presidency for the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region
- Ms Mathilde Konstantopoulou, Greek Presidency for the EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region
- Mr Markku Markkula, Vice Presidente of the Committee of the Regions
- Ms Isabelle Perret, French Presidency of the EU Sea Basin Strategy for the Atlantic

Main take-away messages:

- All seas support unique ecosystems yet are severely affected by general threats like Climate change, a loss of biodiversity, and pollution.
- Shared resources and the shared use of sea calls for cross-sectoral and cross border cooperation.
- The common areas of cooperation - wind energy, nature preservation, fishery, coastal protection, and freight are getting even tighter with further developments. We all face two main challenges:
 - 1) how to fit all uses and transitions into the seas?
 - 2) how to uphold the ecological balance despite incoming human activities?
- There is a strong need to respond to geopolitical changes, especially regarding resilience-building and the need for even better coordination and complementarity between different formats and levels of the MSR's multilevel governance structures.
- This is why the countries should work together more strongly on enhanced integrated and international cooperation regarding the MRS and Sea Basin strategies.
- The strength of cooperation is directly dependent upon the strength of its stakeholders.

- The member states and other stakeholders should clarify to themselves what they really want – what kind of added value the macro-regional strategy (or another strengthened cooperation format) could bring. Furthermore, the present policy is (that an MRS should include all the countries of the region, as well as non-EU countries).
- We also have to think about how to boost up the political will.
- By cooperating in the common areas, we should work towards the transition to a sustainable, resilient, decarbonised and competitive blue economy, while achieving a good environmental status of the seas.
- One of the starting points for the enhancement of the health of the seas should be the early education of children on humanity's impact on the waters and the inclusion of ethics in education programmes.
- Additionally, one of the key focus areas in the strategies has to be stimulating innovation and establishing sustainable economic growth in the long run.
- Strategies need to be a platform for communication and the sharing of knowledge, data, and best practices.
- The flow of information and sharing of best practices between different policy areas and other substance actors would be desirable.
- More can be done to improve communications and connections to broader EU opportunities, making the EU more strategically coordinated in its actions and policies.
- The main bottleneck for cooperation is embodied in resources.
- Another bottleneck is the different governance setups and thematic combinations. And perhaps also different ways of including the local, regional, national and EU authorities.
- Both governance and thematic differences are understandable and likely the result of sound planning within the specific region taking into account their specific needs. Forcing similarities for the sake of cross-strategy cooperation runs the risk of making cooperation less viable within a specific region. And that is the main aim of each of us.
- Embedding/capitalization/funding remains one of the key issues most likely in all MRS and SBS. In order to work better with the funds, we could use more exchange between the MRS and SBS on best practices and good examples of cooperation we could all build on. Even if the MRS and SBS operate differently, the funds operate the same way. Again, we need to find common ground and the funds could be it.
- The strategies should not be used as a silver bullet as it is not the answer for all situations. We have also been thinking within our strategy what tasks

should be realised specifically through the Strategy. And what issues might be resolved in other formats?

- The way forward is to continue to identify common challenges and priorities by staying flexible and agile.
- The main added value of macro-regional and sea-basin strategies is in consolidation and coordination of on one hand EU, national and regional/local efforts and on the other of different sectorial interests to achieve more coherent and enhanced results in the region.
- Both sea basin and macro-regional strategies emphasize the importance of **protecting marine and coastal environments**. This includes biodiversity conservation, combating marine pollution, and sustainable fisheries management. By implementing joint measures to protect marine ecosystems, both kinds of strategies can ensure the long-term sustainability of marine resources, which are vital for the blue economy sectors such as tourism, fishing, and aquaculture.
- **Tourism** is a major economic driver in sea basin regions. Strategies can focus on eco-tourism and cultural tourism, promoting activities that protect natural and cultural heritage while boosting local economies. We can also learn from each other how to break seasonality and focus on sun & sea tourism.
- Enhancing the efficiency and sustainability of **maritime transport and port operations**. Improved maritime transport infrastructure and operations can boost trade and economic activities, crucial for the blue economy. Implementing smart port technologies, such as automated logistics, IoT, and big data analytics, can optimize operations and reduce emissions. Additionally, transitioning to alternative fuels and energy-efficient technologies in shipping can significantly contribute to the green transition.
- Even though the potentials for the use of **renewable energy sources** vary greatly between the sea basins, there are many areas in which we can learn from each other, for example in improving energy efficiency, integration of digital technologies, such as smart grids and energy management systems, promoting R&D and innovation in energy technologies. Stimulating cooperation in marine **research and innovation** between the two kinds of strategies can drive to new economic opportunities and sustainable practices.
- The exchange platform between the 4 macro-regions and their supporting units supported by Interact could be further enhanced and extended also towards the sea-basin strategies.
- Furthermore, the use of existing EU/UN initiatives and platforms encouraging interregional exchange could be further explored. For example, S3 Community of Practice and Smart Specialization Thematic Partnerships or cooperation initiatives established within the Mediterranean Sea basin, for example BlueMed or Barcelona Convention.

- Climate neutrality is far more than an environmental imperative; it is also a critical economic, industrial, wellness, and security concern. Our approach must reflect this broad spectrum of impact, recognizing that the steps we take towards climate neutrality are steps towards strengthening our economy, our global competitiveness, our public health, and our security.
- To support the goals of such strategies, it is crucial to continue and enhance funding instruments making them more impact-oriented rather than maintaining a vast array of fragmented projects. These should be orchestrated into larger, change-maker initiatives to ensure that collaboratively defined strategic objectives are achieved.