

In the news

The integrated maritime policy is gradually becoming a reality in the European Union. Portugal has drawn up its National Strategy for the Sea which, following the example of the European Union's Blue Book, proposes an integrated vision of its future national maritime policy.



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Maritime affairs: towards an integrated policy

On 10 October 2007, the Commission adopted a Communication and an Action Plan that lay the foundations for an integrated maritime policy for the European Union. The new policy aims to realise the tremendous potential of the world's oceans while adopting an integrated rather than a sector-specific approach.

Maritime activities represent five million jobs in Europe in the sectors of maritime transport and logistics, fisheries, marine sciences and engineering, offshore energy and tourism. Maritime regions account for around 40% of the European Union's GDP, while some 90% of EU exports are transported by sea. And the sector still has significant growth potential, thanks to increasing demand for energy, expanding international trade, development of tourism, etc.

This growth, however, comes with its share of risks. With mounting pressure on marine ecosystems and growing competition for the use of marine and coastal areas, the different maritime activities can no longer be dealt with in isolation. If the EU is to use its oceans in a sustainable manner, then its maritime policy must be developed using an integrated approach based on collaboration and cooperation.

That is why the European Commission published a Green Paper on this subject over a year ago. During the extensive consultation that followed, stakeholders submitted their ideas to the Commission and voiced broad-based support for its initiative. This process resulted in the adoption, on 10 October, of a Communication from the European Commission known as 'The Blue Book', accompanied by a detailed Action Plan and a report on the stakeholder consultation.

The Action Plan that accompanies the Communication gives a more precise idea of the range and scope of projects that will be covered by the new integrated maritime policy. It provides for the establishment of a European Space for Maritime Transport without barriers, an integrated network for maritime surveillance, a European strategy for marine research and a European network of maritime clusters.

The Action Plan also includes a strong environmental dimension that will contribute to the European Union's efforts to combat climate change through the reduction of CO₂ emissions and pollution from navigation, for example. It also provides for a strategy to attenuate the impact of climate change on coastal regions.

The CFP concerned first and foremost

The Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) is obviously an integral part of this integrated maritime policy. While it has linkages with the action plan as a whole, there are certain points which concern it more directly, such as the fight against illegal fishing and the ban on destructive fishing practices on the high seas.

Of course, integration cannot be achieved through regulation alone. Integration is a new mindset that must be adopted by all of Europe's maritime stakeholders, in particular the Member States. They will be required to develop national integrated maritime policies putting into practice the European policy guidelines, in particular through coherent maritime spatial planning.

This new integrated approach will change the way the European Union formulates policies and adopts decisions. Henceforth, from the very first reflections on a given policy up to its concrete results on the ground, the focus will be on grasping the interactions between the different sectors concerned so as to ensure they are all taken into consideration. This approach will provide a coherent policy framework that will make possible the optimal and ecologically-viable development of all sea-related activities.

Portugal sets an example

In 2005, Portugal set up an institutional task force charged with developing a maritime strategy. This initiative is an important one, because Portugal is one of the European Union's leading maritime nations. The result of this work is the *National Strategy for the Sea*, unveiled in 2006. It sets out Portuguese maritime policy for the next decade – an integrated policy based on better scientific knowledge of the sea and appropriate maritime spatial planning. This approach is in keeping with the European Union's integrated maritime policy, to which Portugal has lent its wholehearted support.