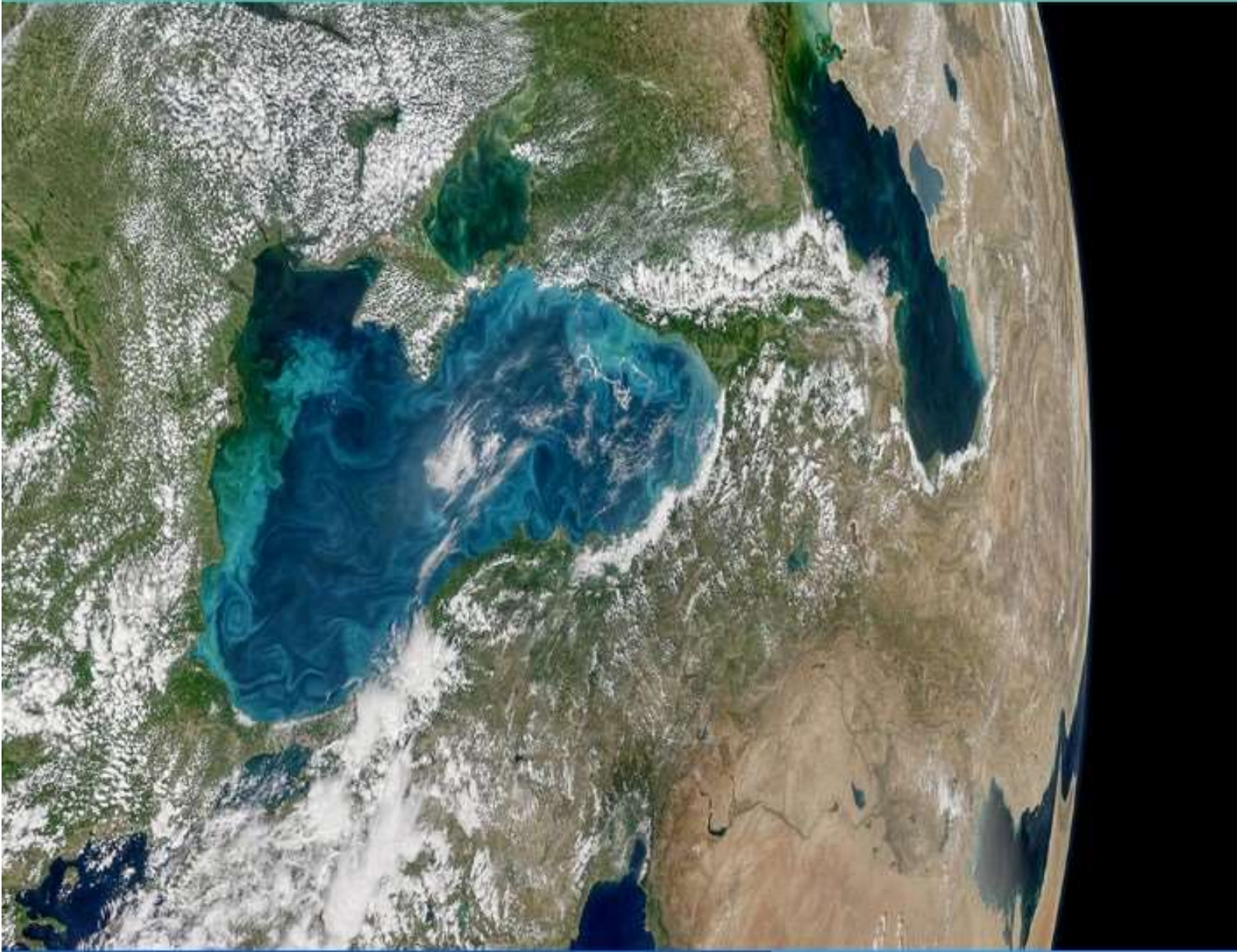


# Coordination of Marine and Maritime Research and Innovation in the Black Sea

## Black Sea CONNECT



**D2.5 Report on agreed measures on  
medium- and long-term articulation  
beyond the CSA lifetime**



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## Contents

1. Executive Summary.....	4
2. Introduction .....	5
3. Agreed measures on medium- and long-term articulation beyond the CSA lifetime.....	5
3.1 National Level Measures for the mid-and long-term legacy of the SRIA Implementation.....	6
3.1.1.1 Bulgaria .....	7
3.1.2 Georgia .....	7
3.1.3 Moldova.....	9
3.1.4 Romania.....	10
3.1.5 Türkiye .....	11
3.1.6 Ukraine .....	12
3.2 European Level and Regional Level Measures Towards SRIA Legacy .....	12
Contribution from European Commission .....	13
Contribution from Regional Organizations .....	14
3.3 Conclusions and Next Steps Beyond the CSA .....	15
Annex .....	18



## 1. Executive Summary

Black Sea CONNECT promotes a shared vision for a productive, healthy, resilient, sustainable, and better-valued Black Sea. The overall objective of the Action is to coordinate the development of the Black Sea Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA), based on the defined principles in the Burgas Vision Paper and support the development of a sustainable Blue Economy in the Black Sea. During the lifetime of the project, many activities took place for updating and consolidating the SRIA and its Implementation Plan (IP) and establishing an Operational Network of Funders to enable the uptake of SRIA and therefore promote the blue economy in the region. With these activities, the CSA also paved the way for a mechanism to ensure the SRIA implementation beyond the CSA's lifetime.

Black Sea CONNECT CSA through its activities during the lifetime of the project worked towards ensuring mechanisms for the long-term implementation of the Black Sea SRIA and its Implementation Plan. To do so, under the CSA the Operational Network of Funders (ONF) is developed to focus funding of joint actions as part of the Implementation Plan to address the key challenges and goals of the SRIA. Additionally, the CSA has actively taken part in and supported broader policy initiatives such as Horizon Europe Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership (SBEP), Mission Ocean and Waters, UN Decade of Ocean, and European Green Deal as well as regional ones such as the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea (CMA).

As a result, many short to medium-term - planned and scheduled actions that will continue some of the CSA achievements have been raised and consolidated for the final event of Black Sea CONNECT in Brussels “Launch of the Black Sea SRIA Implementation Plan: What is next for the Black Sea research and innovation cooperation?” that took place on 4 May in the European Parliament.

Based on the contributions and pledges made during this high-level event, this document outlines the national, regional and international level legacy-related agreed measures which will ensure further uptake of the Black Sea SRIA.





## 2. Introduction

Black Sea CONNECT promoted a shared vision for a productive, healthy, resilient, sustainable, and better-valued Black Sea. The overall objective of the Action was to coordinate the development of the Black Sea Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA), based on the defined principles in the Burgas Vision Paper and support the development of a sustainable Blue Economy in the Black Sea.

Overall, the main goal of the Action was to coordinate the development of the SRIA by aligning it with the principles outlined in the Burgas Vision Paper. Additionally, the project aimed to support the growth of a sustainable Blue Economy in the Black Sea region. The SRIA and its Implementation Plan provide guidance to stakeholders from academia, funding agencies, industry, policy, and society, enabling them to collaborate and address the fundamental challenges faced by the Black Sea. This includes promoting a sustainable blue economy, fostering economic prosperity, establishing crucial support systems and innovative research infrastructure, and enhancing education and capacity building. The project has facilitated the creation of synergistic activities such as establishing a functional network of funders, initiating transnational joint activities, and facilitating the transfer of knowledge and innovation to support a sustainable blue economy. Furthermore, the project aligns with the policy direction set in the Burgas Vision Paper and serves as a link between stakeholders, relevant initiatives, and institutions. In addition to the specific objectives, the project also focused on integrating policy, industry, and research, connecting innovation with the blue economy. It further strived to promote the alignment and convergence of national and international research and innovation activities, as well as relevant initiatives and investments.

## 3. Agreed measures on medium- and long-term articulation beyond the CSA lifetime

Black Sea CONNECT CSA through its activities during the lifetime of the project worked towards ensuring mechanisms for the long-term implementation of the Black Sea SRIA and its Implementation Plan. To do so, under the CSA, the Operational Network of Funders (ONF) is developed to ensure cooperation among public research funders at the regional level and focused funding of joint actions as part of the Implementation Plan to address the key challenges and goals of the SRIA. Additionally, the CSA has actively taken part in and supported broader policy initiatives such as Horizon Europe Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership (SBEP), Mission Ocean and Waters, UN Decade of Ocean, and Green Deal, as well as regional ones such as the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea (CMA).

In the Black Sea CONNECT CSA framework, the Black Sea ONF became a central driving force in reflecting the SRIA implementation at the country level. With the support and active participation of European Commission (EC) marine and maritime-related offices, such as DG RTD, DG MARE, coordination teams of Mission Ocean and Waters and SBEP were actively engaged in the CSA work throughout the lifetime. Mission Ocean and Waters, SBEP and other EU-supported programs such as InterReg, and EMFAF all present new opportunities for SRIA implementation for the medium and long term.

In the short term, it was evident that the Horizon 2020-supported SRIA implementing projects BRIDGE-BS and DOORS (active until the end of 2025) continue to provide scientific support if needed, and help the ONF members in implementing the SRIA priorities. The BRIDGE-BS and DOORS projects will be key in keeping the legacy of the SRIA alive in the next 2 years and passing the flag to future projects and initiatives. The Black Sea SRIA Implementation Plan (IP) has foreseen such a need and included in its Theme 11: Innovative Approaches to Connect Scientists, Policymakers, Industry and Society and Strategic Joint Action - 11.1 Develop mechanisms



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to continue the identification of new SRIA priorities and emerging topics of implementation are directly about CSA-type legacy-generating actions and this need has been endorsed by all parties.

All these connections were synthesized and presented in the final conference of the Black SEA CONNECT project in Brussels at the event entitled '*Launch of the SRIA Implementation Plan: What is Next for Black Sea Research and Innovation Cooperation?*'. This event took place on May 4<sup>th</sup> 2023, at the European Parliament, being hosted and chaired by **MEP Marian-Jean MARINESCU** in the framework of the SEArca Intergroup, and provided an occasion to launch the **Black Sea SRIA Implementation Plan**, setting the foundational work for protecting unique habitats of the Black Sea while supporting the development of sea-based sectors, which will then boost the blue economy and help create more jobs. The Implementation Plan, which was presented in detail during the event, outlines specifically designed research and innovation actions, actions to build vital support systems and innovative research infrastructures, actions to enhance education, and to build, develop and strengthen capacity. The Implementation Plan of the SRIA, as the scientific pillar of the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea, calls upon participants from academia, funding organisations, industry, policy, and society to take these strategic joint actions forward, in order to address the fundamental challenges of the Black Sea and promote sustainable blue economy. Policy-makers, Black Sea scientists and Black Sea Young Ambassadors, citizens, as well as the next generation of Black Sea youth and entrepreneurs and investors, all have a role to play as future change makers for the Black Sea.

In this context, it can be assessed that the actions of the IP were generally endorsed by country-level and regional and European-level policymakers and representatives. They provided different levels of detail on their views of the continuation of SRIA implementation and measures/steps to be taken towards this direction.

Here in the remainder of this document, we present the national and international level legacy-related agreed measures, starting with the national level and then continuing with the regional and European levels.

### 3.1 National Level Measures for the mid- and long-term legacy of the SRIA Implementation

Towards implementing the SRIA at the national level and leaving a long-lasting legacy, the Black Sea CONNECT CSA supported the establishment of an Operational Network of Funders and key players (ONF - reviewed in another deliverable see D3.5 for details). The CSA facilitated, with support from the European Commission, the cooperation and coordination among the Black Sea countries to promote the alignment and convergence of national research and innovation activities and relevant initiatives and investments. This was achieved by launching an operational network that included the appointed representatives of marine and maritime research funders and other key players at the national and international levels. The operational network was strengthened particularly by other similar strategies as well as work and products of previous and ongoing initiatives in other European sea basins. Briefly, to support the CSA legacy the ONF worked on:

- Ensuring the cooperation among public research funders at the regional level and facilitating the alignment of national priorities with already existing national funding streams.
- Focusing funding of joint actions as part of the Implementation Plan to address the key challenges and goals of the SRIA.
- Working multilaterally (as Member States or associated countries) in relation to Horizon Europe for its calls, like Pillar II Societal Challenges WP 2021-2022/WP 2023-2024 and for the European Partnership



- for a climate-neutral, sustainable, and productive Blue Economy (Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership) as co-fund approach between MS/AC and EU.
- Joint preparation of dedicated calls, multilateral through parallel funding at the same time in different countries for new projects outside Horizon Europe.

Consisting of funding agencies (ministry representatives) of Black Sea countries (Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Moldova, Turkey, Ukraine) and EC officials from DG RTD, DG MARE, and EEAS, the objective of the ONF is to streamline funding for the implementation of the SRIA IP joint actions. Through online and onsite/hybrid meetings organized in the last year under the Black Sea CONNECT CSA, ONF contributed greatly to the development of the IP. The ONF of Black Sea CONNECT finalized its future recommendations related to the CSA/SRIA legacy in the final phase of Black Sea CONNECT CSA and they provided these inputs in the Launch event. Here is a country-by-country overview of their contribution.

### 3.1.1.1 Bulgaria

**On behalf of Bulgaria, Milen BALTOV from Burgas Free University, with the mandate of the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science has given the final official standing of the country for implementing the SRIA.** For Bulgaria, the impact of the Burgas Vision paper still endures. It was reminded that the paper was initiated by the expert group during the European Maritime Day in Burgas in 2018, highlighting the importance of this event in carrying out the legacy of the SRIA. Bulgaria also hosted the general assemblies (GA) of the two Horizon 2020 SRIA projects - Burgas hosted the DOORS GA in June 2022 and Varna hosted the BRIDGE-BS GA together with the Blue Economy High Tech Summit for the Black Sea organized under the BRIDGE-BS project in September 2022. Both general assemblies were active in engaging local and regional stakeholders.

During the national-level SRIA consultations in Bulgaria, some suggestions for changes were concentrated to consider existing and innovative models; developing and advancing AI-powered decision support tools; investments in existing working prototypes instead of developing fundamentally new ones. A definite suggestion was the wind-related energy to be an action, and the blue carbon – another one. These SRIA priorities seem to converge with the innovation Strategy for Smart Specialisation in Bulgaria, which is now ready as a text and dominated by the horizontal issue of the circular economy. These priorities are also already integrated into Theme 8: Marine Renewable Energy and the two Strategic Joint Actions under this theme. Definitely, it will call also some new strategies in the two regions that have coastal Black Sea areas.

A real challenge will be the participation of Bulgarian players and stakeholders in the new calls. Bulgaria sees the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership as a key opportunity in this regard to implement Bulgarian SRIA priorities. For the moment, surprisingly more investor-driven pull is behind the blue economy acceleration. It comes in line with the quadruple helix approach and examples in Bulgaria of successful citizen science initiatives like the “Plastic Pirates”. Bulgaria demonstrated strong ownership of this European citizen science initiative and this link will be an important implementing mechanism of the CONNECT Implementation Plan Theme 7: Marine Litter and Strategic Joint Actions under this theme.

### 3.1.2 Georgia

**Tea TARIELASHVILI, from the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, presented a consolidated overview of Georgian contribution to the near future implementation of the SRIA.** It was highlighted that



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participation in different activities of European cooperation is of great importance for Georgia. The country sees investment in research and innovation as a key step toward a sustainable and healthy future for the country. A new era of cooperation within the Black Sea SRIA Framework may open up new opportunities for Georgian science and innovation. SRIA focuses on specific points, common vision, expected impact, and collaboration for Blue Economy in the region.

From the very beginning, the country has been involved in the process of defining a vision for regional development - SRIA was prepared by an international group of experts, including scientists from higher education institutions in Georgia. The Georgian group participated in various activities to update the document. The priorities identified in the SRIA document are in line with the existing challenges in Georgia and the development of the region. The Ministry as a governmental entity supporting education and scientific research in the country, emphasizes priorities of the Black Sea fundamental research, developing an innovative interdisciplinary research scheme, and supporting education towards the value of the Black Sea.

To support the process of implementation and dissemination of information about the importance of the Black Sea SRIA goals, a special intergovernmental working group was established by order of the Minister. It meets periodically to exchange views on the relevance of SRIA's goals and to promote dialogue between the CMA and SRIA, as it is the scientific pillar of the CMA.

Additionally, activities took place to identify key actors, ongoing projects, and priority areas and connect them to obtain input for the drafting of the implementation plan. The Ministry has completed the mapping of research groups and institutions involved in the Black Sea and regional research, especially those issues that are in line with the objectives of SRIA. Through stakeholder dialogue, priority areas that require "scientific strengthening", as well as issues that are relatively new and have a potential for future development are identified. Some of these priorities focus on promoting the issues such as science-based policymaking, marine litter management, community participation in science, enhancing existing research infrastructures, developing dedicated educational programs and training policymakers – all set the direction for development. Moreover, raising awareness of marine litter pollution, developing a training series for ECOPs and LATE COPS, and the activities of Black Sea Young Ambassadors and other Early Career Ocean Professionals - are also defined as priorities by Georgian stakeholders.

In line with these priorities, with the support of the Ministry, a special interdisciplinary event was held to promote Black Sea research, bringing together researchers from different fields. Such a large-scale outreach event will be held annually. Furthermore, the National Science Foundation of Georgia has developed an internationalization strategy, emphasizing the priorities of developing relations with science foundations in the Black Sea region and research related to the Black Sea.

The most important issue of Georgia's foreign policy priorities is the achievement of future integration in light of the European perspective of Georgia. The Government strives to mobilize the appropriate resources to advance the readiness of the state system in different directions, including in aligning research and innovation sector policies with EU Acquis. SRIA plays an important role in this process as well, and it is also a great example of science diplomacy that supports confidence-building, sustainability and positive regional dialogue.

Its implementation plan is in line with ERA actions (12. Action focused on industrial decarbonization through Accelerating green/digital transition of Europe's key industrial ecosystems, where Georgia has already started to get involved (Mutual Learning Exercise has just kicked off). Alongside Georgia's European integration





advancement, the process of development of the national ERA Roadmap stands high on the strategic agenda of the ministry, and the vision of the country in the direction of development of scientific cooperation.

At the local level, Georgia plans to revise and update the action plan to the national unified strategy of education and science for 2022-2030. As a result of the revision of the document, plans are in place to include the Black Sea activities. This link will be an important mechanism to carry the SRIA legacy forward.

At European Level, Georgia wants to ensure the compliance and synergy of the SRIA implementation plan with the processes that are taking place in the European Research Area, including all 18 ERA Actions that are running now. Georgia posits that SRIA should not be a stand-alone initiative, rather it should be an integral part of the wider ERA efforts, supporting the achievement, among other things, of the ERA policy agenda.

As the next steps, the National Science Foundation has planned to organize a targeted competition of grants at the national level, which will be dedicated to Black Sea research based on the themes identified by the SRIA objectives. It is planned to organize both bilateral and multilateral grant competitions for the countries of the Black Sea region. The Ministry will also actively communicate with other Ministries to promote the development of SRIA thematic issues and innovative ecosystem. As part of the Ministry's science popularization program, activities will be organized to promote research on the Black Sea and the coastal region and raise public awareness.

In summary, Georgia is fully supportive of the SRIA Implementation Plan and already outlined a planned set of measures for the near-term and long-term legacy of the SRIA. The representative finalized her contribution by emphasizing that the active participation of all parties in solving existing problems, vision and solutions based on scientific knowledge contribute to the dynamic development of the region and sustainable and "blue growth" of the Black Sea.

### 3.1.3 Moldova

**Sveatoslav POSTORONCĂ, Moldovan Office for Science and Technology in Brussels, represented the Republic of Moldova in the ONF activities as well as in the Brussels final conference.** Mr Postoronca pointed out that deep reforms in all domains and sectors are being promoted to align the structural shape as well as the concept to a common European approach, for which the research and innovation sector is not an exception. R&I national sector has been heavily reorganized with the transfer of research institutes from the Academy of Science to the Ministry in 2018 and the creation of the independent National Agency for Research and Development for funding. On the other hand, as they see in the chronology of the development of the Black Sea SRIA and IP, Moldovan stakeholders, mostly researchers, were active in offering their contribution by participating in the DANUBIUS-RI Preparatory Phase Consortium Led by the Romanian Institute GeoEcoMar in 2016 and even earlier. This denotes the possession of knowledge and skills in the field of aquatic sciences accumulated from previous activities. Studying a list on the site of the Agency of all national 147 funded projects, Moldova identified 19 of them related to research in water, biodiversity, fisheries, pollutants, and their impact on climate change with economic and social aspects. On the Dashboard of Horizon programs portal, as much as Moldova-involving 141 projects can be found, of which 20 are dedicated to aquatic sciences, including the H2020 projects BRIDGE-BS, DOORS, and Black Sea CONNECT. The results of the first round of consultations in 2020 speak for it, as well, offering us a vision that Moldovan researchers opt for almost all topics in four pillars, but prefer mostly scientific ones.



Related to specific features of the Black Sea, development of mathematical models, sustainable fisheries, and start-ups, these belong more to, maybe, aspects of innovation or connection with real sectors of the economy. Moldovan stakeholders were very positive to be involved in the realization of common projects between countries of the Black Sea basin in the frame of the adopted Implementation Plan. Especially the Strategic Joint Actions 2.2 (Developing a source-to-sink pilot study to identify the fluxes, transformation and impact of emerging contaminants (such as pharmaceuticals, antibiotics, anthropogenic nanoparticles) and identify hazards arising from their multiple biotic impacts on the marine ecosystem), 7.1 (Raise awareness on the marine litter pollution and solutions in the Black Sea targeting the broader public by linking with already existing initiatives and creating novel activities (such as activities of Black Sea Young Ambassadors and other Early Career Ocean Professionals (ECOPs)), and 12.2 (Develop an Intergenerational Training series (including summer school-type activities) for ECOPs and LATE COPS (peer training, involving late careers as mentors) Adopt a "Train the Trainer" Programme Approach (through staff exchanges, secondments, mobility programmes etc.) to increase the capacity of mentors/researchers who can act as mentors to younger researchers) were found highly feasible by the Moldova case. The concern of identification of hazards arising from their multiple biotic impacts on the marine ecosystem and marine litter is obvious, because of the alarming situation of the rivers on Moldovan territory that flow into the Black Sea. The feasibility of all the other actions is a bit less but very present.

The adoption of the Black Sea SRIA IP occurs in a very favourable period for Moldova and here are some recent developments that will carry out the legacy of the SRIA into the near future. Firstly, Moldova is currently updating the code on research and innovation, enhancing the overall status of R&I in the country. Secondly, The Smart Specialization Strategy Moldova - 'Smart 2030' is being prepared and we expect its approval by the end of the year; Thirdly, National Agency for Research and Development is managing the opening of the National Horizon Europe Office to increase participation in the Horizon Europe program; Lastly, at the beginning of April, a novel Moldo-Romanian joint research program will be launched where SRIA priorities will find their place.

For all these, our central authorities in R&I need input data on the topics of the proposed calls for further science activities and the work of CONNECT and the SRIA IP will be very helpful in shaping the collaborations of the near future. The country is fully committed to serving as a successful case for the implementation of the Black Sea SRIA.

### 3.1.4 Romania

**Viorel VULTURESCU, Ministry of Education and Research of Romania, represented Romanian efforts since the launch of the SRIA in 2019 which took place during the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, all the way to 2023 as the chair of the ONF for 2023.** He stated that thanks to the endorsement of the scientific community of the SRIA and CMA, the blue economy and many SRIA themes are now a common thread in Romanian sustainable development policies. The National Strategy for Research, Innovation and Smart Specialization was approved by the government of Romania in 2022, and at the end of 2022, its main implementation instrument has been approved, the National Plan for Research, Innovation and Technological Development, which now includes a specific sub-program dedicated to Blue Economy at the Black Sea. The administrative work is ongoing for launching dedicated calls towards the end of 2023. This plan will serve as an important implementation and SRIA legacy opportunity.



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Mr Vulturescu also reminded us that Romania is also part of the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership, as an important step towards regional and cross-basin cooperation. Additionally, on December 15, 2022, Romania took the presidency of the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea for 2023 with the main priorities of blue entrepreneurship, blue skills development and environmental protection. Romania will also continue to identify opportunities for action and alignment with the SRIA and ensure closer coordination with INTERREG NEXT Black Sea Programme and the EU Mission Ocean and its Danube Lighthouse.

The representative finalized his talk by emphasizing that the Launch of SRIA IP is a fresh start for further collaboration within the region and with European institutions and partners and the importance of continuing research and innovation efforts for the Black Sea and all our seas and oceans.

### 3.1.5 Türkiye

**Mustafa YÜCEL of the Middle East Technical University, with the mandate of the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye (TÜBİTAK), outlined the main actions towards short-term CSA legacy in Türkiye.** Yücel highlighted the appreciation of the full and continuous support given by TÜBİTAK in the process of SRIA Implementation Plan development.

In 2023, Türkiye is still trying to recover from the devastating earthquakes that happened in February 2023. It can be stated that this unfortunate catastrophe already accelerated the recently established national initiatives towards disaster preparedness, tackling the climate crisis and improving the resilience of the natural environment for the improved well-being of Turkish Citizens. In all of these challenges now the role of marine and coastal research and innovation is well recognized. The SRIA and its Implementation Plan have arrived at the right time in this respect. The IP has been well received by Turkish stakeholders and decision-makers and they already started to use the SRIA and its IP in different strategies and calls for proposals. Examples include the National Climate Summit Decisions of 2022, based on which the Ministry of Industry and Technology is now opening a call this year. Particular national interest seems to be in actions such as the development of a Digital Twin, fisheries and aquaculture.

Already, in Türkiye a considerable amount of the national budget is also allocated for supporting national stakeholders via existing bilateral programs coordinated by TÜBİTAK. Other Turkish Ministries, including Technology and Industry, Transport, Foreign Affairs, Agriculture and Forestry and the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change are also committed to tackling global and regional challenges through continued support to research initiatives and science diplomacy.

Since marine and maritime challenges are very important for Türkiye as a country surrounded by sea; TÜBİTAK is open for new bilateral or multilateral cooperation/calls on marine and maritime research. TÜBİTAK is also a partner of SBEP and already participating in SBEP calls as well.

Türkiye stakeholders fully support the SRIA and they fully agreed that the new IP will pave the way to harmonize the marine and maritime research international cooperation in the Black Sea region.



### 3.1.6 Ukraine

**Igor TARANOV, Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, represented the Ukrainian decision-makers in the final ONF meeting as well as in the Brussels final conference.** Ukraine thinks that SRIA is a unique document, which serves as a roadmap for regional collaboration in scientific research, innovation, and capacity-building initiatives. It aims to address common challenges and foster sustainable development.

Ukraine like some other Black Sea countries has contributed to its development from the early start. In Ukraine, the Ministry of Education and Science was entrusted with coordinating issues on the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea and the SRIA. Ukrainian experts were involved in drafting the document at different stages with the support of the Black Sea CONNECT project;

- In 2020, the first national consultation on strategic research and innovation took place in Ukraine with the involvement of more than 100 stakeholders;
- In 2022, the second national consultation was not held because of safety reasons, permanent blackouts, and energy cuts as the Russian invasion started;
- However, in 2023, stakeholders in Ukraine got involved in the SRIA IP commenting by means of filling out the relevant questionnaire. It was filled by more than 60 participants from all over Ukraine.

Understandably, in current conditions, Ukraine has limited access to the Black Sea and its coast. The beaches are mined; there is a danger of marine mines in Black Sea waters, and much damage is done to the Black Sea ecosystems, which cannot be effectively measured now.

Currently, the first priority of Ukrainian actors is winning the war and rebuilding the country. While reaching this priority, they plan to prepare for post-war reconstruction and resilience in all fields, including the Black Sea research and innovation and blue economy development. Here SRIA IP plays a vital role as the way forward for joint studies and knowledge sharing, educational activities and trainings, where Ukraine can and needs to be active already now.

As soon as the war is over, the top priorities for Ukraine include:

- Identifying the ecosystem impact of civil and military disruptive activities on coastal communities' resilience (because we need to calculate the damage done by the Russian aggression and make it be paid);
- Cost-effective mapping of the Black Sea's biodiversity (to make sure that we protect key biodiversity values);
- Designing an integrated joint observation system;
- Developing the Digital Twin of the Black Sea.

Ukraine acknowledges the support from the European Union for launching a number of programmes (cross-border, regional etc.) to support joint research and innovation for the Black Sea. The Ukrainian government actively promotes the participation of Ukrainian stakeholders in the joint calls. By working together and leveraging the SRIA IP, Ukraine can emerge from the war with a solid foundation to build a sustainable and prosperous future, which will benefit the whole Black Sea community.

## 3.2 European Level and Regional Level Measures Towards SRIA Legacy



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## Contribution from European Commission

At the very outset a close link was established between Black Sea CONNECT and EC's DG RTD and DG MARE, with the SRIA being the scientific pillar of the Black Sea CMA. The CMA process is still ongoing and the SRIA legacy will definitely be alive there as the CMA already includes science-supported blue economy priorities. On a more research and innovation level, the programs coordinated by DG RTD, such as Horizon Europe, Mission Ocean and Waters (co-coordinated with MARE) and Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership (co-funded with countries) will all support SRIA priorities at least until 2030, providing long-term legacy support to the work of the CSA and its Implementation Plan.

During the Final Conference in Brussels, high-level officials from RTD, MARE and SBEP provided their synthesis views on how to build on the SRIA legacy and near-term measures, which are presented in the sections below.

**Delilah Al Khudari, Director at DG MARE**, participated in both opening and closing sessions and provided a holistic view of the meaning and legacy of the Black Sea SRIA. She emphasized that we are not starting from scratch and that the stakeholders and decision-makers should capitalize on the existing initiatives and governance structures. There is a pressing need to further deepen the regional cooperation that we already have between the many countries that has been growing successfully along the Black Sea, with the European Commission as well, but also with the different stakeholders and the local communities. According to her, this urgent call for action and call for cooperation at all levels for the future and the present in the Black Sea and its sustainable blue economy is the biggest legacy of the three-year CONNECT CSA and its implementation Plan.

**Elizabetta Balzi, Head of Unit from DG RTD**, highlighted the close support sustained by RTD during the Black Sea CONNECT CSA lifetime and ensured the continuation of this support to the Black Sea communities in the upcoming years. She particularly highlighted the big achievement of creating a Black Sea R&I family including the Black Sea Operational Network of Funders and the Black Sea Young Ambassadors. The joint participatory work on common priorities for Research and Innovation in the Black Sea has already generated important structural effect at national level, in each of the countries involved and is also a great example of science diplomacy in action. She elaborated on important future links with the Horizon Europe Work Programme, the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership and mechanisms and opportunities presented by the Mission Ocean and Waters, where there is a large array of possibilities of cooperation, including the Black Sea region. The Danube-Black Sea Lighthouse has been launched recently and there are calls for proposals which are currently open. There is also a possibility of associating more regions to currently running Lighthouse projects, such as Danube4All within the Mission Ocean and Waters. She also noted that the Mission Ocean and Waters goes far beyond the Horizon Europe program, so many other programs are involved, and all the EU programs are involved. And here the participants can tap and use all EU instruments to join forces and achieve our objectives together.

**Christos Economou, Head of Unit from DG MARE** emphasized the contribution of SRIA to the innovation ecosystem of the Black Sea region. Innovation is still something that can be promoted very, very much by this type of approach and the stakeholders can now take advantage of the newly established smart specialization platform for a sustainable blue economy, including the Black Sea. It is evolving as a new way to make new investments, developing smart sustainable businesses, and business models respectful to the environment. Therefore, cooperation through smart specialization is something that DG MARE is pushing forward and this is where the SRIA legacy can be strengthened.





He also noted the need for wider stakeholder involvement, such as at the European Maritime Day that DG MARE is organizing every year which allows highlighting these efforts on research and innovation for the sustainable blue economy. The 2023 EMD on May 24 - 25th in Brest will be a fruitful opportunity in this regard where Black Sea CONNECT and SRIA will be featured via panel events, exhibition booths and with the associated project booths of BRIDGE-BS and DOORS.

Funding opportunities among the many active funds in the region are also important to explore, for example during a dedicating CMA regional webinar event taking place on 10 May 2023.

Now in the same context of the CMA, DG MARE co-organises with RO the annual Stakeholder conference event taking place in Bucharest in Romania later in November 2023. Mr. Economou highlighted that they will also put an accent to bringing the stakeholders together showing results on implementation plans like the SRIA but also the funding opportunities attracting businesses and investors. He reminded that the annual events of EMD and CMA Stakeholder events seem like one of the best venues to follow up the SRIA implementation and carry out its legacy into the future.

Finally, SRIA implementation opportunities abound in the **Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership (SBEP)**, a co-funded public-private partnership between EC and countries. The manager of SBEP, **Margherita Cappeletto introduced this program and she noted that a high level of cooperation entailing both strategic and operational activities can be already seen for the Black Sea countries.** Black Sea CONNECT CSA has been an observer in the development process of the SRIA of SBEP and in that regard, the Black Sea perspective has already contributed to the evolution of the strategy of the partnership. Recently, Romania, Bulgaria and Türkiye joined SBEP that launched its first call in 2023. It is anticipated that more communities and regions will be associated in the coming years, including stakeholders from researchers to private companies. In this regard, participation in the joint co-funded call of the partnership, of course, will ensure the uptake of the legacy of SRIA and its IP. The Young Ambassador program of the Black Sea CONNECT CSA has received strong interest from SBEP coordination and the Ambassadors will be very instrumental in continuing the legacy of the SRIA and definitely support from SBEP and other EC funds should be anticipated. SBEP side also noted that there will be a follow-up regional workshop (after 2022) dedicated to the Black Sea, further providing a new opportunity to reflect on Black Sea SRIA priorities and collaboration opportunities with other sea basins.

### Contribution from Regional Organizations

**Irina Makarenko from the Black Sea Commission** highlighted that they have been contributing to the SRIA development from the beginning onwards and emphasized the importance of SRIA as a powerful regional tool to continue our common efforts for the Black Sea. Despite the negative circumstances BSC continues to elaborate on the new edition of the Black Sea integrated Monitoring and Assessment program and also to draft the new report on the State of Marine Environment. They would be seeking support and coordination from the colleagues and that would be under the SRIA Implementation Plan. So, in this context, the Plan and other CONNECT deliverables, with the updated SRIA, will all provide very valuable input. BSC remains committed to assisting with the implementation of the IP.

**BSEC General Secretary Ambassador Lazar Comănescu** pointed out that the Implementation plan of the SRIA is a guiding document which calls upon concrete joint actions towards productive, healthy, resilient, sustainable and better-valued Black Sea by 2030. BSEC is ready to support all the activities that are envisaged



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in the Plan. The Permanent Secretariat (PERMIS) in Istanbul is particularly ready to organize the next edition or editions of the Black Sea Marine Litter Action Forum. Working together with the countries in the region and with the European Commission to further develop joint initiatives and projects in areas of common interest in a practical, flexible and result-oriented way stays high on our agenda. In this context, BSEC also highlights the relevance of projects like Mission Ocean and its Danube-Black Sea Lighthouse and SBEP. BSEC finally expressed the readiness and willingness of the BSEC PERMIS to continue to actively support the implementation stage of the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea region CMA and the activities of the current Coordinator of the Steering Group, namely Romania.

## CPMR

**CPMR Mr Mihai HULENI – Vice President of Tulcea County Council, on behalf of Mr Horia TEODORESCU, President of the Balkan & Black Sea Commission of the CPMR, and President of Tulcea County Council** starts his talk by reminding that as a region with an urban area and an extended rural zone, and at the same time an emerging tourist and investment destination, we aim to improve the quality of the public services and increase the standards for our citizens, visitors, and investors, in line with the themes of the four Pillars of the Black Sea SRIA Implementation Plan. This will help them to better protect our sensitive ecosystem – also as Danube Delta – and be more resilient towards climate change, address challenges such as marine litter more efficiently, adopt innovative methods to protect our coastal and underwater heritage, and encourage the development of blue skills and promote capacity building on marine sciences for a wide array of professionals operating in our region. We are well aware that similar challenges with Tulcea County Council face, more or less, all Black Sea coastal Regional and Local Authorities of the countries participating in the Black Sea SRIA.

Mr Huleni reminds that as an active member of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR) and its Balkan & Black Sea Commission (BBSC), we are glad that the CPMR through its BBSC has been actively involved in the elaboration of the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea and the Black Sea SRIA since the very beginning of both initiatives. Given the CPMR's experience from the different sea basins of Europe, its close cooperation with the European Institutions and participation in relevant groups of experts, they are confident that our administration and other CPMR members in the region will receive the support needed for the successful implementation of the objectives of the Black Sea SRIA Implementation Plan, and that our voices and concerns will carry on being heard at EU level, for a constructive follow-up that will ensure that the priorities of the Regional Authorities and local communities will be seriously taken into consideration throughout the whole implementation period, providing useful feedback to the policy and decision-makers. To this end, not only as BBSC Presidency, but also as an active member of the CPMR, they pledge to encourage, when necessary, to-the-point exchanges between BBSC and other CPMR members, learning from their mistakes and best practices, to better meet the objectives of all Black Sea SRIA Pillars and address them in a consistent, coherent and efficient manner, considering the latest developments at EU level, as well as the different EU funding tools available.

### 3.3 Conclusions and Next Steps Beyond the CSA

Considering the SRIA development process, CSA activities and achievements, as well as the Launch event, it is possible to conclude that the Black Sea SRIA has been an important framework bringing together the countries, regional and international actors and for connecting the Black Sea to other sea basins and broader policies. The cooperation that has resulted in the development of the Black Sea SRIA has continued during the lifetime of the Black Sea CONNECT CSA and successfully led to the Black Sea SRIA Implementation Plan. The



Launch event has shown that the Black Sea SRIA and now its Implementation Plan are still very much supported at national, regional and European levels.

At the national level, SRIA priorities and Implementation Plan Strategic Joint Actions that are derived from the stakeholder input to the SRIA have resonated with the national stakeholders with also creating strong links with country priorities just to name a few: Bulgaria with wind energy and blue carbon – Theme 8 of IP; Georgia with citizen science and marine litter; Theme 12 and Ukraine with the recovery of biodiversity and resilience of the marine ecosystem; Theme 6).

It is also possible to see that the Implementation Plan comes at a good time to integrate sustainable blue economy principles and SRIA priorities in the national agendas as is the case for Moldova as the code on research and innovation, enhancing the overall status of R&I in the country, is now being updated. Similarly, Romania already included a specific sub-program dedicated to Blue Economy at the Black Sea under the National Plan for Research, Innovation and Technological Development which will launch dedicated calls towards the end of 2023. Moreover, SRIA priorities and IP actions are already integrated into the National Climate Summit Decisions of 2022 under which the respective Ministry of Industry and Technology will launch a call in 2023 as well.

Even though it is further elaborated under D3.5, it is also important to mention that the country representatives (ONF group created under the Black Sea CONNECT CSA) who made the abovementioned interventions at the Launch event, also expressed their strong support for the ONF group to continue their work beyond the CSA for the Implementation of the Black Sea SRIA and IP in the final meeting that took place also on 4 May 2023. METU has agreed to convene the group in a virtual meeting in late October / early November to further discuss the next steps in the SRIA Implementation.

At the regional level, regional organizations such as BSEC, BSC and CPMR are also committed to further implement the Black Sea SRIA and its IP through their programme, mechanisms and funds. As the most specific commitment BSEC has declared an explicit commitment to the Black Sea Marine Litter Action Forum which reflects the implementation of 7.2 Enable the Black Sea CONNECT Marine Litter Action Forum as a recurring platform/forum to tackle the pollution crisis with close links to EU Mission: Mission Restore our Ocean and Waters under Theme 7: Marine Litter. This shows great enthusiasm and willingness towards implementing the Black Sea SRIA Implementation Plan actions and it will be followed upon with the BSEC PERMIS for the realization of this activity by METU.

As for the European level commitment, high-level officials from the relevant EC services pointed out the exploitation of the already existing mechanisms as a legacy of the CSA and SRIA. Mission Ocean and Waters and the Lighthouses present a unique opportunity for the uptake of the Black Sea SRIA. Additionally, benefitting from the occasions such as European Maritime Day (EMDs) and CMA Annual Stakeholder Conference are given as concrete examples in which SRIA and its Implementation Plan can be followed up. SBEP structure and upcoming calls will also facilitate the implementation of the strategic joint actions especially with regard to the citizen science and Black Sea Young Ambassador Programme which has been mentioned by many representatives as a priority throughout the Launch event.

Based on these inputs and commitments made, the specific next steps to ensure the legacy of the CSA and SRIA are summarized below:



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- Based on the enthusiasm from the ONF, METU will organize another ONF meeting virtually in late October, Early November.
- BSEC will be contacted on the organization of the Marine Litter Conference in late 2023
- CMA and its Assistance Mechanism will be contacted for a dedicated session for the Black Sea SRIA and its IP to be integrated in their events such as Annual Stakeholder Conferences
- Black Sea SRIA and its IP will be present at the EMD 2024 (already in 2023, Black Sea CONNECT presented the SRIA IP in the EMD Brest)
- Specific calls and programmes can be initiated to make stand-alone Black Sea Young Ambassador Programme and citizen science activities in the Black Sea

Therefore, the legacy of the Black Sea SRIA, the CSA and IP will be ensured in cooperation with national, regional and European level efforts, in line with the same spirit that gave birth to the Black Sea SRIA in the first place. We are looking at a near future where countries have already started to integrate blue economy principles into their national agendas which did not seem feasible a short while ago. On top of that, throughout the CSA lifetime, the ONF has progressed into a more proactive group with built trust and cooperation which will pave the way for regional or joint calls between some countries of the Black Sea. With also SBEP and Mission Ocean mechanisms whose priorities are also integrated into the IP (and both policies had already benefited from the Black Sea SRIA priorities), complementing the ONF in terms of funding IP joint actions. Additionally, the Black Sea community can also benefit from other mechanisms such as EMFAF, INTERREG Black Sea, and CMA for calls and projects that are in line with the SRIA IP.

It is also important to note here that, the Black Sea SRIA is also updated as one of the final products of the CSA. Whereas the Implementation Plan focuses on concrete actions that are feasible by 2030, SRIA presents a broader framework for the Black Sea SRIA beyond 2030. Further implementation plans reflecting the current situation can also be developed through the abovementioned mechanisms beyond 2030.



## Annex

# INTERGROUP SEAS, RIVERS, ISLANDS AND COASTAL AREAS



## AGENDA

### Presential event

*Working language: English*

- 14:00 - 14:10 **Opening by MEP Mr Marian-Jean MARINESCU**, Member of the European Parliament and Member of the Seas, Rivers, Islands & Coastal Areas (SEArICA) Intergroup
- 14:10 - 15:10 **Benefits of implementing the Black Sea SRIA Implementation Plan at Black Sea and national level**  
(Moderator: *Mr Barış SALİHOĞLU - Black Sea CONNECT*)

#### Introductory words

**Ms Delilah AL KHUDHAIRY**, Director Maritime Policy and Blue Economy, Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE), European Commission

**Ms Elisabetta BALZI**, Head of Unit Healthy Ocean and Seas, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD), European Commission

**Mr Mehmet Tevfik ZEYREK**, Vice-Rector, Middle East Technical University (METU) (Türkiye)

#### Presentation of the Black Sea SRIA Implementation Plan

**Mr Barış SALİHOĞLU**, Black Sea CONNECT Coordinator

Influence of Black Sea SRIA Implementation Plan preparation and implementation at national level – national perspectives from:

- **Mr Milen BALTOV**, Burgas Free University, with the mandate of Ministry of Education and Science (Bulgaria)
- **Ms Tea TARIELASHVILI**, Ministry of Education and Science (Georgia)
- **Mr Sveatoslav POSTORONCĂ**, Moldovan Office for Science and Technology in Brussels (Republic of Moldova)
- **Mr Viorel VULTURESCU**, Ministry of Education and Research (Romania)
- **Mr Mustafa YÜCEL**, Middle East Technical University, with the mandate of Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye (Türkiye)
- **Mr Igor TARANOV**, Ministry of Education and Science (Ukraine)





# INTERGROUP SEAS, RIVERS, ISLANDS AND COASTAL AREAS



## Reactions from regional organisations

**Ambassador Lazăr COMĂNESCU**, Secretary General, Permanent International Secretariat (PERMIS), Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC)

**Ms Iryna MAKARENKO**, Pollution Monitoring and Assessment Officer, Permanent Secretariat of the Commission on the Protection of the Black Sea Against Pollution (Black Sea Commission)

**Mr Mihai HULENI**, Vice-President of Tulcea County Council (Romania), Balkan & Black Sea Commission (BBSC) of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR)

15:10 - 15:25

**Black Sea Young Ambassadors as future change-makers for the Black Sea**  
(Moderator: **Mr Vangelis PAPATHANASIOU**)

### Black Sea Young Ambassadors

- **Ms Sofia SADOGURSKA** (Ukraine)
- **Ms Selma MENABIT** (Romania)
- **Ms Marika MAKHARADZE** (Georgia)
- **Ms Aliona ISAC** (Republic of Moldova)
- **Ms Remina ALEKSIEVA** (Bulgaria)
- **Ms Destan ÖZTÜRK** (Türkiye)

15:25 - 15:40

**What next for the Black Sea cooperation?**  
(Moderator: **Mr Barış SALİHOĞLU - Black Sea CONNECT**)

**Mr Christos ECONOMOU**, Head of Unit Sea-basin Strategies, Maritime Regional Cooperation and Maritime Security (DG MARE), European Commission

**Ms Margherita CAPPELLETTO**, Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership (SBEP)

15:40 - 15:50

**Debate with participants**

15:50 - 16:00

**Closing of the event and conclusions by Ms Delilah AL KHUDHAIRY**, Director Maritime Policy and Blue Economy, Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE), European Commission



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