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JOINT STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

Black Sea Synergy: 4th review of a regional cooperation initiative - period 2019-2023

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Black Sea Synergy: 4th review of a regional cooperation initiative - period 2019-2023

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Black Sea Synergy (BSS) is the EU's key regional policy framework for the Black Sea region and one of the fundamental pillars for the EU's engagement there alongside the EU maritime security Strategy (revised in October 2023), and the EU Strategic Compass for Security and Defence (March 2022). Since the policy began, through the 2007 European Commission Communication ⁽¹⁾, three implementation reports have been issued re-confirming its contribution to addressing regional and global challenges in the Black Sea region, for the benefit of both the region and the EU.

Like the previous implementation reports, this fourth report limits itself to providing a **factual description of the Black Sea Synergy activities** over the reporting period. It contains information that can be useful for a wider policy discussion, but does not discuss or propose a future policy.

The Black Sea Synergy aims to ensure policy coherence and further cooperation between the countries surrounding the Black Sea, as a flexible framework for developing practical region-wide solutions.

The Council Conclusions on the EU's engagement to the Black Sea regional cooperation ⁽²⁾, adopted on 17 June 2019, emphasise the increasing strategic importance of the Black Sea area for the EU, and call for an EU enhanced engagement to the regional cooperation there, with the Black Sea Synergy playing a central role. In particular, they identify the importance of harnessing the new opportunities for economic development, resilience and connectivity in the region and beyond.

This report offers a review of the Black Sea Synergy regional cooperation initiative for the 2019-2023 period, highlighting a number of 'key points and achievements' and providing thus a basis for reflection and planning for future EU policy in the region. It confirms the wide range of EU activities in the Black Sea region that have sought to address existing and new challenges in the region.

An annex to this paper includes a table with details of projects developed under the Black Sea Synergy umbrella and relevant EU initiatives closely connected to the Black Sea region and supported by the EU between 2019 and 2023.

Since 2019, the Black Sea Synergy has been implemented in a **context marked** in particular by the impact of the **COVID-19 pandemic** and **Russia's ⁽³⁾ war of aggression against Ukraine**. The **EU Strategic Compass for Security and Defence ⁽⁴⁾**, the **EU Maritime security strategy ⁽⁵⁾** together with the **Global Gateway ⁽⁶⁾** have been important EU policy developments for the implementation of the Black Sea Synergy. Increased synergies with other policy frameworks, such as **the Eastern Partnership ⁽⁷⁾** have been equally factored in. The 2020 Eastern Partnership new agenda on recovery, resilience and reform ⁽⁸⁾ together with the flagship initiatives under its economic and investment plan ⁽⁹⁾ are complementing additional commitments taken by the partner countries and the EU within the Black Sea Synergy.

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine is undermining the rules-based international order and security in the Black Sea, Europe and beyond. Its fallout has added to the challenges and threats

⁽¹⁾ COM(2007) 160 final, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52007DC0160>

⁽²⁾ **Council Conclusions** 10219/19, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/39779/st10219-en19.pdf>

⁽³⁾ The Russian Federation is referred to as Russia in the context of its war of aggression against Ukraine.

⁽⁴⁾ A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence 7371/22, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/strategic-compass-security-and-defence-0_en, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/strategic_compass_en3_web.pdf

⁽⁵⁾ JOIN(2023) 8 final, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52023JC0008>

⁽⁶⁾ JOIN(2021) 30 final, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021JC0030>

⁽⁷⁾ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eastern-partnership_en

⁽⁸⁾ JOIN(2020) 7 final, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/1_en_act_part1_v6.pdf

⁽⁹⁾ SWD (2021) 186 final, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/swd_2021_186_f1_joint_staff_working_paper_en_v2_p1_1356457_0.pdf

experienced already in the Black Sea region and outlined in the previous 2019 joint staff working document ⁽¹⁰⁾.

In the Black Sea, Russia has been obstructing the freedom of navigation and overflight with its attempted naval blockade of Ukraine's Black Sea ports, and has been **weaponising global food security and energy security**. Russia's announcement of a decision to establish a permanent naval base in the Black Sea port of Ochamchire, located in Georgia's breakaway region of Abkhazia, has added to security risks and challenges.

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has negatively affected commercial shipping in the Black Sea, and Azov Sea, leading to increased risks for vessels and seafarers ⁽¹¹⁾ and has resulted in increased insurance rates for sailing in the Black Sea, augmenting overall costs for economic operators.

Economically, Russia has limited Ukraine's ability to export and import goods through the Black Sea. Overall, the increasingly worsened security situation poses threats more broadly ⁽¹²⁾ to the blue economy in the Black Sea, including fisheries and other maritime activities, within a severely degraded maritime security environment.

Environmentally, efforts to reduce existing pollution in the Black Sea and to protect its biodiversity have been complicated by the challenges posed by pollution resulting from military conflict – e.g. unexploded ordnance and floating mines, as well as the microbiological and chemical contamination of the Black Sea in the aftermath of the destruction of the Nova Kakhovka dam.

Russia's war also increased the spreading of false narratives by the Russian state-controlled media propaganda, malign activities and hybrid warfare, as factors aggravating the tension and climate of distrust regarding Moscow's intentions in the region.

With Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine ongoing, the regional cooperation and EU interests, including those from a security standpoint, remain heavily affected.

As part of the EU's response ⁽¹³⁾, Russia's participation in the Black Sea Synergy has been **suspended**, as well as all forms of cooperation at regional and national level with Russian public stakeholders. The EU's approach to the regional cooperation in the Black Sea continues to be grounded in respect for the norms and principles of international law, especially sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity within internationally recognised borders, as well as for the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Challenges and threats created by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine have mobilised a united response and have opened new opportunities for cooperation in the region and for the participants in the Black Sea Synergy, with resilience against Russia's aggression as a central component.

In terms of regional security, the need for a coherent and streamlined approach specifically for the Black Sea region was emphasised in the framework of the International Crimea Platform ⁽¹⁴⁾. The first Black

⁽¹⁰⁾ SWD(2019) 100 final,

https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/swd_2019_100_fl_joint_staff_working_paper_en_v3_p1_1013788-1.pdf

⁽¹¹⁾ With various vessels being hit by missiles and colliding with floating sea mines

⁽¹²⁾ <https://www.oecd.org/ukraine-hub/policy-responses/impacts-of-russia-s-war-of-aggression-against-ukraine-on-the-shipping-and-shipbuilding-markets-4f925e43/>

⁽¹³⁾ EU response to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-response-ukraine-invasion/>

⁽¹⁴⁾ Presentation made by Ukrainian organisers within the 1st panel of the 3rd International Crimea Platform (23 August 2023), time reference 2:14:26-2:19:11

<https://crimea-platform.org/en/events/the-third-summit-of-the-crimea-platform/>

Ukraine and Romania to hold the First Black Sea Security Conference of the International Crimea Platform in Bucharest

<https://mfa.gov.ua/en/events/ukraine-and-romania-hold-first-black-sea-security-conference-international-crimea-platform-bucharest>

<https://crimea-platform.org/en/events/chornomorska-bezpekova-konferentsiia-krymskoi-platfomy/>

Sea annual security conference was held in April 2023, in Bucharest, co-organised by Ukraine and Romania, and the second one - in April 2024, in Sofia, by Ukraine and Bulgaria.

The EU and its Member States have been working in coordination with like-minded partners to address the **impact of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine across the Black Sea region** – both in the short and long run. The immediate focus was on supporting Ukraine as well as on helping the region address the wider fallout of Russia's war. This effort has also been taken in multilateral frameworks, especially within the United Nations, the G7 and in coordination with NATO.

The **EU enlargement process has gained momentum** with the decision to open accession negotiations with Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, and to grant Georgia the status of a candidate country on the understanding that certain reform steps are taken. Enlargement is a geo-strategic investment in peace, security, stability and prosperity.

The geopolitical developments in the Black Sea region highlighted the importance of: **(i) quick implementation of the connectivity projects** for the Black Sea designed under complementary EU policies; **(ii) strengthened and streamlined cooperation on other critical infrastructure in the region.** Also highlighted is the **importance of increased EU monitoring and situational awareness** in the region to adapt and respond promptly to evolving threats. The EU's '**EU-Ukraine Solidarity Lanes**' established in May 2022 ⁽¹⁵⁾ helped the country to export and import more goods via rail, road and inland waterways ⁽¹⁶⁾. Close cooperation of the riparian ⁽¹⁷⁾ EU Member States (Bulgaria, Romania) together with the Republic of Moldova, involving their port and transport infrastructure, was instrumental in this joint endeavour.

In the wider effort to facilitate exports of Ukraine's grain and other agricultural products to global markets, Ukraine established, in August 2023, the 'Black Sea Corridor' for civilian cargo ships along its shorelines and those of riparian EU Member States and partners. This was possible after Ukraine successfully limited the operations of Russia's navy in the north-west of the Black Sea. The role of this corridor has increased significantly over time.

2. THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BLACK SEA SYNERGY

The main characteristics of the Black Sea Synergy, as determined by the 2007 Black Sea Synergy Communication and its implementation over the years, are the following: (i) coherent, with a long-term outlook, complementing the EU's bilateral activities in the Black Sea region; (ii) inclusive, with states in the wider Black Sea region participating (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Romania, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation ⁽¹⁸⁾ – participation suspended because of its war against Ukraine – Türkiye and Ukraine) and (iii) encouraging a bottom-up approach to projects, which are to be

Debates organised under the First Black Sea Security under Crimean Platform (13-14 April 2023), notably in the panel discussion 'Future configuration: What is the future of regional security in the Black and Azov Seas? Towards a Euro-Atlantic Strategy for a Stable, Secure and Prosperous Region', <https://crimea-platform.org/en/events/chornomorska-bezpekova-konferentsiia-krymskoi-platforny/>

Debates organised also under panel discussion III - Future configuration the 3rd panel of the First Black Sea Security Conference, <https://mae.ro/node/61681>

⁽¹⁵⁾ https://eu-solidarity-ukraine.ec.europa.eu/eu-assistance-ukraine/eu-ukraine-solidarity-lanes_en

⁽¹⁶⁾ Between May 2022 and end December 2023, Solidarity Lanes allowed Ukraine to export over 116 Mt of goods and to import around 43 Mt of goods it needs. The total value of trade via the Solidarity Lanes since May 2022 is estimated at around EUR 132 billion, with around EUR 44 billion for Ukraine's exports and around EUR 88 billion for Ukraine's imports. This is complementing the United Nations and Türkiye brokered the Black Sea Grain Initiative in July 2022, establishing a maritime corridor for commercial food and fertilizers' exports from three Ukrainian ports (Odesa, Chornomorsk, Yuzhny/Pivdennyi) to Istanbul, discontinued after Russia's unilateral withdrawal in July 2023, and Ukraine's 'Black Sea Corridor' established in August 2023.

⁽¹⁷⁾ The Black Sea riparian countries are the following: Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, the Russian Federation, Türkiye and Ukraine.

⁽¹⁸⁾ Hereinafter referred to as Russia.

developed on a voluntary basis and through different types of interaction (cross-border, local authorities, civil society, intergovernmental).

3. FIELDS OF COOPERATION: PROGRESS MADE SINCE 2019, KEY POINTS AND TRENDS

Drawing on the 2007 Communication on Black Sea Synergy and its subsequent implementation, the Black Sea Synergy initiative includes the following: *(A) a wide variety of areas with a list of main sectors and fields of cooperation; (B) links with other EU policies or strategies that are relevant for the Black Sea region; and (C) cooperation with regional and international organisations.*

The progress and key achievements registered under the Black Sea Synergy, together with the measures related to the fields of cooperation have been particularly affected by the broader geopolitical context outlined in the introduction.

(A): Main sectors and fields of cooperation – key points and achievements

Field of cooperation #1: Sustainable blue economy and marine research and innovation

Significant progress was made on regional cooperation on maritime affairs and on marine research and innovation during the reporting period, despite the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. As a follow-up to the commitment of the 2018 Burgas Ministerial Declaration ⁽¹⁹⁾, in May 2019, at a dedicated ministerial conference, Bulgaria, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russia ⁽²⁰⁾, Türkiye and Ukraine established a sea basin strategy named **Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea**.

The sea basin strategy promotes **voluntary and sectoral cooperation** between participating countries, with three main goals: healthy marine and coastal ecosystems; a competitive, innovative and sustainable blue economy for the Black Sea, and investment in the Black Sea blue economy. After several months of online exchanges at technical level, the partners' efforts culminated in a successful edition of the annual stakeholder conference in Bucharest in November 2023 and the activation of the **first Technical Group** on sustainable aquaculture, a strategic sector for land and coastal communities across the Black Sea region.

The initiative has shown its worth in mobilising funding for projects, resulting in **more than 90 supported actions** on marine pollution, blue economy entrepreneurship, tourism and environmental protection, **worth a total of about EUR 500 million in 5 years** ⁽²¹⁾. Furthermore, it informed relevant calls under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund / European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFF/EMFAF) and the Interreg NEXT Black Sea Basin Programme 2021-2027, developing close synergies with, for example, research coordination and scientific activities of the Black Sea CONNECT, DOORS and BRIDGE-Black Sea projects from the Horizon 2020 Framework and the EU Mission 'Restore Our Ocean and Waters by 2030', especially its Danube-Black Sea Lighthouse.

In the field of marine research and innovation, work on a common vision among Black Sea riparian countries and the Republic of Moldova led to **the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA)** being established, as the scientific pillar to the Common Maritime Agenda. Under this framework, **28 Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe have supported collaborative research in the Black Sea projects for a total of EUR 37,5 million** ⁽²²⁾ **and in addition EUR 36 million for the first five Danube-Black Sea lighthouse projects of the Mission 'Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030'**. The Black Sea Young Ambassadors programme launched in 2021 resulted in many training and mobilisation activities with valuable visibility in the region and beyond.

The Black Sea SRIA implementation plan launched in May 2023 has been co-created with the Senior Officials Working Group for the implementation of the Black Sea SRIA and the **Black Sea Operational Network of Funders**. As a result, all Black Sea Member States and associated countries aligned their

⁽¹⁹⁾ 'Towards a Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea' 2018.

⁽²⁰⁾ Russia's participation was suspended in the aftermath of its unjustified and illegal invasion of Ukraine

⁽²¹⁾ See the Annex for examples of projects (non-comprehensive list).

⁽²²⁾ A number of projects and links to project portfolio publications have been included in Annex.

national research and innovation funding plans with the SRIA. The Plan includes future opportunities for cooperation through the EU Mission ‘Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030’, with its Danube-Black Sea lighthouse, and **the European Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership (SBEP)** ⁽²³⁾.

In October 2020, the European Commission launched **five EU Missions**, including the Mission ‘Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030’ and the Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change, as **new broad mobilisation initiatives** cutting across policies, programmes and different levels of governance. The Mission ‘Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030’ aims to protect and restore marine and freshwater ecosystems and biodiversity, prevent and eliminate pollution of our oceans, seas and waters and make the blue economy carbon-neutral and circular. The Mission has a **strong regional dimension** through its ‘*lighthouse*’, hubs to develop, test and deploy transformative and innovative solutions in four areas, including the Danube River basin and the Black Sea. Under the Mission, a coordination and support action (EcoDalli) was launched and four innovation actions to help support restore the Danube River and its (coastal) wetlands, flood plains, salt marshes and their biodiversity, as well as the sustainable management of its sediments taking into account their connectivity with the Black Sea. Other Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe projects, such as **REST-COAST** and **MSP4BIO**, will also help achieve the Mission’s objectives in the Black Sea. In addition to these Mission projects and other projects funded under Horizon Europe, 36 local, regional or national Mission Charter actions have mobilised an overall budget of approximately EUR 96.6 million for the Danube, proving that the Mission ‘Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030’ has generated a growing interest.

The Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change focuses on supporting EU regions, cities and local authorities in their efforts to build resilience against the impacts of climate change. The city of Burgas and metropolitan area of Istanbul are active participants in the Mission in the Black Sea area. The **Regions4Climate** and **ARSINOE** projects significantly contribute to these developments at the Black Sea coast and wetlands.

⁽²³⁾ The European co-funded Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership (SBEP) comprises 60 partner institutions from 25 countries and the European Commission pooling research and innovation investments and aligning national programmes at pan-European scale. As a Horizon Europe co-funded partnership, its strategy takes into consideration the R&I agendas of the sea basins (Mediterranean, Black Sea, Baltic and North Sea) and the Atlantic Ocean and builds on lessons learned from previous initiatives. Georgia and Ukraine are in the process of joining this partnership that includes Bulgaria, Romania and Türkiye and supports investment in collaborative research projects and other joint activities, with the aim of encouraging researchers from all the Black Sea riparian countries and the Republic of Moldova to participate.

Key points and achievements

- The 2019-2023 period was marked by the establishment of structured cooperation on maritime affairs and on marine research and innovation in the Black Sea. Most countries, except Russia, showed a strong commitment to advancing collaborative efforts under both the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea and the Black Sea Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda, despite the challenging geopolitical context induced by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.
- Under the Common Maritime Agenda, with the EU steering and financial support through an assistance mechanism, significant efforts were made to align country priorities around a common vision for a sustainable and resilient blue economy in the region. Work at the regional level rests on close synergies with other partners and is focused on addressing challenges and opportunities, such as marine pollution, greening and decarbonisation of maritime sectors, and more sustainable and circular blue economy activities.
- Closer cooperation with BlueInvest, the EU Innovation and Investment platform that accelerate new ocean-based technologies and solutions, has been established. Efforts to capitalise on the economic potential of the Black Sea maritime sectors includes a regional workshop organised on the margins of the Common Maritime Agenda stakeholder conference in 2023 and other initiatives to facilitate investment in SMEs and startups in the region.
- Similarly, increased funding has been directed towards the Black Sea blue economy to boost entrepreneurship and innovation. In 2021, a Black Sea flagship call was launched under the EMFAF, supporting projects like DBAN and 4BiZ, to build a multi-stakeholder network strengthening blue economy value chains. In 2022, a second call addressed the environmental impact of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, with projects like RESPONSE and Black Sea SIERRA assessing marine pollution and coordinating responses.
- For the Black Sea Research and Innovation Agenda, joint work between countries resulted in the planning of national research and innovation being structured in order to achieve common regional objectives, as provided for in the SRIA implementation plan. Collaborative research projects help achieve regional connectivity and overall integration of the Black Sea research community in the European Research Area.
- The EU Mission 'Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030' has generated a growing interest. Some 36 actions have been submitted mobilising an overall budget of approximately EUR 96,6 million for the Danube. A coordination and support action (CSA) EcoDalli, and four innovation actions have started (with funding of EUR 53 million) to help restore the Danube River and its (coastal) wetlands, flood plains, salt marshes and their biodiversity, as well as the sustainable management of its sediments.
- The Danube and Black Sea lighthouse of the EU Mission 'Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030' started to connect Danube and Black Sea countries to adopt a 'source to sea' approach in research and innovation, with significant societal impact towards protecting and restoring ecosystems, cutting pollution and increasing carbon-neutrality and circularity. The culture of cooperation in the region has proven to be valuable in building synergies with the Mission, its Danube-Black Sea lighthouse, and the European Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership (SBEP). Several SBEP intervention areas are important for the Black Sea, such as planning and managing use of the seas, blue bioresources and EU-funded 'Digital Twins of the Ocean' project at sub-basin scale.
- The first areas in the Black Sea region participating in the Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change will also help the region to build resilience against the impacts of climate change.

Field of cooperation #2: Fisheries and aquaculture

Fisheries governance and cooperation in fisheries in the Black Sea have been further improved and strengthened during the reporting period based on the implementation of the roadmap established under the 2018 Sofia Ministerial Declaration ⁽²⁴⁾ with the objective of supporting sustainable fisheries and aquaculture.

The adoption in 2021 of the new 2030 General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) strategy led to a new impetus for further guidance, regional cooperation being stepped up and joint actions involving the Black Sea riparian countries being strengthened ⁽²⁵⁾. Stronger regional cooperation also takes the form of political will for full accession to the GFCM as a contracting party, announced by the non-contracting and cooperating countries in the region (Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine).

Despite the difficult geopolitical context and its long-term impact on fisheries, the marine ecosystem, and vulnerable marine species, the Black Sea countries cooperated within the GFCM to implement the 2030 Strategy. Strengthened regional cooperation helped achieve technical and scientific advancements and joint actions. Partners cooperated to: (i) collect data and improve scientific advice by means of joint surveys at sea and developing common protocols to manage key fisheries ⁽²⁶⁾, mitigate fisheries impacts to vulnerable species and habitats ⁽²⁷⁾, which also involve relevant stakeholders in a participative approach to management; (ii) improve fisheries control and compliance; and (iii) step up the fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU) by implementing catch documentation schemes.

Collaborative research projects between European and Black Sea partners (EcoScope, OptiFish and ECOFISH) include Black Sea case studies, advancing the meaningful implementation of the ecosystem approach to fisheries, the digitalization for fisheries control and the potential conversion of conventional fish farms into organic ones.

Aquaculture continued to play a key role in providing food security, economic growth, and employment in the region. As such, it has become an increasingly important part of the blue economy in the region. To ensure its resilience and sustainability, several actions have been promoted to support Black Sea countries, including through technical assistance and ad hoc support.

⁽²⁴⁾ https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/sites/fisheries/files/docs/2018-06-07-sofia-declaration_en.pdf

⁽²⁵⁾ <https://www.fao.org/3/cb7562en/cb7562en.pdf>

⁽²⁶⁾ Such as turbot, sprat, rapa whelk, and piked dogfish.

⁽²⁷⁾ Such as sturgeon and Black Sea harbour porpoise

Key points and achievements

- Cooperation in fisheries and aquaculture between the Black Sea riparian countries under the GFCM is sound and well-established. The technical and scientific work has not been discontinued, resulting in many advancements.
- With the EU steering and financial support, the BlackSea4Fish project under the GFCM generated multiple benefits for effective collaboration in fisheries in the Black Sea. This project set up an inclusive multinational scientific operational platform bringing together fisheries stakeholders, scientists, fishermen and fish workers, administrations, researchers and partner organisations. It also consolidated national expertise and scientific capacity to create a level playing field for fisheries across the region, enabling cross-sectoral opportunities. Moreover, it supported a first ever joint survey in the Black Sea, carried out with scientists representing Bulgaria, Romania, Georgia, Ukraine and Türkiye taking part.
- Several European collaborative projects from Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe include Black Sea case studies to advance the meaningful implementation of the ecosystem approach to fisheries and digitalization for fisheries control.
- Increasing efforts have been made by all actors involved to boost sustainable aquaculture development. A TAIEX workshop was organised in June 2023 to help Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, and Georgia exchanging best practices on developing local aquaculture production, to ensure resilient food systems and reduce import dependency.

Field of cooperation #3: Environmental protection and climate change

The Black Sea is one of the world's most vulnerable regional seas given its limited exchange of water with the open oceans and the large area of continental Europe from which it receives drainage. High levels of environmental pollution and degradation are observed⁽²⁸⁾. In the Black Sea there is double the level of marine litter that is found in the Mediterranean⁽²⁹⁾. As other European seas, the Black Sea has been exposed to eutrophication and invasive species. The results of surveys conducted with EU support within the EMBLAS programme showed that the eutrophication status of the north-western shelf of the Black Sea, the part is most significantly affected by the inflowing large European rivers Danube, Dniester, and Dnieper, has been gradually improving over the last two decades. The occurrence of the two most prominent non-indigenous species decreased steadily in the period from 1999 till 2019. The 'summary of the findings, gaps and recommendations of the EMBLAS project', issued in April 2021, signalled that the Black Sea's environmental status was improving based on biological indicators. At the same time, there are worrisome developments. A recent study on the presence of antibiotic resistance bacteria and genes indicated that the region is under threat. Initial data show that Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has resulted in significant environmental loss and damage in the Black Sea.

In 1992, the Bucharest Convention⁽³⁰⁾ was concluded. Its aim is to protect the marine and coastal environment of the Black Sea, with the Black Sea Commission as its executive body. As the EU is not a Party to the Convention, it can only participate as an observer at its meetings. The EU recognises the role of the Black Sea Commission and supports its activities, including by enabling its participation in EU-funded projects and processes. For example, an EU-funded project on marine litter managed by the Secretariat of the Barcelona Convention has a component assisting the Black Sea Commission in implementing its own regional plan against marine litter, with activities such as guidelines and pilot

⁽²⁸⁾ <https://emblasproject.org/the-black-sea>

⁽²⁹⁾ <https://emblasproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Summary-on-EMBLAS-Project-findings-gaps-and-recommendations.pdf>

⁽³⁰⁾ <http://www.blacksea-commission.org/Official%20Documents/The%20Convention/Full%20Text/>

projects in Georgia and Ukraine. The EU aims to accede to the Convention ⁽³¹⁾, as reflected in several policy documents and 2019 Council Conclusions ⁽³²⁾. This would facilitate coordinated implementation of EU marine environment policies, such as the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. Ukraine and Georgia are also legally bound to implement the Directive due to their Association Agreements with the EU and their candidate status.

Clean-up campaigns have regularly happened in both countries. The 2021 Clean Beach campaign in Ukraine involved 88 teams and close to 3 000 people, of which more than half were young volunteers. Together, they collected 38 tonnes of waste. Several awareness raising campaigns were conducted with involvement of schools, and special programmes combining art and science to study biodiversity were established, including some for children affected by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Awareness raising was often carried out in cooperation with programmes that address water issues in the Eastern Partnership framework.

In conjunction with the transfer of the research vessel Belgica from Belgium to Ukraine ⁽³³⁾, in 2021, a **comprehensive survey of European seas** was carried out covering the northern part of the Atlantic Ocean, the Mediterranean Sea, the Aegean Sea, the Sea of Marmara, and the Black Sea. The issues that received particular attention included: (i) suspect screening of organic micropollutants with 65 690 substances analysed in each sample; (ii) sampling of microplastics; (iii) the identification of hotspots of antibiotic resistance and (iv) the distribution patterns of fish communities across these water bodies. Novel techniques such as fish eDNA analysis were applied. The survey's initial results confirm the high level of pollution in the Black Sea. Survey results are expected to be published in 2024.

The routine work to populate the **Black Sea Water Quality Database** with data has continued. Originally designed within, and for, the joint EU-United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 'Environmental Monitoring in the Black Sea' (EMBLAS) project, this database was expanded to accommodate data from other projects and includes more than 430 000 entries. This information is aligned with the requirements of the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive. Database management includes cooperation with the European Environment Agency and the European Marine Observation and Data Network (EMODnet). In 2022-2023, the database was transformed into the **Black Sea e-Data Platform**, which integrates data assessment tools. There has been regular cooperation with EU-funded programmes designed to address surface water management in the Eastern Partnership countries.

In 2023, the Black Sea basin was exposed to a large-scale man-made disaster. On 6 June, an explosion destroyed a critical piece of infrastructure in southern Ukraine – the Nova Kakhovka dam. A vast amount of water from the 18 cubic kilometres reservoir was unleashed downstream along the Dnipro River into the Black Sea. According to the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), 'the breach of the Kakhovka dam [...] is a far-reaching environmental disaster that goes beyond Ukraine's borders' ⁽³⁴⁾. This breach of the Nova Kakhovka dam resulted in the release of nutrients, chemical and biological contaminants, which may adversely impact the ecosystems of the Black Sea. According to a report by the Ukrainian government and the United Nations ⁽³⁵⁾, the destruction of the Kakhovka dam caused USD 14 billion [approximately EUR 13 billion ⁽³⁶⁾] worth of damage and losses. In particular, 'there was approximately

⁽³¹⁾ The Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea Against Pollution

<http://www.blacksea-commission.org/Official%20Documents/The%20Convention/Full%20Text/>

⁽³²⁾ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/39779/st10219-en19.pdf>

The 10th paragraph refers for the EU's accession to the Black Sea Commission, as follows:

'(...) The Council reaffirms the EU's aim to become a full member of the Commission on the Protection of the Black Sea against Pollution. The Council particularly takes into account the need for enhanced international cooperation for addressing the environmental and climate challenges in the Black Sea. (...)'

⁽³³⁾ Belgium donated a research vessel to Ukraine and the EU4EMBLAS project enabled its transfer. The vessel, renamed after the late Ukrainian scientist Boris Aleksandrov, arrived in Odesa in October 2021.

⁽³⁴⁾ UNEP (2023), Rapid Environmental Assessment of Kakhovka Dam Breach Ukraine <https://wedocs.unep.org/20.500.11822/43696>

⁽³⁵⁾ The Post Disaster Needs Assessment report of the Kakhovka Dam Disaster was jointly prepared by the Ukrainian Government and the United Nations, <https://ukraine.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/PDNA%20Final%20and%20Cleared%20-%2016Oct.pdf>

⁽³⁶⁾ Conversion to Euro as of 12 June 2024, according to the European Central Bank EUR/ USD reference rate available at https://www.ecb.europa.eu/stats/policy_and_exchange_rates/euro_reference_exchange_rates/html/index.en.html

\$2.79 billion [approximately EUR 2.5 billion ⁽³⁷⁾] in direct damage to infrastructure and assets, with losses exceeding \$11 billion [approximately EUR 10.02 billion ⁽³⁸⁾], with a particularly long-lasting environmental impact. [...] Environmental and energy sectors also recorded the highest losses, which are vital for long-term stability and recovery.’

Key points and achievements

- More analysis of the impacts from the Nova Kakhovka dam destruction is needed with a focus on groundwater in Ukraine, quality of seawater along the coastline of all Black Sea riparian countries, ecosystems, including the risk of sturgeon, the as flagship species in the Black Sea, becoming extinct.
- There has been a strong link between stepping up environmental monitoring in the Black Sea and helping riparian partner countries (particularly Ukraine and Georgia) with the approximation and implementation of EU law relevant for their EU accession path, including the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive and EU Water Framework Directive. Close interaction with relevant processes under the Eastern Partnership umbrella has been ensured.
- The European Commission has continued to support the activities of the Black Sea Commission and has continued working towards the EU accession to the Bucharest Convention. EU accession to the Black Sea Commission would also create favourable conditions for a sustainable EU financial and technical support on marine and coastal environment issues and collaboration in the region.

Field of cooperation #4: Cross-Border Cooperation - Black Sea basin programme 2014-2020, (Interreg VI-B) NEXT Black Sea basin programme

With a budget of EUR 49 million in EU funds, the **ENI CBC Black Sea basin programme for 2014 - 2020** ⁽³⁹⁾ funded 57 Interreg projects around two main priorities: (1) promoting business and entrepreneurship within the Black Sea basin and (2) promoting coordination in environmental protection and in jointly reducing marine litter in the Black Sea basin. So far, 132 partners are involved in the tourism and cultural sectors, in rural and agricultural areas and are specialised in environmental monitoring and joint actions against marine litter and pollution. Even if the COVID-19 pandemic affected the implementation of some projects, especially when looking at the cross-border impact, some projects made use of flexible solutions enabled by regulatory changes that allowed them to broaden the scope of planned activities or carry out further activities with health-related goals.

With a total allocation of EUR 85 million, the **Interreg NEXT Black Sea basin programme for 2021 - 2027** ⁽⁴⁰⁾ has recently benefited from an additional EUR 20 million from the discontinued cooperation with Russia and Belarus in order to support Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova with additional funding⁽⁴¹⁾. The programme's priorities focus on a *blue and smart region* contributing directly to the Common Maritime Agenda objectives, with activities that involve developing research and

⁽³⁷⁾ Ibidem

⁽³⁸⁾ Ibidem

⁽³⁹⁾ <https://www.blacksea-cbc.net/eni-cbc-bsb-2014-2020>

⁽⁴⁰⁾ <https://www.blacksea-cbc.net/interreg-next-bsb-2021-2027>

⁽⁴¹⁾ ‘Ukraine: €135 million initially planned for programmes with Russia and Belarus will be transferred to strengthen cooperation with Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova’ (16 August 2023), https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/whats-new/newsroom/16-08-2023-ukraine-eur135-million-initially-planned-for-programmes-with-russia-and-belarus-will-be-transferred-to-strengthen-cooperation-with-ukraine-and-the-republic-of-moldova_en

innovation capacities among others. A second priority for a *clean and green region* is funding projects to promote climate change adaptation, risk management, protection of nature and biodiversity, as well as tackling all sorts of pollution, responding to the EU Green Deal objectives. The third priority *better cooperation governance* supports the institutional capacity of public authorities of the participating countries, by building mutual trust, and increasing democracy and supporting civil society ⁽⁴²⁾. This is directly in line with the EU support to Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. The first call for proposals triggered large interest with 151 applications submitted. Among the partners in regular projects, 55 come from Ukraine and 43 from the Republic of Moldova despite the difficult situation those countries are facing.

As a novelty, the programme offers the possibility to apply for small-scale projects with a smaller scope, partnership size, duration and budget. Small-scale projects use simplified cost options which eased the financial management and triggered the interest of 212 partners. In January 2024, the programme selected 33 projects for funding, with more than 110 partners. They will start rolling out activities already in 2024. The second call for proposals was launched in March 2024. The Interreg Black Sea basin programme works in line with other EU priorities and in synergy with initiatives being carried out in the region. EUR 11 million will support civil society and boost capacity building for the public authorities, activities which are also in line with the EU accession processes for Ukraine, the Republic of the Republic of Moldova and Georgia.

Key points and achievements

- Focused on regional development and cooperation, the Interreg Black Sea basin programme plays a central role in boosting cooperation, on an equal footing, between the EU Member States and their neighbours. In addition to its maritime dimension, the programme provides EU funds to support projects building mutual trust and common understanding to overcome similar territorial challenges in the areas of environment, fight against climate change, innovation and research, and support to SMEs.
- More recently, with the decision to open EU accession negotiations with Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, and the granting of candidate status to Georgia, the Interreg NEXT Black Sea basin programme is becoming an increasingly useful platform to support these countries' accession path and promote better governance in cooperation matters, including by strengthening the administrative and institutional capacity of the respective authorities.

Field of cooperation #5: Civil society engagement, democracy and human rights

The EU continued to support civil society in the countries in the Black Sea region using all available mechanisms, including the regional and bilateral funds of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Facility.

The Black Sea NGO Forum is an annual regional event, launched in 2008 as part of the Black Sea Synergy. It was organised with the support of the European Commission and the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs until 2022, holding 15 annual editions. Its mission is to increase the level of **dialogue and cooperation** among NGOs in the wider Black Sea region, strengthening their capacity to influence regional and national policies and to increase the number and quality of regional partnerships and projects.

The Forum has enabled participants to share expertise and best practices on various themes of regional interest – democracy and human rights; local development; youth; children's rights; the environment; sustainable development, citizen participation and social entrepreneurship. It has also encouraged multi-stakeholder dialogue and facilitated partnerships.

The Forum has **developed its strategic framework for the 2019-2024 period**, highlighting two main strategic directions: (1) supporting **the creation of thematic NGO networks in new areas of**

⁽⁴²⁾ Commission implementing decision C(2023) 8959 of 15.12.2023

cooperation – sustainability and resilience of civil society organisations, environment and climate change, sustainable development and corporate social responsibility, development of volunteering activities; and (2) promoting and supporting an enabling environment for civil society in the Black Sea Region, **focusing on building the resilience** of civil society.

Key points and achievements

- The Black Sea NGO Forum continued to be a significant driver behind developing cooperation in the region, reuniting participants from different countries in the Black Sea region, as confirmed through the annual forums organised between 2019-2022 and by redesigning its Strategic Framework for 2019-2024. Overall, it has helped build trust and create joint projects, identifying common challenges and opportunities and ways to address them together.
- In terms of thematic focus, priority was given to sustainability and resilience, including the development of inclusive, resilient and adaptive societies in the Black Sea region, addressing environmental issues and climate change, as well as to reflecting on new priorities, objectives and strategies dedicated to the Black Sea region in a transformed regional context, affected by different crises (COVID-19 pandemic, impacts of Russia's war against Ukraine, etc.).

Field of cooperation #6: Education, research and innovation, culture and tourism

In the current geopolitical context, science, innovation and technology cooperation, as one of the main drivers for sustainable growth, across the Black Sea Region, is key in building mutual trust and interdependent relationships between the EU and the Black Sea riparian countries, regionally as well as bilaterally.

The EU has been actively supporting cooperation on education, training, youth issues and sport in the Black Sea region through the Erasmus+ programme. Since 2019, several Erasmus+ projects involving organisations from the Black Sea countries have supported partnerships, capacity building, youth cooperation and mobility, and the modernisation of education systems. The programme has supported over 82 000 exchanges of students and staff between countries in the region. In addition, nearly 36 000 young people and youth workers participated in Erasmus+ youth projects involving countries from the Black Sea region.

Similarly, six countries (Armenia, Bulgaria, Greece, Georgia, Romania and Ukraine) participate in the Creative Europe 2021-2027 programme, the flagship EU initiative supporting the culture and audio-visual sectors. The results from the first 3 years of the programme's implementation show that 408 organisations from the six countries have been involved in 395 projects promoting multilateral cooperation in culture. Some 183 of these projects are led by an organisation based in one of the countries of the region.

Research and innovation in the region are supported through Horizon Europe, the EU's key funding programme for research and innovation. Collaboration in science and research is especially important, and has the potential to unite the partners' efforts around common vital challenges also through Science Diplomacy. Horizon Europe with its extensive association policy is offering the region and the Eastern Partnership countries at larger extent an opportunity of reinforced cooperation with the EU in research and innovation.

Alongside Bulgaria and Romania, Türkiye, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine successfully joined the programme as associated countries and are implementing their association agreements with increased participation as compared to Horizon 2020. Priority areas are climate, energy and mobility, health and actions under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie programme. The associated countries' engagement in the EU missions and partnerships has started, like the Cities Mission, the Mission 'Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030', Mission Adaptation to Climate Change, Biodiversa+, Water4All and the Sustainable

Blue Economy partnerships. Several support measures to Ukraine also helped Ukrainian scientists become included in regional cooperation initiatives.

The Horizon Europe Joint Committee Meetings, taking place annually, aim to assess, evaluate and review the implementation of the Horizon Europe Association Agreement, as regards the participation and performance of organisations from associated countries in Horizon Europe. These meetings involve discussions on how to improve and develop cooperation and on future policy priorities as regards research and innovation among other things.

Joint Committee Meetings with Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Türkiye have taken place annually since they joined the programme. Horizon Europe info days have taken place. Here, the Black Sea SRIA, and participation in the Mission ‘Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030’ and the SBEP have also been especially highlighted. All these actions, in addition to the launch of the Horizon Europe Offices and the Eastern Partnership Informal Working Group on research and innovation have positively contributed to the successful participation of these countries in the programme.

The research and innovation dimension of the Eastern Partnership, followed up through the Partnership’s Informal Working Group on research and innovation, aims to boost the research and innovation capacities of partners by intensifying their integration into the European Research Area. New executive funding agencies for research and innovation have for example been established in Georgia and Ukraine.

Furthermore, some countries participating in the Black Sea Synergy (the Republic of Moldova, Georgia, Ukraine and Türkiye) benefit from specialised target support from the EU in the design of smart specialisation strategies (S3), which consists of assistance, guidance and methodological expert support to the national S3 teams. Specialised publications and online courses are available in the Knowledge Hub for Smart Specialisation in the EU Enlargement and Neighbourhood Region ⁽⁴³⁾, intended to help practitioners advance in the design process of these strategies.

The Republic of Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine, also active partners in the Eastern Partnership, are key in the discussions that aim to accelerate the delivery of the economic and investment plan for the Eastern Partnership countries in key areas of cooperation. This touches, among other things, connectivity, transport, energy, the green and digital transitions, as well as increased cooperation with regions such as Central Asia and the Western Balkans, and synergies with other regional policies such as the Black Sea Synergy.

⁽⁴³⁾ https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/scientific-activities-z/innovation-eu-enlargement-and-neighbourhood-region/s3-knowledge-hub_en

Key points and achievements

- Erasmus+ continues to be the most important and successful flagship initiative in the field of education and training, with Black Sea countries actively participating in it. Its increasing attractiveness is confirmed by the number of applications, implemented projects and student exchange visits, offering new cooperation opportunities both within Europe and internationally.
- Erasmus+ projects continue to be particularly crucial for cooperation with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, whose active participation helps in particular with capacity building in the field of higher or vocational education and training.
- Science and technology cooperation across the Black Sea Region is important to build mutual trust and interdependent relationships between the EU and the Black Sea riparian countries, regionally as well as bilaterally. This collaboration is especially important as science and technology are one of the main drivers for building sustainable growth and prosperity and have the potential to unite the partners' efforts around common vital challenges also through Science Diplomacy.
- Horizon Europe with its extensive association policy is offering the region and the Eastern Partnership countries at larger extent an opportunity of reinforced cooperation with the EU in research and innovation. The research and innovation performance of Black Sea associated countries has significantly increased in Horizon Europe compared to Horizon 2020.
- The Horizon Europe Joint Committee meetings, the launch of the Horizon Europe offices and the Eastern Partnership Informal Working Group on research and innovation significantly contributed to this increased success.

Field of cooperation #7: Energy and transport

Energy

During the implementation period, energy cooperation in the Black Sea region was marred by the disruptions caused by the pandemic, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, Russia's weaponisation of energy supplies and the recent energy crisis. Nevertheless, the Southern Gas Corridor ⁽⁴⁴⁾ became operational across the southern shore of the Black Sea in 2020 and partners are exploring ways to double its capacity by 2027 under the EU's REPowerEU plan **to phase out the EU's dependency on Russian fossil fuels**. Gas transmission system operators from Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Slovakia have adopted a memorandum of understanding with the State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR) to enable additional gas deliveries from Azerbaijan covering more European customers. At the same time, Türkiye and Romania are developing offshore gas drilling operations in the Black Sea to **increase energy security and reduce import dependency**. All Black Sea neighbours **have committed to achieving net-zero emissions by or around 2050**. The EU and its Member States, as well as the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan have joined the Global Pledge to triple renewable energy capacity and double energy efficiency gains worldwide by 2030. Romania and Bulgaria are working on prospects for **offshore wind power development in the Black Sea**, with both fixed-bottom and floating turbines. Some 16 companies from the EU, Türkiye and the UK have come together to develop a 5 MW floating wind turbine demonstrator adapted to Black Sea conditions, with EU funding (Horizon Europe programme).

⁽⁴⁴⁾ The Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) started operating in 2020 and currently supplies natural gas from Azerbaijan to Georgia, Türkiye, Greece, Italy, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, and Serbia. In 2023, it supplied over 11 billion cubic metres of natural gas from Azerbaijan to the EU market. The REPowerEU strategy and the EU-Azerbaijan strategic energy partnership of 2022 aim to increase gas supplies from Azerbaijan to the EU market via the SGC.

Work is advancing in various forums to promote **energy infrastructure connectivity, approximation of laws to the EU energy acquis and market integration**. The Energy Community ⁽⁴⁵⁾ exemplifies this trend, alongside **the Green Energy Partnership**, which was launched in 2022 by Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania and Hungary, with more regional partners interested in joining. Investigations are progressing on the possible laying of a high-voltage direct-current submarine cable between the Romanian and Georgian coasts that is bidirectional as well as on various possible trading routes across the region for renewable fuels such as hydrogen. The EU supports Armenia's participation in regional projects such as the Black Sea Electricity Cable ⁽⁴⁶⁾.

The EU together with the US have led global efforts to reduce methane emissions, and in 2021, they jointly launched **the Global Methane Pledge** at COP26 in Glasgow, in line with a political commitment to collectively reduce methane emissions by 30% from 2020 levels by 2030. The EU has developed a **methane action plan** outlining the policies and activities that will enable it to help implement the Global Methane Pledge. Armenia, Bulgaria, Czechia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan have joined the Global Methane Pledge and countries need to take comprehensive domestic action. A lot remains to be done to achieve the Pledge, from policies to finance, to monitoring reporting and verification, and engaging with the rest of countries around the Black Sea, in particular those that produce fossil fuel.

Key points and achievements

- Despite challenges, work is advancing steadily with partners from the Black Sea region to promote the development of renewable energy capacity, energy interconnections and market integration in line with the EU acquis so as to increase energy security and accelerate the energy transition, in line with the EU Green Deal, the REPowerEU strategy and the EU's external energy strategy.

Transport

In the area of transport, common concerns of the EU Member States and non-EU countries bordering the Black Sea include freedom of navigation, maritime safety, maritime security and protecting the marine environment. Since 2017, the European Maritime Safety Agency has been implementing a project bringing together national, European and international stakeholders **to step up the safety, security and protection of marine environment standards in the Black Sea**. **The Black and Caspian Sea project**, successfully implemented at regional level, has shown that more efforts are needed to further enhance the efficiency of maritime administration in several of the Black Sea coastal countries. The EU-funded project 'Strengthening Environmental Resilience and Maritime Safety for Black and Caspian Sea riparian states' (BCSEA II) started on 1 October 2022, with a planned duration of 4 years. The project addresses maritime safety and maritime security and, in the Black Sea region, supports Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Türkiye and Ukraine with a total budget of EUR 3.5 million.

The consequences of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine go beyond the Black Sea region and are felt worldwide, affecting the global economy, including food and energy security along with transport routes. In particular, food insecurity has worsened worldwide with Russia continuously targeting port infrastructures and storage facilities in Ukraine.

⁽⁴⁵⁾ The Energy Community includes the European Union, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia as members and Türkiye and Armenia as observers.

⁽⁴⁶⁾ https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/joint-statement-european-commission-president-ursula-von-der-leyen-and-armenian-prime-minister-nikol-2023-10-06_en

Global inclusive efforts, with Russia as a participant, such as the UN and Türkiye-brokered Black Sea Grain Initiative implemented between July 2022 and July 2023, allowing for the resumption of Ukrainian grain exports via the Black Sea, require Russia's political will to be sustainable and continued. Since its withdrawal in July 2023, Russia has not shown any willingness to revert to the initiative.

Launched in May 2022, the EU-Ukraine Solidarity Lanes were established to help Ukraine overcome the Black Sea blockade, enabling vital Ukrainian exports and imports via rail, road, and inland waterways and becoming a lifeline for Ukraine's economy and agricultural sector. The Solidarity Lanes also represent the backbone infrastructure ensuring long-term connectivity between the EU, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. The total value of trade via the Solidarity Lanes since May 2022 (up to end of April 2024) is estimated at around EUR 157 billion, with around EUR 50 billion for Ukraine's exports and around EUR 107 billion for imports to Ukraine. Between May 2022 and the end of April 2024, approximately 52 Mt of goods were imported and 136 Mt of goods were exported through the Solidarity Lanes (around half of the exports have been agricultural goods and the other half non-agricultural products).

In terms of agricultural exports in total, as of end April 2024, Ukraine has exported around 131 Mt of grain, oilseeds and other related products through the Solidarity Lanes, in particular through the Danube route⁽⁴⁷⁾, and the Black Sea. After the Black Sea Grain Initiative ended (limited to grain exports), Ukraine, together with other riparian Black Sea countries, launched a new corridor in north-west area of the Black Sea referred to as Ukraine's 'Black Sea Corridor'. The 'Black Sea Corridor' ensured a larger capacity to respond to Ukraine's needs in exporting grain. However, it cannot be taken for granted while freedom of navigation remains under pressure from floating sea mines and ongoing naval warfare. The 'EU-Ukraine Solidarity Lanes' - first and foremost the Danube route - remain a valuable complement to it.

Key points and achievements

- As a result of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the safety of navigation in the northern part of the Black Sea is severely impacted by sea mines, among others things, and is likely to remain a major concern even for some time after the end the war.
- The 'EU-Ukraine Solidarity Lanes' provide a lifeline to Ukraine's economy in the face of Russia's attempted blockade of the country's Black Sea ports. While the recent increase of exports through Ukraine's 'Black Sea Corridor' is a very positive development, Solidarity Lanes remain essential for Ukraine's imports and exports of a wide range of goods, and for long-term improved connectivity of both Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova with the EU, including by better integrating both countries' transport infrastructure network within the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) and supporting development of an interoperable rail network. The EU continues to pursue the Solidarity Lanes objectives to increase efficiency and reduce transport costs to improve transport connections between the EU, Ukraine and the Black Sea region.
- On research, development of innovative solutions enabling clean, safe, energy efficient and decarbonised sea transport within the Black Sea could be considered. Further efforts to build institutions are needed to support the efficiency of the maritime administration in several Black Sea coastal countries, as shown by the Black and Caspian Sea project.

Other areas of cooperation mentioned by the 2007 Communication on Black Sea Synergy, such as employment, social affairs and trade, saw modest progress being made in cooperation at regional level between 2019 and 2023. As regards trade, the EU is an important economic and trading partner for the Black Sea countries and closer economic cooperation ties and preferential trade relations remain an important element of our relationship.

⁽⁴⁷⁾ An estimated 68% of the Ukrainian grain, oilseeds and other products exported via the Solidarity Lanes went through the Danube corridor.

(B): Links with other EU policies or strategies relevant for the Black Sea region

(i) The Eastern Partnership

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) – underpinned by the economic and investment plan – provides the framework for strengthening the EU's economic and political relations with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

The 2020 EaP new agenda on recovery, resilience and reform ⁽⁴⁸⁾ outlined five policy objectives: (a) resilient, sustainable and integrated economies; (b) accountable institutions, the rule of law and security; (c) environmental and climate resilience; (d) digital transformation and (e) fair and inclusive societies. These five flexible and inter-connected long-term objectives are the result of a broad and inclusive consultation and aim to respond to new priorities, strengthen resilience to address common challenges, foster sustainable development and deliver concrete results for citizens. The Joint Declaration of the EaP Summit of 15 December 2021 reaffirmed the 2020 new agenda on recovery, resilience and reform, and the role of EaP in bringing closer the EU and its Eastern partners. After a transitory period following the start of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, at the December 2022 Ministerial Meeting, EU Member States and partner countries were united in their commitment to the EaP, to its agenda of recovery, resilience and reform, as well as in their willingness to make the EaP more flexible and tailored to the needs of partners.

The December 2023 Ministerial Meeting re-confirmed the EaP agenda for recovery, resilience and reform, as well as tackling challenges related to the ongoing consequences of Russia's war against Ukraine for the entire region. Also, connectivity, transport, energy, green and digital transitions, and security matters figured high in the discussions.

Despite Russia's war against Ukraine and other challenges in the region, the EaP has brought Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia closer to the EU and continues to promote regional cooperation delivering results across different areas in partner countries. The EaP continued to be a driver of normative transformation for partners in the region. Throughout this time, the EU has contributed to economic development, helped implement key reforms, diversify trade flows, improve energy security, and strengthen resilience, civil society and political pluralism in the EU Eastern neighbourhood. **A number of these initiatives also directly contribute to the Black Sea Synergy**, including in sectors such as environment and water management, civil society, research and innovation, connectivity, transport, energy, green and digital transitions and are key for the EU's cooperation in the Black Sea region.

Key points and achievements

- The Eastern Partnership has contributed to bringing partners closer to the EU, in particular Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, who became candidate countries in 2022 and 2023.
- The economic and investment plan has played a key role in promoting socio-economic development and boosting resilience in the region. As of 1st January 2024, a total amount of EUR 8.5 billion has been mobilised through bilateral and regional grants, blending operations and guarantees, of which EUR 5.1 billion are supporting the implementation of country flagship projects. Some of the programmes and initiatives under this umbrella contribute directly to the Black Sea Synergy.

⁽⁴⁸⁾ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eastern-partnership_en

(ii) *The macro-regional EU strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)* ⁽⁴⁹⁾

This is particularly important, considering the explicit reference to it in the Communication on EU strategy for Danube Region of 2010 ⁽⁵⁰⁾, highlighting the linkage and the consistency required by the EU Danube strategy with Black Sea perspectives ⁽⁵¹⁾. The common challenges identified by the Danube macro-region countries concern: a) connectivity (transport and energy infrastructure, tourism and people-to-people contacts); b) environment (water quality and management, environmental risks, biodiversity); c) socio-economic aspects (knowledge society, competitiveness, education and skills); and d) institutional capacity and security. The Danube strategy therefore facilitates cooperation referenced previously in the document, under Section III(A), but at macro-regional scale.

Some of the priority areas of the Danube strategy, such as navigability, are particularly important for the Black Sea region. As part of the ‘EU-Ukraine Solidarity Lanes’, the Danube corridor plays a particularly significant role in enabling continued exports of Ukrainian grain and key imports by sea despite Russia’s blockade of Black Sea ports. For Ukrainian exports and imports, the Danube ports as well as the port in Constanta in Romania have provided Ukraine with vital direct access to the rest of the world.

Solidary Lanes are also paving the way for the future TEN-T connectivity in the region with a focus on developing rail interoperability between the EU riparian countries and the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

Links between the EU strategy for the Danube Region and the Interreg Black Sea basin programme rely on Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova participating in both. The programme helps implement the strategy’s priorities and thematic objectives, including through participation in joint events and initiatives. In November 2021, an event on marine litter in the Danube and the Black Sea region was co-organised by the Balkan and Black Sea Commission of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe and the International Centre for Black Sea Studies. Focused on the initiatives implemented under the strategy, the programme presented potential solutions for marine litter identified by the projects funded ⁽⁵²⁾.

(iii) *Global Gateway strategy*

Through the 2021 **Global Gateway**, the EU offered its quality investment to its partners around the world, seeking to support fair, green and digital transitions beyond European borders and boosting competitiveness and security of global supply chains.

Boosting connectivity through the Black Sea is at the heart of the two Global Gateway strategy flagship projects for 2023. One involves deploying **undersea electric and digital cables**, and other involves establishing **ferry connections** between the EU and the South Caucasus contributing not only to the EU’s connectivity with the Black Sea region and the South Caucasus, but also with Central Asia. Overall, the economic and investment plan for the Eastern Partnership is contributing to the green and digital transformations.

As one of the flagship initiatives of the Global Gateway Strategy, the Commission conducted a study on sustainable transport connections between Europe and Central Asia, which was published on 30 June 2023⁽⁵³⁾. It identified 33 hard infrastructure investment needs and 7 soft connectivity

⁽⁴⁹⁾ The EU Strategy for Danube Region was launched by the Commission Communication of 2010 (COM(2010) 715) and approved by the European Council in its Conclusions of 23-24 June 2011. It brings together fourteen countries: Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Germany (Baden Wuerttemberg and Bavaria), Hungary, the Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine (four oblasts: Odessa, Chenivetska, Ivano-Frankivska and Zakarpatska).

⁽⁵⁰⁾ https://danube-region.eu/download/communication_from_the_commission_2010/?wpdmdl=625&refresh=5d5fe189964b61566564745

⁽⁵¹⁾ ‘Since the Danube River flows into the Black Sea, the Danube Strategy should be coherent with Black Sea perspectives’.

⁽⁵²⁾ Also available on the programme website at <https://blacksea-cbc.net/videos/>.

⁽⁵³⁾ https://transport.ec.europa.eu/document/download/4360ea36-a75a-47e5-8b6f-84a9bde66a02_en?filename=Sustainable_transport_connections_between_Europe_and_Central_Asia.pdf

coordination actions across the five Central Asian countries, based on strict sustainability criteria (environmental, social, economic, fiscal as well as political viability) and in close consultation with a wide range of stakeholders in the countries concerned. Considering that the extended TEN-T covers the South Caucasus region and that the identified Trans-Caspian connections would need to pass through either the South Caucasus countries or Türkiye in order to reach the EU, work on the follow-up to this study ensures Georgia, Azerbaijan and Türkiye will be closely involved. Since the publication of the study, the European Commission has worked towards putting into practice the study's findings. The EU and its partners, in Team Europe and beyond, are together mobilising EUR 10 billion to promote the establishment of direct transport links with Central Asia through the Black Sea and Caucasus regions.

Key points and achievements

- For Ukrainian exports and imports, the Danube ports have provided Ukraine with vital direct access to the rest of the world. The Danube and its connections to the Black Sea will continue to play a key role in the reconstruction of Ukraine and the development of a coordinated approach between EU-Ukraine Solidarity Lanes initiative, the EU strategy for the Danube Region and the Black Sea Synergy. Steps that continue to improve regional connectivity are needed.
- The EU and Central Asia are cooperating closely in developing the Trans-Caspian Transport Corridor (TCTC) as a sustainable and multimodal transport link that provides an alternative to the so-called 'Northern Corridor' through Russia. The aim of the TCTC is to link Europe and Central Asia in 15 days (or less). The EU's Study on Sustainable Transport Connections (conducted by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development) in 2023 assessed existing and potential routes to ensure most sustainable transport connections between Central Asia and Europe. In addition to 33 hard infrastructure investment needs in Central Asia, the study also proposes 7 coordinated regional actions on soft connectivity measures (trade facilitation, harmonisation of tariffs, customs procedures, border controls, interoperability, market liberalisation, etc.).
- At the Global Gateway Investors Forum for Sustainable Transport Connectivity between the EU and Central Asia in January 2024 in Brussels, the EU pooled a 10 billion EUR investment package from finance institutions participating in the Forum and announced the establishment of a coordination platform, which will monitor progress and ensure that the TCTC's development stays on track. The next Investors Forum is expected to take place in 2025.

iv) Maritime security in the Black Sea

The 2022 EU Strategic Compass for Security and Defence, setting out a common strategic vision for EU security and defence policy over the next 5 to 10 years, highlights that stability and security in the wider Black Sea region are severely affected by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine with far-reaching implications in terms of security, resilience, freedom of navigation and economic development. Furthermore, it underscores the relevance of **maritime security** in the sea basins around the EU, including the Black Sea basin, for EU's economic development, free trade, transport and energy security.

The **European Union maritime security strategy and its action plan**, revised in October 2023 ⁽⁵⁴⁾, provide the framework for addressing security challenges and threats at sea. It strengthens the EU's autonomy and capacity to respond to threats, safeguard its interests at sea and protect its citizens, values and economy.

https://transport.ec.europa.eu/transport-themes/international-relations/study-sustainable-transport-connections-central-asia_en

⁽⁵⁴⁾ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/67499/st14280-en23.pdf>

It features a dedicated section on the Black Sea, with actions such as detection of sea mines posing a risk to shipping and navigation, including those deployed during Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

Since 2019, multipurpose maritime operations (MMOs) ⁽⁵⁵⁾ organised annually in the Black Sea and coordinated by Frontex and riparian EU Member States (Bulgaria and Romania), with support from the European Maritime Safety Agency and the European Fisheries Control Agency, have provided impetus for cooperation in the maritime security domain. These focused on preventing illicit activities, combating cross-border crimes, improving search and rescue, and supporting increased maritime surveillance ⁽⁵⁶⁾. Therefore, the EU approach and activities have complemented those of other strategic partners such as NATO.

Bulgaria, Romania and Türkiye signed ⁽⁵⁷⁾ the Black Sea Mine Countermeasures Task Group Agreement that seeks to address the mine threat in the Black Sea amid Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. This joint effort, known as the Mine Countermeasures Naval Group in the Black Sea, has put the basis for vital cooperation seeking to ensure safe and secure shipping routes in the Black Sea.

Key points and achievements

- Maritime security enables resilient and sustainable activities. Since 2018, the European Union, through its maritime security strategy and its section plan has sought to contribute to maritime security in the Black Sea, including through the regular MMOs. The revised maritime security strategy from October 2023 has provided additional guidance for Black Sea region in safeguarding the EU's interests in the region.
- Once available, the EU capabilities under development or planned in the maritime domain, including within the EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), connected with the revised EU maritime security strategy and its action plan, may consolidate the inventory of EU Member States, and generate overall security benefits for all sea basins around the EU, including the Black Sea basin.

(C): Cooperation with regional and international organisations

The Organization for the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC)

During the reporting period, cooperation with the EU remained high on the BSEC's agenda. In turn, as highlighted in the Council Conclusions of 17 June 2019, the EU paid particular attention to its interaction with the BSEC and engagement in Black Sea regional cooperation.

Before Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, interaction between the EU and the BSEC was dynamic and project-oriented, with EU funding worth over EUR 50 million. However, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has affected the dynamics of this interaction. To date, observer status has not been extended to any of the EU Member States. Equally, possibilities for the EU, as a permanent observer to the BSEC, to take part notably in the meetings of the BSEC Ministerial Councils have diminished.

Although the informal meetings between the BSEC open Troika and the members of the Council's Working Party on Eastern Europe and Central Asia (COEST) continued to be organised until 2022, the last in-person meeting was held in Brussels in January 2022.

⁽⁵⁵⁾ A multipurpose maritime operation (MMO) is an initiative that aims to enhance European cooperation on coast guard functions. It provides increased technical and operational assistance to the host Member States by coordinating various activities. These operations focus on preventing irregular migration, illegal fishing, and marine pollution, as well as combating other cross-border crimes in specific maritime regions.

⁽⁵⁶⁾ Through deploying remotely piloted aircraft systems provided by the European Maritime Safety Agency, and surveillance aircraft from Frontex.

⁽⁵⁷⁾ on 11 January 2024

Thematically, the BSEC is engaged in implementing the Common Maritime Agenda and Black Sea SRIA, by sharing information and raising awareness about relevant opportunities in the blue economy sector through its Black Sea Virtual Knowledge Centre.

Key points and achievements

- Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has more broadly affected the dynamics of the interaction between BSEC and the EU.
- From a sectoral point of view, BSEC-EU interaction continued to take place through the Common Maritime Agenda and its scientific pillar, the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda for the Black Sea. These interactions are limited to the BSEC Permanent International Secretariat's participation in these initiatives as an observer.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has deeply changed the security situation, affecting regional cooperation in the Black Sea, and has had an impact on the implementation of the Black Sea Synergy. It placed the focus on the need for increased cooperation and resilience in response to the war fallout and in addressing transnational challenges such as demining and fighting pollution.

Despite Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine, activities under the Black Sea Synergy have been successfully implemented in all its **fields of cooperation and have helped strengthen the interconnection among them**. These fields are: (i) integrated maritime policy and sustainable blue economy; (ii) fisheries and aquaculture; (iii) environmental protection and climate change; (iv) cross-border cooperation - Black Sea basin programme 2014-2020, (Interreg VI-B) NEXT Black Sea basin programme; (v) civil society engagement, democracy and human rights; (vi) education, research and innovation (beyond the marine sector), culture and tourism; and (vii) energy and transport.

The implementation of the Synergy has also resulted in increased engagement by most of the participating countries, except Russia, in its **two milestone initiatives** on maritime affairs and marine research and innovation: the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea and its scientific pillar, the common SRIA for the Black Sea, despite Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. This showed the potential of the Black Sea Synergy to act as a facilitator for cooperation and cohesion for all riparian states and beyond.

The 'EU-Ukraine Solidarity Lanes', although designed to cover Ukrainian exports and needs for imports of essential goods, have proven to be a lifeline for Ukraine's economy and showcased the flexible and proactive cooperation on the part of a number of Black Sea riparian countries.

Overall, this report reconfirmed the added value of the bottom-up approach to project development and of the inclusive and voluntary nature of the Black Sea Synergy and its implementation, offering a comprehensive review of the results of regional cooperation in the Black Sea area between 2019 and 2023.

During the reporting period, meeting the financial needs remained essential for the Black Sea Synergy's progress and success, its activities being financed through various budget lines and programmes. The initiative benefited from: (i) allocations ⁽⁵⁸⁾ via the cross-border cooperation programmes; (ii) funding under cohesion policy; and (iii) funds related to sustainable blue economy and other EU programmes and financial instruments. These different financial instruments create opportunities, but also the need to

⁽⁵⁸⁾ More details in Annex I to this Joint Staff Working Document and on the public dashboard of the European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA), public dashboard https://dashboard.tech.ec.europa.eu/qs_digit_dashboard_mt/public/sense/app/3744499f-670f-42f8-9ef3-0d98f6cd586f/sheet/4c9ea8df-f0f9-4c0d-b26b-99fc0218d9d9/state/analysis

ensure the sustainability, relevance and effectiveness of action under the Black Sea Synergy. Better policy steering, stronger ‘buy-in’ from partner countries and a more structural approach to funding could strengthen regional cooperation in the Black Sea. Cooperation with international financial institutions could be pursued further.

The geopolitical situation in the Black Sea has substantially changed over these past years, becoming more complex and tense in light of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, and is prone to further changes. Regional cooperation in the Black Sea requires security and stability. Given the high degree of uncertainty and instability in the context of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, flexibility, agility, resilience, coherence and coordination of actions and resources are still required.

This report demonstrates the wide range of EU activities in the Black Sea region which have sought to address existing and new challenges in the region and provide a good basis for reflection and planning for future EU policy in the region.

Annexes:

- The tables with the updated and synthetic information regarding the projects developed during 2019-2023 period in the 7 thematic fields of cooperation;
- Map

*(A): Main sectors and fields of cooperation**(A): Main sectors and fields of cooperation**Field of cooperation #1: Sustainable blue economy and marine research and innovation*

No	Flagship project Reporting period	Main actors Level of interaction – regional, national, local or civil society Funding sources	Main activities and results
1. Integrated maritime policy & sustainable blue economy for a resilient and sustainable Black Sea blue economy			
1.1	Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea (CMA) 2019-2023 <i>Endorsed on 21 May 2019</i>	Regional initiative for voluntary cooperation on sustainable blue economy, supported by the six Black Sea riparian countries and the Republic of Moldova. The Russian Federation has been suspended from the initiative since February 2022, due to its war of aggression against Ukraine.	The common maritime agenda for the Black Sea ⁽⁵⁹⁾ is the latest of the EU sea basin strategies. It supports regional cooperation for a more sustainable blue economy in the Black Sea and sets main 3 goals: 1. healthy marine ecosystems; 2. innovative blue economy; 3. investment. These goals are further broken down into priorities and actions. The agenda is voluntary, bottom-up and sectoral driven by the participating countries. Since its establishment, it has helped strengthen regional dialogue and improved cooperation on maritime affairs in the sea basin, putting in place a stable and reliable regional framework to address the challenges and opportunities of the blue economy in the Black Sea. One of the initiative's key objectives is to identify bankable projects with a concrete impact on the participating countries, involving multilevel stakeholders and aligning EU, national and international funding and investments. Political coordination of the agenda is ensured through ministerial meetings, while operational coordination is guaranteed by a Steering Group comprised of officials from participant countries (national coordinators) and the Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries of the EU Commission (DG MARE). Participating countries coordinate the Steering Group on an

⁽⁵⁹⁾ <https://black-sea-maritime-agenda.ec.europa.eu/>

			<p>annual rotating basis and provide guidance and necessary support to ensure expected results are achieved. Regional and international organisations active in the Black Sea act as consultative and observer bodies, complementing and mutually reinforcing the work of the Steering Group. These organisations include: the Black Sea Commission, the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions, the Managing Authority Interreg NEXT Black Sea basin programme, the World Bank, and the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM).</p> <p>The implementation of the agenda is supported through the Black Sea Assistance Mechanism (https://black-sea-maritime-agenda.ec.europa.eu/about/bsam), funded by the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF). As a practical support arm, the Black Sea Assistance Mechanism works closely with the Steering Group and offers operational, logistical and administrative support.</p> <p>The initiative does not have own resources. Implementation is made possible by pooling and aligning available funding by participating countries, the European Commission, international financial institutions and other donors. Participating countries, supported by the Black Sea Assistance Mechanism, are called to use the agenda as a tool for working on joint sustainable blue economy projects, including bankable investment projects, in line with the main goals and priorities of the agenda. Since 2019, it is estimated that 190 actions, including projects and other initiatives, worth over EUR 150 million, were supported in the Black Sea blue economy (data from Maritime Data Hub ⁽⁶⁰⁾ (https://maritime-datahub.eismea.eu/), that were managed by the European Climate Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA).</p>
1.2	Black Sea Assistance Mechanism (BSAM) 2020-2023	<p>Technical assistance established by the European Commission to support the development of the blue economy in the Black Sea under the Common Maritime Agenda.</p> <p>The Black Sea Assistance Mechanism is supported by the EMFAF. It is implemented by</p>	<p>The implementation of the Common Maritime Agenda is supported by a specific team, the Black Sea Assistance Mechanism. Established in 2020, it was renewed in 2022 and became known as the Assistance Mechanism supporting the implementation of the three EU sea basin strategies.</p> <p>As a practical arm of support, the Black Sea Assistance Mechanism helps countries and stakeholders at regional and national level to organise events, develop projects and provide guidance on available funding opportunities. It oversees the overall implementation of the Common Maritime Agenda, while strengthening cross-sea basin synergies and providing policy feedback to the Commission. The Black Sea Assistance Mechanism runs the official website and social media accounts of the Common Maritime Agenda, where it promotes key</p>

⁽⁶⁰⁾ <https://maritime-datahub.eismea.eu>

		<p>the CINEA and the Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE) of the European Commission.</p> <p>Prior to 2020, a facility for blue growth was in place under the European Maritime Fisheries Fund: EUR 909 200 (2017-2019)</p> <p>Funding for 1st ‘Assistance Mechanism for the Black Sea’: EUR 899 750 European Maritime, Fisheries Fund (2020-2022) Funding for 2nd ‘Sea Basins Assistance Mechanism for the Atlantic, Black Sea and Western Mediterranean’: EUR 2 999 256 – EMFAF (2022-2024)</p>	<p>achievements, upcoming events and other activities. It also publishes a 3-monthly newsletter, providing for a wider outreach to the Black Sea sustainable blue economy community.</p> <p>The work of the Black Sea Assistance Mechanism central team is complemented by local efforts carried out by a network of national hubs⁶¹ of blue economy experts located in each participating country (except Russia) that coordinate stakeholder involvement at national level. The national hubs are responsible for organising national events and work in close cooperation with national coordinators on setting priorities, promoting projects and funding opportunities, as well as monitoring progress in their country.</p> <p>In 2022, the normal running of the Black Sea Assistance Mechanism’s tasks was affected by Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine. Regional activities were suspended from the end of February to the end of November. In that period, the focus shifted to national activities organised by the national hubs and continuation of standard tasks, where possible, such as communication activities, projects monitoring and development. In doing so, the Black Sea Assistance Mechanism managed to maintain stakeholder interest, paving the way for revitalised regional cooperation at the end of 2022.</p>
1.3	Black Sea annual stakeholder conferences 2020-2023	<p>Regional events organised annually, bringing together stakeholders from different blue economy sectors, public authorities, project representatives, research and academia, and NGOs. They are hosted and coordinated by countries on a rotating basis and organised in cooperation with</p>	<p>The COVID-19 related restrictions affected the organisation of the Black Sea annual stakeholder conferences. The first conference under the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea took place online in December 2020, coordinated by Bulgaria (that country being in charge at the time on a rotating basis). It was followed by a virtual conference coordinated by Türkiye in November 2021. In 2022, despite COVID-19 restrictions easing, a stakeholder conference was not organised due to the disrupted security situation in the sea basin, following Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine. The 2023 edition of the stakeholder conference took place in Bucharest in November, coordinated by Romania. It enjoyed exceptional visibility with its programme of side meetings and events, thematic panels and hackathon sessions, attracting more than 200 participants from across the region.</p>

(⁶¹) <https://black-sea-maritime-agenda.ec.europa.eu/bsam-nationalhubs>

		the Black Sea Assistance Mechanism and the Commission.	The annual stakeholder conferences have become a landmark event for the Black Sea blue economy community. They provide stakeholders with an opportunity to capitalise on the many actions promoted during the year and discuss the state of play and next steps in terms of implementing the Common Maritime Agenda's main goals and priorities. A feature that is particularly appreciated is the organisation of hackathons, where stakeholders brainstorm and identify concrete actions to support a sustainable blue economy in the region, in the form of future project proposals or other activities. Stakeholder conferences also act as a forum for exploring synergies with other regional initiatives and partners.
1.4	Technical and working groups – Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea <i>July 2023</i>	Groups of national experts, specialists and representatives established under the Common Maritime Agenda to address challenges and opportunities in a specific maritime sector.	<p>Technical and working groups can be established under the EU sea basin strategies to enable close collaboration between participating countries on specific maritime sectors or topics.</p> <p>Taking inspiration from similar initiatives (e.g. AquaWest in the WestMed), in 2023, a technical group on sustainable aquaculture was established under the Common Maritime Agenda. It consists of several aquaculture experts and practitioners from the participating countries bringing in diverse expertise and experience. The group supports the adoption and sharing of innovative and sustainable aquaculture practices in the Black Sea. Its main objectives are to promote knowledge sharing, facilitate policy development, encourage stakeholder cooperation (e.g. through pilot projects) and identify funding opportunities.</p> <p>The Technical Group on Sustainable Aquaculture in the Black Sea kicked off activities in November 2023. Experts identified four areas for strengthened collaboration at regional level: governance, capacity building, best practices and project pilots, involving both traditional and innovative aquaculture practices. Similarly, they agreed on developing an action plan and comprehensive roadmap to serve as a strategic framework providing guidance for the group's activities in the years to come.</p>
1.5	Black Sea blue economy investment and innovation capacity building pilot projects (EMFAF) <i>2021-2024</i>	4BIZ project: Boosting the blue economy in the Black Sea region through a business collaboration framework in the field of fisheries and aquaculture, coastal and maritime tourism and maritime transport. Coordinator: Romania. Participants from	The objective of 4BIZ project is to develop a framework for business collaboration between participating countries to stimulate innovation, digitalisation and investment by addressing local capacity-building needs. The main beneficiaries of the project are blue economy businesses active in the sectors of fisheries, aquaculture, coastal and maritime tourism, and maritime transport from target regions in Romania, Bulgaria, Türkiye, Ukraine and Georgia. The expected results are job creation, income increases, and improvements to the quality of life for local communities, while preserving the unique natural and cultural heritage of the Black Sea basin.

		<p>Romania, Bulgaria, Türkiye, Ukraine and Georgia.</p> <p>Funding: EUR 510 484 – ENFAF</p> <p>DBAN project: Establishing a regional digital blue economy and innovation acceleration network. Coordinator: Bulgaria. Participants from Bulgaria, Georgia and Ukraine.</p> <p>Funding: EUR 414 798 – EMFAF</p>	<p>The DBAN project ⁽⁶²⁾ aims to establish a regional digital blue innovation acceleration network for the Black Sea region, which will be first to be implemented between the partnering cities of Burgas (Bulgaria), Batumi (Georgia) and Odessa (Ukraine). The network will support businesses and business initiatives in blue economy sectors, building upon their potential for innovation, circular and bio-based solutions as well as their capacity to contribute to local sustainable development. The expected results are a strengthened capacity and boosted collaboration among businesses through a digital blue innovation acceleration platform, mentorship and incubation programmes.</p>
1.6	<p>Harnessing preparedness and response to marine pollution in the Black Sea flagship projects (EMFAF) 2023-2026</p>	<p>Black Sea SIERRA project: Harnessing complementary curricular preparedness via sustainable management in response to civil and military pollution on the coastline, tributaries and lagoons in the Black Sea's north, west and south zones. Coordinator: Romania. Participants from Bulgaria, Romania, Italy, Türkiye and Ukraine.</p> <p>Funding: EUR 599 999 – EMFAF</p>	<p>The objective of the Black Sea SIERRA project ⁽⁶³⁾ is to prepare and adapt the capacity of regional authorities to tackle current and emerging marine pollution by coordinating cross-border response to contamination resulting from armed conflict. The project will help: (i) identify specific types of marine pollution in an area of 90 000 m² along the Black Sea shoreline; (ii) quantify added marine pollution from armed conflicts; (iii) detect novel hazardous substances; and (iv) map underwater noise pollution to assess its impact on marine biodiversity (e.g. sensitive species). The expected results are increased response capacity and optimised cooperation among authorities of participating countries through improved training and management.</p>

⁽⁶²⁾ <https://blue-growth.net/>

⁽⁶³⁾ <https://www.incdpm.org/blackseasierra-project-about>

		<p>RESPONSE project: Building response frameworks to tackle existing and new marine pollution challenges in the Black Sea. Coordinator: Greece. Participants from Bulgaria, Romania, Georgia and Ukraine.</p> <p>Funding: EUR 479 803 – EMFAF</p>	<p>The RESPONSE project aims to co-design, co-implement and co-assess new training schemes and curricula for monitoring, reporting, managing and mitigating marine pollution, with particular attention paid to pollution caused by armed conflicts. The project will propose and apply operating models for key authorities and organisations in charge of the marine environmental pollution response in the Black Sea, both at national and regional level. The expected results are the increased sustainability of these processes, and continuous evaluation and fine-tuning of advanced training systems, which will prioritise potential environmental risks and threats to marine and coastal biodiversity of the Black Sea.</p>
1.7	<p>Strategic research and innovation agenda for the Black Sea (SRIA)</p>	<p>DG Research & Innovation Funding sources: Horizon 2020 Black Sea CONNECT Coordination and Support Action, DG NEAR Eastern Partnership support for meetings of the Black Sea SRIA Senior Officials Working Group and the Operational Network of Funders, CORDIS office for publications</p>	<p>The European Commission has been a consistent facilitator of the Black Sea international research cooperation through the co-creation of the Black Sea SRIA launched in May 2019, based on the Burgas Vision paper, launched in May 2018 for a productive, healthy, resilient, sustainable and better valued Black Sea by 2030. The subsequently developed Black Sea SRIA implementation plan was launched on 4 May 2023 at the European Parliament, together with all Member States and Associated Countries surrounding the Black Sea, all being represented in the Black Sea Operational Network of Funders (ONF) Working Group. See also the European Commission’s dedicated website on the Black Sea SRIA: https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/news/all-research-and-innovation-news/european-commission-welcomes-launch-black-sea-strategic-ri-agenda-implementation-plan-2023-05-04_en.</p> <p>Exchanges on the Black Sea SRIA and its implementation plan have taken place with the Black Sea SRIA Working Group of Senior Officials (3 meetings in 2020 and 3 in 2021) and the Black Sea ONF (2 meetings in 2022 and 3 in 2023).</p> <p>A CORDIS Results Pack – Ambitious cooperation for a healthy, resilient and productive Black Sea (europa.eu) – was published in 2020 that featured 12 Black Sea related transnational projects, including Space@Sea – Multi-use affordable standardised floating Space@Sea, PRIDE – Drivers of Pontocaspian biodiversity Rise and Demise, PORTIS – PORT-Cities: Integrating Sustainability, and ECOFISH. Website: https://cordis.europa.eu/article/id/422446-ambitious-cooperation-for-a-healthy-resilient-and-productive-black-sea</p> <p>A CORDIS Leaflet – EU-funded research helps ensure a prosperous future for the Black Sea region (europa.eu) – was published in 2023 with 14 additional Black Sea related transnational projects. Website: https://cordis.europa.eu/article/id/443370-eu-funded-research-helps-ensure-a-prosperous-future-for-the-black-sea-region</p>

			At its last meeting of 23 November 2023, the Black Sea ONF concluded that their continued cooperation will mainly include the following forms: i) joint research and development projects, including the exchange of the obtained results, as well as the exchange of scientists, specialists and researchers; ii) organisation of scientific meetings, conferences, symposia, courses, seminars, exhibitions, etc. and joint participation in them; iii) exchange of scientific and technological information and documentation; iv) joint use of research and development facilities and scientific equipment; v) other forms of scientific and technological cooperation that can be mutually agreed upon.
1.8	Black Sea CONNECT coordination and support action	DG Research & Innovation, Coordination and Support Action Funding sources: Horizon 2020, EUR 2 167 437,50	The Black Sea CONNECT project developed the Black Sea SRIA implementation plan with joint research and innovation actions for a resilient, sustainable blue economy for the region, guided by principles established in the Burgas Vision Paper. The project has been making use of the collective expertise of the scientific experts, stakeholders and various national and international organisations ⁽⁶⁴⁾ . The project was also instrumental to develop the Black Sea Young Ambassadors Programme, through successful trainings and numerous outreach activities. CORDIS factsheet link: https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/860055 Project website: http://connect2blacksea.org/
1.9	DOORS research and innovation action	DG Research and Innovation, Research and Innovation Action Funding sources: EUR 9 000 000	The consortium of the DOORS project 'Developing Optimal and Open Research Support' for the Black Sea brings together 37 institutions, including the relevant European Research Infrastructure Consortia and research infrastructure initiatives. This consortium aims to develop and test a system of systems platform to develop evidence-based knowledge based on integrating and sharing data and observations, like those from satellite technology. It will help determine aspects of interaction of the Black Sea system with global biogeochemical cycles and climate change impacts and will implement integrated models to improve knowledge on ecosystem quality and change. The Blue Growth Accelerator will support the sustainable development of businesses. CORDIS factsheet link: https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101000518 Project website: https://www.doorsblacksea.eu/
1.10	BRIDGE-BS research and	DG Research and Innovation, Research and Innovation Action	The BRIDGE-BS project is assessing the current state of the Black Sea's unique ecosystems, put at risk by climate change, pollution and overfishing. The project is paving the way towards sustainable solutions for a healthy, resilient, and productive Black Sea by 2030. It does this

⁽⁶⁴⁾ [https://urldefense.com/v3/http://connect2blacksea.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/27042023-Black-Sea-SRIA-Implementation-Plan.pdf;!DOxrgLBm!ElZ2C3KwYN9ATy0t5OJ4IbCSb5Mt6SeTR_zK1lwx3EeOU3iG_PDkpcMRQSLIXZEKtul0QjVZZQ4FDga6RygaF7AtUVM\\$](https://urldefense.com/v3/http://connect2blacksea.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/27042023-Black-Sea-SRIA-Implementation-Plan.pdf;!DOxrgLBm!ElZ2C3KwYN9ATy0t5OJ4IbCSb5Mt6SeTR_zK1lwx3EeOU3iG_PDkpcMRQSLIXZEKtul0QjVZZQ4FDga6RygaF7AtUVM$)

	innovation action	Funding sources: EUR 8 999 877,5	through using ecosystem service risk analysis, climate scenarios and socio-economic scenarios, co-designed transformative pathways at local living labs, blue economy incubators and public engagement. CORDIS factsheet link: https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101000240 Project website: https://bridgeblacksea.org/
1.11	EMPOWERUS research and innovation action	DG Research and Innovation Horizon Europe Destination 6 Funding sources: EUR 150 336 of the EUR 5 982 637 total project budget	The EMPOWERUS project on ‘socio-economic Empowerment of coastal communities as users of the sea to ensure sustainable coastal development’ develops transition coastal labs in six locations across Europe, including one in the Black Sea. These help create initiatives that will empower coastal communities to act for change to increase the environmental, economic and social sustainability of the areas. CORDIS factsheet link: https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101000240 Project website: https://empowerus-project.eu/
1.12	European Sustainable Blue Economy Co-Funded Partnership (SBEP)	DG Research and Innovation Funding sources: Horizon Europe + Member States/Associated Countries	The European Commission supported the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership to hold four regional sea basin workshops, including the workshop on 13 October 2023 in Brussels, dedicated to the Black Sea. It was held back-to-back with a Black Sea ONF meeting in Brussels, to raise awareness and understanding of this partnership that currently contains members of Romanian and Turkish research funding organisations and a Bulgarian research performing organisation as the state-of-art of December 2023. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As a result of the first joint transnational call launched in 2023, two projects have been selected to start in 2024 with participation from Turkish Black Sea organisations in the field of cooperation of Black Sea fisheries and aquaculture (see below and at https://bluepartnership.eu/news/get-know-our-first-projects).
1.13	Mission ‘Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030’	DG Research & Innovation & DG MARE Funding sources: Horizon Europe, so far Work Programme 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024, EMFAF, LIFE, BlueInvest, European Solidarity Corps	The European Commission launched five new EU Missions in Oct 2020 – including ‘Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030’. EU Missions are new broad mobilisation initiatives established to face the greatest challenges of our time. Rooted in the Horizon Europe research and innovation programme with EUR 0.5 billion in funding, Missions also go beyond research and innovation (R&I) and the existing instruments, cutting across policies, programmes and different levels of governance. They will develop and demonstrate innovative technological, social, business and governance solutions , and promote new forms of governance, allowing everyone to play an active role.

			<p>Running until 2030, the Mission ‘Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030’ targets three main challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • protect and restore marine and freshwaters ecosystems and biodiversity; • prevent and eliminate pollution of our oceans, seas and waters; • make the blue economy carbon-neutral and circular. <p>Two cross-cutting enablers support all Mission objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a digital ocean and waters knowledge system and, building on European infrastructures and services such as Copernicus and EMODnet, a Digital Twin of the Ocean; • public mobilisation and engagement: engaging Europeans at large to help catalyse the transformative change needed to restore the ocean and waters. <p>The Mission has a strong regional dimension, through its ‘<i>lighthouses</i>’ that are hubs to develop, test and deploy transformative and innovative solutions in four specific regions, including the Danube River basin and the Black Sea.</p> <p>Across regional sea basins, the EU Blue Parks Community is embedded in the Mission ‘Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030’, with dedicated projects and part of the Mission’s Portal. To help implement the Mission in the Danube, including the Black Sea basin, a coordination and support action, EcoDalli, has been funded.</p> <p>In addition, two innovation actions have been funded to restore fresh & transitional water ecosystems and two more to protect and restore wetlands, flood plains, coastal wetlands and salt marshes along with their biodiversity (explained below). Two other projects will focus on demonstrating effective and sustainable management of sediments.</p> <p>All these innovation actions have already published (and will publish more in the future) calls for expressions of interest from associated regions which are understood as areas with ecosystems that can benefit from the demonstration activities (e.g. neighbouring regions and/or regions in a different sea basin) and/or less-developed regions, with the need to ensure capacity building).</p> <p>Website: https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/eu-missions-horizon-europe/restore-our-ocean-and-waters_en</p> <p>and https://projects.research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/en/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/eu-missions-horizon-europe/restore-our-ocean-and-waters/mission-ocean-and-waters-service-portal</p>
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(A) Field of cooperation #2: Fisheries

Black Sea fisheries and aquaculture			
Towards fostering environmental, economic and social sustainability and ensuring food security			
2.1	GFCM BlackSea4Fish project	<p>General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM), the European Union, Bulgaria, Romania, Türkiye, Georgia Ukraine</p> <p>Funding: EMFF/ EU annual grant to the GFCM EUR 8 000 000, exclusive financial donor of EUR 1 000 000 to the BlackSea4Fish project</p>	<p>The BlackSea4Fish project was established in 2016 to contribute to the sustainable management of Black Sea fisheries. It provides scientific and technical support to the GFCM's work in the region, coordinating joint activities such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • regional surveys at sea; • data collection and standardisation of common protocols; • improvement of scientific advice; • implementation of pilot projects such as those for sturgeon and cetaceans; • research plans such as for Rapa whelk fisheries and piked dogfish; • awareness campaigns also among fishers as part of a participative approach to fisheries management, • support to the local ecological knowledge. <p>These are only indicative joint activities with the Black Sea riparian countries.</p> <p>BlackSea4Fish supports the GFCM members in fulfilling their objectives with regards to Black Sea fisheries, in line with the 2030 GFCM strategy. BlackSea4Fish plays a central role in implementing the GFCM 2030 strategy, directly addressing each target specific to the Black Sea, and helping achieve the strategy's objective of consolidating national expertise and scientific capacity to create a level playing field for fisheries across the region.</p> <p>BlackSea4Fish is structured in such a way as to enable cross-sectoral opportunities that reach across these component parts, strengthening the contribution it makes to levelling the playing field in the Black Sea. It promotes technical cooperation between research and policy institutes on specific topics, the exchange of best practices, and the creation of expert hubs to share specialist knowledge and facilities. For the years to come, it will be very important to ensure this project continues facilitated by the EU grant.</p>
2.2	Aquaculture demonstrative centres in the Black Sea	GFCM, the European Union, Bulgaria, Romania, Türkiye, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova Ukraine	<p>In 2017, the EU sponsored the establishment of the aquaculture demonstration centres (ADCs) in the Black Sea. They proved to be one of the GFCM's most important tools for promoting sustainable aquaculture in the region. These centres act as specialised hubs where the sector can share knowledge, promote technical cooperation and increase stakeholder capacity at regional level. Specifically, they function as technical units tailored to the features of each subregion, aiming to fulfil the following objectives: a) enabling further scientific R&I; b)</p>

(A) Field of cooperation #2: Fisheries

		Funding: EMFF/ EU annual grant to the GFCM EUR 8 000 000	<p>providing hands-on technical and technological support; c) showcasing best practices in aquatic food production; d) advancing education and increasing stakeholders' skills, focusing in particular on women, young people and small-scale farmers; and e) promoting collaboration and partnerships.</p> <p>The ADCs are open to all aquaculture stakeholders and play a unique role, given the increasing importance of aquaculture in blue transformation, in achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 GFCM strategy. The first two ADCs were established in the Black Sea: (i) the Grigore Antipa National Institute for Marine Research and Development in Constanta, Romania for shellfish; and (ii) the Central Fisheries Research Institute in Trabzon, Türkiye for finfish.</p> <p>During the reporting period, numerous capacity-building activities have been held for aquaculture stakeholders through several demonstrative training courses, including those on turbot farming and restocking, mussel farming, shellfish pathologies and recirculating aquaculture systems for trout. Online training programmes have been developed to provide free courses on techniques and technologies in aquaculture. More than 4 000 people participated in the ADC online initiatives.</p>
2.3	<p>TAIEX multi-country workshop: Aquaculture as a key factor for sustainable food security</p> <p><i>June 2023</i></p>	<p>European Commission (DG MARE, DG NEAR), Georgia, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova</p> <p>Funding: TAIEX ENI East EUR 161 116.68</p>	<p>A Technical Assistance and Information Exchange (TAIEX) multi-country workshop on developing sustainable aquaculture for Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia took place in Brussels in June 2023. The goal was to help these countries reduce their dependence on Russia and increase economic growth and employment by exchanging best practices on sustainable aquaculture and resilient food systems.</p> <p>There were over 200 participants, including public officials from Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, and Georgia, such as state secretaries and deputy ministers as well as representatives from academia and the private sector. Experts from the European Commission, Member States and international organisations provided an overview of the EU aquaculture policy, relevant legislation, and current strategy for the sector, as well as presented support opportunities available at the international, European, and regional level for closer cooperation on sustainable aquaculture development.</p>
2.4	<p>ECOFISH Marie Skłodowska-Curie Action</p>	<p>DG Research and Innovation</p> <p>Horizon 2020 Marie Skłodowska-Curie Programme RISE</p>	<p>Research on the potential conversion of conventional fish farms into organic fish farms by establishing a model and good practice guide.</p> <p>The ECOFISH project was launched to develop an aquaponic production platform and promote aquaponic systems in the region. A study of fish farms in the south-eastern region of Romania informed the design of an aquaponic recirculating system, designed to meet the requirements</p>

(A) Field of cooperation #2: Fisheries

		Funding sources: EUR 580 500	<p>of potential beneficiaries, such as existing fish farmers in the region, as well as entrepreneurs interested in the economic opportunities of sustainable aquaculture. As well as defining the technological aspects, economic risk was also assessed, and how fish farms can use aquaponics to increase their economic competitiveness.</p> <p>These findings are available in project papers such as the ‘Economic Feasibility Analysis in Aquaponics’. The project’s aquaponics model has since been widely shared with fish farmers in the region, as well as with local communities where there is potential for farming fish, crayfish and shrimp.</p> <p>This work is in line with the 2018 Sofia Ministerial Declaration ⁽⁶⁵⁾, which called for Black Sea region countries to achieve more sustainable fishing and aquaculture.</p> <p>CORDIS factsheet link https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/645691 Project website: http://ecofish-project.com/</p>
2.5	EcoScope Research and Innovation Action and OptiFish Innovation Action	<p>DG Research and Innovation</p> <p>Horizon 2020 for EcoScope: EUR 296 875,00 for the Bulgarian partner</p> <p>Horizon Europe for OptiFish: EUR 130 000,00 for the Turkish partner</p>	<p>The EcoScope ‘Ecocentric management for sustainable fisheries and healthy marine ecosystems’ project has a case study on the Black Sea led by the Bulgarian partner Institute of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Research-Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.</p> <p>CORDIS factsheet link: https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101000302 Project website: https://ecoscopium.eu/</p> <p>Within the OptiFish ‘Optimisation of digital catch monitoring and reporting in European Fisheries’ project, the algorithm for catch composition will also be tested in the Black Sea in relation to the recognition of vulnerable species.</p> <p>CORDIS factsheet link: https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101136674 Project website: https://optifish.eu/</p>
2.6	European Sustainable Blue Economy Co-Funded Partnership (SBEP)	<p>DG Research and Innovation</p> <p>Funding sources: Horizon Europe, Member States/Associated Countries</p>	<p>As a result of the first joint transnational call launched in 2023, two projects have been selected to start in February 2024, with Turkish Black Sea organisations taking part in the SBEP priority area ‘Climate-neutral, environmentally sustainable and resource efficient blue food and feed’.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SEAREFINERY – improved valorisation of marine sources and processing waste for resource efficient blue food/feed and environmentally sustainable materials development. • WASTE2TASTE – from waste to taste: exploring innovative food applications of postharvest fish losses. <p>Website: https://bluepartnership.eu/news/get-know-our-first-projects</p>

⁽⁶⁵⁾ https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/sites/fisheries/files/docs/2018-06-07-sofia-declaration_en.pdf

(A) Field of cooperation #3: Environmental protection and climate change

Environmental Protection and Climate Change to achieve a truly environmentally sustainable Black Sea			
3.1	EcoDaLLi coordination and support action	DG Research and Innovation coordination action for the EU Mission ‘Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030’ (Mission Ocean and Waters) Danube and Black Sea lighthouse. Funding sources Horizon Europe: EUR 2 684 875.00	The EU-funded EcoDaLLi project aims to centralise Danube governance structures in terms of innovative solutions for restoring, protecting and preserving the ecology of the Danube basin and its delta. The project will help create a stronger innovation ecosystem within a well-connected Practices Living Lab System, supported by a digital portal linked to the Implementation Platform of the Mission ‘Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030’. CORDIS factsheet link: https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101093908 Project website: https://ecodalli.eu/
3.2	Mission innovation actions: DANUBE4all, DALIA, DaWetRest, and Restore4Life	DG Research and Innovation Innovation Action Funding sources Horizon Europe: DANUBE4all: EUR 8 422 267.50 DALIA: EUR 8 627 861.25 DaWetRest: EUR 8 200 873.75 Restore4Life: EUR 8 300 641.25	DANUBE4all: This involves restoring the Danube River Basin waters for ecosystems and people from the mountains to the coast, and engaging with the public on river restoration. CORDIS factsheet link: https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101093985 Project website: https://www.danube4allproject.eu/ and https://blueriversfoundation.org/danube/ DALIA: Danube Region Water Lighthouse Action. This involves providing policy tools to clean up the Danube River. CORDIS factsheet link: https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/10109407094070 Project website: https://dalia-danube.eu/index.php DaWetRest: This involves restoring the Danube wetlands and flood plains through systemic, community engagement and sustainable innovative actions CORDIS factsheet link: https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101113015 Project website: https://dawetrest.eu/ Restore4Life: This involves restoring wetland complexes because they are important life supporting systems in the Danube basin. CORDIS factsheet link: https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101112736 Project website: https://restore4life.eu/
3.3	REST-COAST innovation action	DG Research and Innovation Horizon 2020 Green Deal Call Funding sources: EUR 1 172 437.50 of the total	The project ‘Large scale RESToration of COASTal ecosystems through rivers to sea connectivity’ aims to improve the practices and techniques for restoring coastlines through new hands-on restoration projects within the REST-COAST pilots, which include projects in the

(A) Field of cooperation #3: Environmental protection and climate change

		project budget for the Black Sea of EUR 18 482 592.50	Black Sea. These are supported by restoration platforms to demonstrate and scale-up measures for wider use. CORDIS factsheet link: https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101037097 Project website: https://rest-coast.eu/
3.4	MSP4BIO research and innovation action	DG Research and Innovation, Horizon Europe Funding sources: EUR 3 490 501.25	MSP4BIO stands for ‘Improved Science-Based Maritime Spatial Planning to Safeguard and Restore Biodiversity in a coherent European MPA network’. The overall aim of the MSP4BIO project is to help implement the EU biodiversity strategy for 2030, the Convention on Biological Diversity Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, as well as the EU Green Deal. This can be done by integrating biodiversity into policy decisions on different governance levels, and developing an integrated socio-ecological management system for the marine ecosystems. The main objective of the MSP4BIO project is to develop an integrated and modular ecological-socio-economic (ESE) management framework to protect and restore marine ecosystems, in line with its more general objectives of promoting sustainable blue growth and integrating maritime policies. The ESE looks at the compatibility between maritime/coastal uses and protection measures. One of the six specific test sites is the western Black Sea area comprising the areas of Cape Tuzla, Vama Veche, Shabla and Cape Kaliakra. CORDIS factsheet link: https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101060707 Project website: https://msp4bio.eu/
3.5	The Marine Litter MED II project (2020-2023) UNEP/MAP	The Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea Against Pollution (UNEP/MAP) and Black Sea Commission Budget: EUR 1 045 000	The Secretariat of the Barcelona Convention (UNEP/MAP) leads this EU-funded project on marine litter, which has a component assisting the Black Sea Commission to implement its own regional plan against marine litter ⁽⁶⁶⁾ . Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine has caused many delays, but recently there is progress in carrying out the activities (such as guidelines and pilot projects) in Georgia and Ukraine.
3.6	Improving environmental monitoring in the Black Sea – selected	Regional cooperation: focused on Georgia, the Russian Federation – Russia’s participation was suspended in the aftermath of its unjustified and illegal invasion of	EMBLAS-Plus aims to tackle deficiencies and limitations in the availability of accurate, reliable, and comparable data on marine environment in the Black Sea region. Another important objective is to monitor and reduce marine litter, involving the public. Using novel techniques, the project assessed the state of Black Sea biodiversity and carried out comprehensive analytical work to screen for the presence of more than 65 000 chemical

⁽⁶⁶⁾ http://www.blacksea-commission.org/Downloads/BS_Marine_Litter_RAP_adopted.pdf

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	measures (EMBLAS-Plus) March 2018- September 2020	<p>Ukraine – and Ukraine, aiming to reach out to all Black Sea Synergy participants</p> <p>EUR 1 550 000 - European Neighbourhood Instrument; EUR 50 000 – UNDP</p>	<p>substances. The project brought together leading laboratories across the EU, the European Commission's Joint Research Centre, and the European Environment Agency. The joint EU-UNDP work resulted in better knowledge of the Black Sea's pollution status, presented in scientific reports and a web-based Black Sea water quality database. Several wide-reaching awareness, educational and beach clean-up campaigns were carried out.</p> <p>Carrying out a series of joint Black Sea surveys (JBSSs) and national monitoring studies was at the core of project activities. Important components in completing the surveys were: (i) the building-up of the national institutions' capacity to use novel monitoring methods; (ii) the use of quality assurance/quality control procedures; (iii) further development of the Black Sea Water Quality Database; and (iv) the sharing of environmental monitoring data at the regional and European level. The JBSSs addressed the descriptors under the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), focusing on those covering: (i) biodiversity; (ii) non-indigenous species; (iii) eutrophication; (iv) contaminants; and (v) marine litter. During the surveys, samples of sea water, biota and sediments were collected and analysed or made available for analyses carried out by external laboratories.</p> <p>Based on the commonly agreed classification schemes aligned with the requirements under the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD) and the MSFD, the project enabled an indicative assessment of the ecological and environmental status of the Black Sea. Also, Black Sea specific contaminants that need to be monitored in future were identified. A comprehensive scientific report was published in November 2020 summarising the findings of monitoring efforts ⁽⁶⁷⁾. The report is a valuable contribution towards further improving the evidence base and monitoring systems in Georgia and Ukraine so that they comply with the MSFD and the WFD.</p> <p>The project has helped increase public awareness. Besides organising annual Black Sea Clean Beach Days / Black Sea Days, small-scale local actions/projects addressing marine litter/plastics have been carried out. In Ukraine, the activities covered a clean-up of wild coastline, a market forum for entrepreneurs to promote ecological ways of handling waste and alternatives to single use plastic packaging, installation of containers for PET (Polyethylene terephthalate) waste collection, eco events, etc. In Georgia, various activities were organised such as public lectures on marine litter and biodiversity, clean-ups of seaside in major cities, educational activities for school children, contests, and installation of containers.</p>
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⁽⁶⁷⁾ https://emblasproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/EMBLAS_Scientific-Report_ISBN-978-617-8111-01-4-web.pdf

(A) Field of cooperation #3: Environmental protection and climate change

3.7	EU4EMBLAS (European Union for ‘Improving Environmental Monitoring in the Black Sea’) March 2021-March 2025	<p>Regional cooperation: focused on Georgia and Ukraine, aiming at reaching out to all BSS members</p> <p>EUR 2 000 000 – European Neighbourhood Instrument;</p> <p>EUR – 100 000 UNDP</p>	<p>The project’s overall goal is to help improve the protection of the Black Sea environment. Based on the results from the previous project phase, this goal is pursued through: (i) further technical assistance focused on establishing modern systems and facilities for environmental monitoring in Georgia and Ukraine; (ii) capacity building; (iii) assessing environmental status in line with EU MSFD/WFD; and (iv)_conducting public awareness-raising events on Black Sea environmental issues. The project involves relevant national authorities, as well as research/scientific and educational institutions. It also supports cooperation with the Black Sea Commission established by the Bucharest Convention.</p> <p>The project provides laboratory equipment to the national laboratories, dedicated to Black Sea monitoring, complemented with a training and scientific programme to further build national capacities. In addition, EU4EMBLAS facilitated the transfer of a Belgium-donated research vessel to Ukraine, which will also help implement national or regional monitoring programmes. While the vessel was being transported from Belgium to Ukraine, a scientific research monitoring programme was carried out, that covered several European seas, screening for organic pollutants, microplastics, and fish communities.</p> <p>As part of the project’s engagement with public, specific actions on the ground are carried out every year, in both countries, for instance, clean beach campaigns, art and drawing competitions. The project carries out educational activities, including for internally displaced Ukrainian children.</p> <p>To learn more, see https://emblasproject.org/</p>
3.8	<p>Online event: ‘Sustainability in the Black Sea regional cooperation: Advancing the Black Sea Synergy and the European Green Deal’ (16 November 2020)</p>	<p>The European External Action Service with the support of the European Commission (DG NEAR, DG MARE, DG RTD, JRC)</p>	<p>In 2020, environmental challenges and sustainable green development in the Black Sea region were discussed in an online event: ‘Sustainability in the Black Sea Regional Cooperation: Advancing the Black Sea Synergy and the European Green Deal’. This event was organised by the European External Action Service with the support of the European Commission.</p> <p>The event was open to the public and the media and brought together high-level panellists from academia, civil society and business as well as diplomats. It provided an opportunity to present and discuss the current environmental challenges and sustainable green development in the Black Sea region as well as the EU’s role in responding to these challenges and opportunities. Parallel thematic breakout sessions focused on the sustainable blue economy, environmental resilience, cross-border cooperation and connecting with the Danube.</p>

(A) Field of cooperation #3: Environmental protection and climate change

			For more details see also https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/media-advisory-sustainability-black-sea-regional-cooperation-advancing-black-sea-synergy-and_en https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/newsroom/news/2020/11/11-06-2020-online-event-sustainability-in-the-black-sea-regional-cooperation-advancing-the-black-sea-synergy-and-the-european-green-deal
3.9	Mission Adaptation to Climate Change projects	DG Research and Innovation and DG CLIMA Innovation Actions Funding sources: Horizon Europe for the Regions4climate project: EUR 1 459 000 for Black Sea partners and Horizon 2020 for ARSINOE: EUR 1 173 925 for Black Sea partners	<p>The Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change focuses on supporting EU regions, cities and local authorities in their efforts to build resilience against the impacts of climate change. The Mission contributes to putting the EU's adaptation strategy in practice by helping the regions to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • better understand the climate risks they are and will be confronted with in the future • develop their pathways to be better prepared and cope with the changing climate • test and deploy on the ground innovative solutions needed to build resilience <p>The Mission's objective is to accompany by 2030 at least 150 European regions and communities towards climate resilience.</p> <p>Website: https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/eu-missions-horizon-europe/adaptation-climate-change_en and https://projects.research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/en/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/eu-missions-horizon-europe/restore-our-ocean-and-waters/mission-ocean-and-waters-service-portal</p> <p>One of the Climate Adaptation Mission projects has a demonstration site along the Black Sea coast and wetlands of Burgas: Burgas Regions4Climate.</p> <p>CORDIS factsheet link: https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101093873 Project website: https://regions4climate.eu/</p> <p>The ARSINOE project 'Climate resilient-regions through systemic solutions and Innovations' aims to leverage innovation for climate adaptation across a series of key systems – from biodiversity to flooding and sea level rise and from droughts and water scarcity to heatwaves and deforestation, showing the way towards a green, digital, inclusive, resilient and sustainable future, including in the Black Sea case-study.</p> <p>CORDIS factsheet link: https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101037424 Project website: https://arsinoe-project.eu/ and https://arsinoe-project.eu/case-study-6/</p>

(A) Field of cooperation #4: Cross-border cooperation – Black Sea basin programme 2014-2020

No 4	Flagship project Period	Main actors Level of interaction (regional, national, local or civil society) Funding sources	Main activities and results
<p>1.1.1 Cross-border cooperation – joint operational programme Black Sea basin 2014 – 2020, (Interreg VI-B) NEXT Black Sea basin programme</p> <p>To support sustainable development along the EU’s external borders, reducing differences in living standards and addressing common challenges across these borders.</p>			
4.1	Black Sea basin cross-border cooperation programme 2014-2020	<p>The ENI CBC Black Sea basin programme for 2014-2020 has its managing authority located in Romania. Other participating countries are Bulgaria, Greece, Armenia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Türkiye and Ukraine.</p> <p>It has a budget of EUR 49 million, benefiting partners such as public authorities, NGOs, small and medium-sized enterprises, universities, cultural institutions.</p>	<p>57 projects implemented (54 are finalised), gathering 132 partners. The projects operate with aim of fulfilling the main priorities: 1. promote business and entrepreneurship within the Black Sea basin; and 2. promote coordination of environmental protection and joint reduction of marine litter in the Black Sea basin. Behind each project, there were many individuals and businesses that benefitted from EU investment. For instance, in the year 2022 ⁽⁶⁸⁾, 2 065 businesses participated in cross-border agricultural or agro-industrial business events. On environmental protection, 2 420 people actively participated in environmental actions and awareness-raising activities, and 709 organisations are using programme support to develop or improve waste management tools or small-scale facilities along riverbanks and seashores (including ports).</p> <p>More information on ENI CBC Black Sea basin joint operational programme 2014-2020 available at the link below</p> <p>https://maritime-spatial-planning.ec.europa.eu/fundings/eni-cbc-black-sea-basin-joint-operational-programme-2014-2020</p>

⁽⁶⁸⁾ Annual Implementation Report for 2021-2022, ENI CBC Black Sea basin programme.

(A) Field of cooperation #4: Cross-border cooperation – Black Sea basin programme 2014-2020

4.2	Interreg NEXT Black Sea basin programme (Interreg VI-B) NEXT Black Sea basin programme 2021-2027	<p>The Interreg NEXT Black Sea basin programme has its managing authority located in Romania. Other participating countries are Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, the Republic of Moldova, Türkiye and Ukraine. Armenia will also join.</p> <p>Overall budget: EUR 85 million</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1st call for projects completed on 4 July 2023 – 33 projects selected - election of projects is ongoing, 2nd call for projects was launched in March 2024 - Main priorities: blue & smarter region, clean and green region, better cooperation governance.
4.3	EU Solidarity with Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova (Interreg VI-B) NEXT Black Sea basin programme	<p>DG REGIO increased the EU support to Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, which are facing unprecedented challenges triggered by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.</p>	<p>On 9 November 2022, the EU adopted a dedicated legal act addressing the disruption of the 2014-2020 programmes (Regulation (EU) 2022/2192). Projects, also involving partners from Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, could benefit from the flexibility rules on 100% co-financing and were allowed to carry out additional activities.</p> <p>In August 2023, the Commission decided to redistribute EUR 135 million, i.e. the remaining resources from the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument for cooperation programmes from the 2023-2027 period to support cooperation programmes with Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova.</p>

(A) Field of cooperation #4: Cross-border cooperation – Black Sea basin programme 2014-2020

4.4	Synergies with the Danube strategy (Interreg VI-B) NEXT Black Sea basin programme	Synergies between the Black Sea basin programme and the EU strategies and initiatives in the region.	Links between the EU Strategy for the Danube Region ⁽⁶⁹⁾ and the Interreg Black Sea basin programme are reinforced by the participation of Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova in both cooperation frameworks. The programme could provide inputs to the strategy during an event on marine litter in the Danube and the Black Sea region. Held on 4 November 2021, the event was co-organised by the Balkan and Black Sea Commission of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe and the International Centre for Black Sea Studies. Focused on the projects and initiatives implemented, the ENI CBC Black Sea basin programme presented a video with that provided solutions to deal with the marine litter identified by the funded projects. This video is also available on the programme website: https://blacksea-cbc.net/videos/ .
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⁽⁶⁹⁾ <https://danube-region.eu/>

(A) Field of cooperation #5: Civil society engagement, democracy and human rights

No 5	Flagship project Period	Main actors Level of interaction (regional, national, local or civil society) Funding sources	Main activities and results
Civil society engagement, democracy and human rights to promote a vibrant and resilient civil society			
5.1	Black Sea NGO Forum <i>Annually</i>	<p>A flagship regional event, organised by the Romanian Non-Governmental Organizations for Development NGDO Platform (FOND) since 2008 in accordance with the objectives of the Black Sea Synergy.</p> <p>The Forum brings together more than 1 400 participants from the countries participating in the EU Black Sea Synergy and beyond the Black Sea region.</p> <p>Until 2022, the EU constantly co-funded the organisation of the Forum's editions.</p> <p>Funding: EUR 148 856.80 for the period 2021-August 2024</p> <p>Additional funds from the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs</p>	<p>The four editions of the Forum continued to serve its main objectives: (i) increase the level of dialogue and cooperation among NGOs in the wider Black Sea Region; (ii) strengthen NGOs' capacities to influence regional and national policies; and (iii) increase the number and quality of regional partnerships and projects on thematic priorities.</p> <p>The 12th edition – ‘Consolidating the Black Sea NGO Community for Sustainable Development’ (23-25 October 2019, Istanbul, Türkiye)</p> <p>The event sought to highlight the progress made on advancing the Black Sea synergy policy, marked by the adoption of the Common Maritime Agenda and the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda, as well as the role played by civil society organisations (CSOs) in their implementation, in which they looked to maximising CSO contribution to society resilience and sustainable development in the region.</p> <p>Report available at https://blackseango.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Final-Report_The-Black-Sea-NGO-Forum-2019.pdf</p> <p>The 13th edition – ‘Advancing Civil Society Cooperation in the Black Sea Region in Times of Uncertainty’ (23-27 November 2020, online)</p> <p>This edition sought to help participants identify the common challenges facing CSOs during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as opportunities for addressing these challenges together, focusing on combating disinformation campaigns.</p> <p>Report available at https://blackseango.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Final_Report_The_13th_edition_of_the_Black_Sea_NGO_Forum_2020.pdf</p> <p>The 14th edition – ‘Strengthening the capacity of the CSOs in the Black Sea to foster regional cooperation and stability’ (13-15 October 2021, online)</p>

(A) Field of cooperation #5: Civil society engagement, democracy and human rights

		<p>This event sought to continue to help participants identify and address together the common challenges facing CSOs in a post-COVID-19 pandemic context, based on dialogue between the government and the public. Exchanges were facilitated by the main findings of two studies developed by FOND in 2021 – ‘Shrinking Civic Space post-COVID-19 pandemic in the Black Sea region’ and ‘CSO Development Effectiveness Principles in the Black Sea region’.</p> <p>Report available at https://blackseango.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Report-The-Black-Sea-NGO-Forum-27-octombrie-2021-.pdf</p> <p>The 15th edition – ‘The Black Sea Region under Pressure. From Multiple Crisis to Sustainable and Democratic Development’ (21-22 November 2022, Bucharest, hybrid format)</p> <p>The main objective of this edition was to highlight the CSOs’ role and involvement in crisis management response and humanitarian assistance in the context of the Ukrainian refugee crisis. In this context, FOND presented the results of the sub-granting programme addressed mainly to Ukrainian NGOs, as well as those of the ‘SOS Ukraine’ campaign, through which FOND raised and awarded funds to several Ukrainian NGOs to support civilians in need.</p> <p>Report available at https://blackseango.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/BSNGOF-2022-Final-Report-.pdf</p>
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(A) Field of cooperation #6: Education, research and innovation (beyond marine), culture and tourism

No 6	Flagship project Period	Main actors The level of interaction (regional, national, local or civil society) Funding sources	Main activities and results
Education, R&I (beyond the marine field), culture and tourism for improved transnational cooperation and people-to-people contacts			
6.1	Association to Horizon Europe programme	Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Türkiye, Ukraine relevant Ministries	These four Black Sea riparian countries successfully joined the Horizon Europe programme and are implementing their association agreements with increased participation as compared to Horizon2020.
6.2	Ukraine in Horizon Europe	Ministry of Education and Science Funding sources: EUR 24 900 000 EU contribution	<p>Ukraine and Horizon Europe</p> <p>Despite Russia's war of aggression, Ukrainian organisations are actively participating in Horizon Europe. In October 2023, Ukraine had 92 signed grants, worth a total of EUR 24.97 million, with 125 participations of which 4 are coordinators. In 2023, Ukrainian organisations enjoyed a 22% success rate, equal to the EU average. The top priority areas are climate, energy and mobility (EUR 8.0 million) and actions under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie programme (EUR 4.3 million).</p> <p>Several actions targeting Ukraine have been implemented under Horizon Europe. These include the launch of the Horizon Europe Office in Kyiv, a call for fellowships under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie programme, MSCA4Ukraine, and the ERC4Ukraine initiative. Ukraine's scientists in its health sector benefited from EUR 3 million in EU contributions in 2022-2024 that was provided to the Scientists for Scientists (S4S) initiative of the Human Science Frontier programme, and the European ERA4Ukraine portal.</p> <p>Supporting R&I is also an important strand for the reconstruction of Ukraine, and this has been underlined by the G7 Science and Technology Ministers' Meeting in May 2022 in Sendai, Japan.</p> <p>Ukraine has been particularly active in the Cities Mission. The city of Rivne is already involved as a pilot city in the NetZeroCities pilot programme and Kharkiv was selected for the twinning programme that goes with the pilots. It is twinned with pilot city Liberec in the Czechia.</p>

(A) Field of cooperation #6: Education, research and innovation (beyond marine), culture and tourism

6.3	Georgia Horizon Europe	in	<p>Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia</p> <p>Funding sources: EUR 3 600 000 EU contribution</p>	<p>Georgia and Horizon Europe</p> <p>The EU and Georgia have a fruitful ongoing partnership in the area of R&I. Georgia has been associated to Horizon Europe (2021-2027) since 1 January 2021 and has made good use of the programme.</p> <p>Georgia's participation in Horizon Europe has resulted in the country receiving EUR 4,3 million in EU contributions with 29 signed grants and 37 participations of which one is coordinator. The top priority areas in the Horizon Europe budget for Georgia are Culture, creativity and inclusive society (EUR 1.2 million) and Widening participation and spreading excellence (EUR 1.1 million). So far, Georgia has performed well in Horizon Europe, submitting 218 applications, with a success rate of 16.54%, which is below the EU average of 21.82%, but is higher than the country's success rate under Horizon 2020 (11.93%). In addition to the 32 grants already signed, there are 4 grants currently under preparation.</p> <p>The Georgian R&I system has undergone significant reforms over the past years. The most important milestones in this process have been the establishment of new executive funding agencies for R&I, the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia and the Georgian Innovation and Technology Agency. A unique administrative entity, 'Horizon Europe' National Office of Georgia, was established in 2021, operating under the umbrella of the Ministry of Education and Science and tasked with initiating and coordinating activities for promoting and sharing information about Horizon Europe. 'Horizon Europe' National Office of Georgia coordinates all Horizon Europe university grant offices (16 at present).</p> <p>The Ministry of Education, Science, and Youth of Georgia confirmed its commitment to Horizon Europe by submitting a signed letter of intent to become a member of SBEP.</p> <p>In anticipation of the upcoming Steering Committee meeting, it will be important to highlight that Georgia is not only committed to joining the partnership but is also exploring the possibility to co-fund the upcoming joint call, as also demonstrated by the country joining via two bodies: the Ministry of Education, Science, and Youth of Georgia primarily engaged in in-kind activities within the partnership, and the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia, serving as a funding body for this year's and/or future calls.</p>
6.4	Türkiye Horizon Europe	in	<p>TUBITAK</p> <p>Funding sources: EUR 165 900 000 EU contribution</p>	<p>Türkiye and Horizon Europe</p> <p>Türkiye's successful participation in Horizon Europe is bearing fruit, particularly as regards R&I cooperation in the field of industrial research and smart manufacturing. The EU and Türkiye share similar green and digital agenda goals and we are keen to work closely with</p>

(A) Field of cooperation #6: Education, research and innovation (beyond marine), culture and tourism

			<p>Türkiye on them. 2023 also marked 20 years of Türkiye’s association to the EU’s framework programmes.</p> <p>EU-Türkiye R&I cooperation is one of the few areas which can be considered a success story. Türkiye has greatly improved its performance under Horizon Europe – figures doubled to EUR 35 million per year at the end of Horizon 2020 and a further doubling to EUR 62 million under the first year of Horizon Europe). The culmination of these efforts was the hosting of the EU-Türkiye High-Level Science, Research, Technology and Innovation Dialogue, considered by the EEAS as one of the largest high-level dialogues ever organised.</p> <p>Türkiye’s full association to EU programmes such as Horizon Europe and Erasmus+ provides a stable basis for cooperation. The European Research Area, the European Innovation Agenda and our industry roadmaps provide strategic guidance. This is supported by our joint education, R&I efforts.</p> <p>National capacity-building efforts have led to Türkiye significantly increasing its level of participation in Horizon Europe. This covers 383 signed grants out of which 84 are coordinated by Türkiye. The country has also participated in 640 projects (the majority under Global Challenges and European Industrial Transformation). The areas related to the twin green and digital transitions comprised most of the country’s participation (164 under climate energy and mobility and 144 digital industry and space).</p> <p>Türkiye took over the chairmanship of EUREKA in July in 2023. A national workshop on the Cities Mission – benefiting from TAIEX funding – took place in October in Istanbul, as a side event of the Marmara Urban Forum ⁽⁷⁰⁾.</p> <p>The Green Deal workshop in early 2022 (hosted by DG NEAR with a very much appreciated intervention from the European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency) clearly underlined this broad interest, particularly from industry.</p> <p>This was further underlined in the first EU-Türkiye High-Level Dialogue on science, research, technology and innovation that took place in Brussels, on 15 November 2022. The dialogue focused on aspects of green deal such as green industrial production, renewable energy, and climate-neutral and smart cities. Emphasis has also been placed on the role EU</p>
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⁽⁷⁰⁾ <https://www.marmara.gov.tr/en/marmara-urban-forum-maruf>

(A) Field of cooperation #6: Education, research and innovation (beyond marine), culture and tourism

			programmes play in human capital development, innovation and technology transfer. The next High-Level Dialogue with Türkiye will take place on 25-26 April 2024 in Istanbul.
6.5	The Republic of Moldova in Horizon Europe	Funding sources: EUR 3 370 000 EU contribution in Horizon Europe	<p>DG RTD has organised specific camps for drafting project proposals and expert consultations, which aim to increase capacity building of the five Eastern Partnership countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine). These include the training courses that took place in Georgia from 16 to 20 October 2023 and 13-17 November 2023 in Chisinau, the Republic of Moldova.</p> <p>The Republic of Moldova has been a participant in the EU's framework programme for research and innovation since 2012. This includes its involvement in the Horizon Europe programme since 2021. The country has a network of national contact points, which is coordinated by the National Agency for Research and Development. In addition, the country has been a member of the European Cooperation in Science and Technology network since 2015 and maintains a liaison office for Science and Technology in Brussels. In May 2023, a Horizon Europe Office was inaugurated in Chisinau.</p> <p>The Republic of Moldova's participation in Horizon Europe amounted to EUR 4.5 million of EU contributions with 41 signed grants. The success rate of eligible applicants from Moldova is 22.40%, which is above the EU average of 21.46%.</p> <p>The Republic of Moldova's legal and policy frameworks for R&I are governed by the Code of Science (259/2004), which was updated in 2018 to incorporate recommendations from the Policy Support Facility initiated by the European Commission. Sectoral funding is primarily regulated through the country's national programme for R&I, along with its related multiannual action plans, which currently cover the 2019-2023 period. National authorities are currently working on formulating a new national programme for R&I, spanning from 2024 to 2028.</p> <p>Regarding the Republic of Moldova's research and innovation expenditures, the country's spending per inhabitant is ranked 104th. Its R&I intensity is 0.23% of GDP, which is below the EU-27 average of 2.26%. The Republic of Moldova has received a total contribution of EUR 3.7 million from the EU for research and innovation. The Republic of Moldova has 0.7 patent applications per billion GDP (in purchasing power parity) which is below the EU-27 average of 3.4. In particular, the top priority areas in the Republic of Moldova's Horizon Europe budget allocation are the Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions (MSCA) with EUR 1.2 million and Civil Security for Society with EUR 1.1 million in funding.</p>

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			In the last Black Sea ONF meeting of 23 November 2023, the Republic of Moldova expressed interest in taking up the ONF co-chairmanship in 2024.
6.6	Eastern Partnership Research & Innovation (R&I) regional cooperation		<p>The R&I dimension of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) aims to boost the innovation capacities of EaP partners by stepping up their integration with the EU's R&I systems. To achieve this, in 2021, the top 10 targets and five R&I post-2020 priorities were incorporated into the EaP's revised architecture. Some of these top 10 targets outline tangible outcomes to be measured against specific indicators to measure progress made in the partners' R&I ecosystems. These targets include: (i) increasing each partner country's Global Innovation Index score by 3 points (through investing in R&I policy reforms, increasing gross expenditure in R&I by at least 50% to ensure sustainable growth, and supporting the green and digital transformations); (ii) ensuring public engagement in R&I issues, including in areas affecting the future of economies and societies; (iii) strengthening excellence and the technological base by increasing the number of times EaP partners participate in Horizon Europe to 700; and (iv) supporting the design and implementation of smart specialisation strategies and the development of technology transfer roadmaps by interested EaP partners.</p> <p>The EaP Informal Working Group on R&I was established by DG RTD and is monitoring the progress made in implementing the above-mentioned targets and post-2020 priorities while taking into account the EU membership applications of Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. There will be stronger monitoring of the implementation of the new top 10 targets and post-2020 EaP priorities while taking into account the volatile situation in the region caused by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. In parallel, RTD.03 will further seek synergies with the external EU support instruments for the region to help achieve those R&I goals.</p> <p>Specific project proposal drafting camps and expert consultations have been initiated by DG RTD, aiming to contribute to capacity building of the five EaP countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine). The last training took place in Georgia from 16 to 20 October 2023 and the Republic of Moldova on 11-17 November 2023.</p>
6.7	Black Sea young ambassadors programme	Funding sources: Horizon 2020 Black Sea CONNECT coordination and support action, BRIDGE-BS and DOORS research and innovation actions	In September 2020, under the EU Horizon 2020 Black Sea CONNECT coordination and support action, the Black Sea young ambassador (BSYA) programme was developed to unite young people in helping achieve a healthy, resilient, and sustainable Black Sea. Considering the success of the programme, the BSYA has been linked with the EU Horizon 2020 BRIDGE-BS project, not only increasing the programme's impact and its visibility but also ensuring its sustainability.

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			<p>Black Sea young ambassadors are ocean professionals who are at an early stage in their careers and who come from different backgrounds in marine and maritime research, industry, policy and civil society.</p> <p>They play an important role in trying to bring about a sustainable blue economy in the Black Sea and promoting the goals of the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (Black Sea SRIA) as well as its implementation. Engaging these young ambassadors improves the visibility and actions of the Black Sea Blue Economy Initiative, helps increase the countries' potential, and spreads the output of R&I projects and blue economy activities across the region. The BSYA has brought a new dynamic to the Black Sea research joint actions, especially in terms of visibility and the widely sharing of information.</p> <p>These young ambassadors conduct different activities and represent young people from the Black Sea region on different platforms. This acts as a bridge between science and society to raise awareness of the Black Sea, its challenges, and marine ecosystem services, and to promote sustainable blue economy, the EU Mission 'Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030', and the UN's Ocean Decade initiative.</p> <p>The following list includes the activities and highlights of the BSYA's programme.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness-raising campaigns: These are developed online or take the form of local awareness-raising campaigns and actions to address the challenges in the Black Sea and make use of the opportunities for a sustainable blue economy. These actions include clean-up days, plastic-free weeks, photo contests, and Black Sea Action Day campaigns. • Representing young people from the Black Sea region on different platforms: These ambassadors are active on different platforms (i.e. EU Research and Innovation Days, EU Mission Ocean events). They take part in activities related to sea and ocean basin blue economy initiatives and projects (i.e. the launch of the Black Sea SRIA implementation plan at the European Parliament in 2023, the BlueMed Final Conference in 2021, CulTourE4Youth Workshops in 2022), as well as in activities related to ocean literacy that are focused on young people (i.e. UN Ocean Decade V.ECOP Day 2021 and Ocean Literacy Festival in the Black Sea 2021). • Contributing to actions related to the blue economy in the Black Sea region: These young ambassadors contribute to the scientific outputs and educational/capacity-building activities under the Black Sea CONNECT project, and
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			<p>those under the BRIDGE-BS and DOORS projects implemented under the SRIA. Also, in line with their background and expertise, they have contributed to Black Sea SRIA and implementation plan consultations, the Marine Litter Action Forum 2022 in Istanbul, and Black Sea CONNECT joint actions on marine litter and education.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Black Tea Time with Youth’ meetings: These are a series of online meeting, where experts come together with young ambassadors. The aim of these meetings is to help and inspire young ambassadors to carry out their activities in the best way possible (i.e. EU Beach clean-up, EU Mission Ocean, UN Ocean Decade ECOP programme, Black Sea SRIA implementation plan) • Training programmes: These young ambassadors receive different types of training and participate in workshops designed to equip them with both theoretical and practical expertise in scientific and communication skills that help them in their awareness-raising activities (i.e. Autumn School 2021, Awareness-Raising Campaign Development Workshop 2022, Summer Training in Istanbul, 2023) <p>For further information: https://bridgeblacksea.org/index.php/young-ambassadors/</p>
6.8	Erasmus+ 2019-2023	Overall budget for Erasmus+ 2021-2027: EUR 26.2 billion, complemented by EUR 2.2 billion from the EU external cooperation instruments (Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III) and Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument)	The EU has been actively supporting cooperation in education, training, youth issues and sport in the Black Sea region through the Erasmus+ programme. Since 2019, several Erasmus+ projects involving organisations from the 10 countries covered by the Black Sea Synergy initiative have supported partnerships, capacity building, youth cooperation and mobility, and the modernisation of education systems. The programme has supported over 82 000 exchanges of students and staff between countries in the region. Additionally, nearly 36 000 young people and youth workers participated in Erasmus+ youth projects involving countries from the Black Sea region.
6.9	Creative Europe 2021-2023	Overall budget for 2021-2027: EUR 2.44 billion	Six countries involved in the Black Sea Synergy initiative (Armenia, Bulgaria, Greece, Georgia, Romania and Ukraine) are participating – during the 2021-2027 period – in Creative Europe, the flagship EU programme supporting the culture and audio-visual sectors. The results of the programme’s first years of implementation show that 277 organisations have been involved in 300 projects promoting multilateral cooperation in the field of culture. A total of 137 of these projects are led by an organisation based in one of the countries in the region.

(A) Field of cooperation #7: Energy and Transport

No 7	Flagship project Period	Main actors Level of interaction (regional, national, local or civil society) Funding sources	Main activities and results
Energy and Transport for building an energy efficient and better-connected Black Sea			
7.1	<i>Energy community</i>	The EU, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, and Western Balkan countries are contracting parties; Armenia and Türkiye take part as observers.	The Energy Community is an international organisation that has brought together the EU and some of its neighbours to create an integrated pan-European energy market. It was founded by the Treaty establishing the Energy Community signed in October 2005 in Athens, Greece, in force since July 2006. Its key objective is to extend the EU internal energy market rules and principles to countries in south-eastern Europe, the Black Sea region and beyond on the basis of a legally binding framework.
7.2	<i>EU4Energy</i>	Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine	EU4Energy is an EU-funded project, currently in its second phase. It promotes the clean energy transition and empowers consumers through better regulation in the EU's Eastern neighbourhood. Various EU4Energy components are implemented by the Energy Community Secretariat, the Council of European Energy Regulators, and the International Energy Agency.
7.3	<i>Bucharest green energy partnership</i>	Romania, Hungary, Georgia and Azerbaijan	The Memorandum of Understanding on a strategic partnership in the field of green energy development and transmission between the governments of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania and Hungary was adopted by Heads of States and Governments in Bucharest in December 2022, in presence of Commission President von der Leyen. The partnership aims to develop a green energy corridor across the four countries, including a high-voltage direct-current line under the Black Sea, and explore possible routes to also conduct trade in green hydrogen. Six ministerial meetings were held under this initiative in 2023 and early 2024, with Bulgaria and the European Commission participating as observers. Armenia, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Türkiye, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have signalled their interest in participating in the initiative. The EU has expressed its support for Armenia's participation.
7.4	<i>Southern Gas Corridor</i>	The EU, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Türkiye, Greece,	The Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) is an initiative proposed by the European Commission in 2008 to supply more natural gas from the Caspian and Middle Eastern regions to Europe. The SGC started operating in 2020 and currently supplies natural gas from Azerbaijan to Georgia, Türkiye, Greece,

(A) Field of cooperation #7: Energy and Transport

	<i>Advisor Council</i>	Albania, Italy and other partners	<p>Italy, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, and Serbia. In 2023, it supplied over 11 billion cubic metres of natural gas from Azerbaijan to the EU market. The REPowerEU strategy and the EU-Azerbaijan strategic energy partnership of 2022 aim to increase gas supplies from Azerbaijan to the EU market via the SGC to 20 billion cubic metres per year by 2027.</p> <p>The SGC Advisory Council is an annual ministerial meeting that has been convened since 2015 and co-chaired by the Minister of Energy of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the European Commissioner for Energy. It gathers SGC partner governments, institutions and companies and offers a platform to oversee the SGC's operations and discuss approaches to addressing common challenges. Since 2022, a Green Energy Advisory Council has also been organised together with the SGC Advisory Council.</p>
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(B): Links with other EU policies or strategies relevant for the Black Sea region

No.	EU strategy or policy	Presentation, activities and results
1	<p>European Union Strategy for the Danube Region</p> <p><i>2010</i></p>	<p>The European Union strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) is a macro-regional strategy endorsed by the European Council in 2011. It supports territorial cooperation, cohesion and regional development in 14 countries (including EU member states and candidate countries) around four cooperation pillars: 1) connectivity (mobility and infrastructure, sustainable energy, culture, tourism and people-to-people contact); 2) environment (water quality and management, environmental risks, biodiversity and quality of air and soil); 3) socio-economic aspects (knowledge society, competitiveness of businesses, education, inclusiveness and skills); and 4) institutional capacity, cooperation and security.</p> <p>The Danube Region seeks active cooperation with the Black Sea area, given its bridging role in terms of interconnectivity. Some of the EUSDR's priority areas are key for the Black Sea region, such is the case of waterway, rail, road and air mobility and transport. Along with removing bottlenecks to boost the energy transition, the Danube and Black Sea cooperation is key for environmental protection, biodiversity preservation, the fight against pollution and the sustainable use of common soils and waters. The water quality of the Black Sea, in particular, depends on the quality of river discharge from the Danube.</p>
	<p>Projects supported under the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region</p>	<p>Between 2019 and 2023, many projects and policy initiatives were implemented or launched under the EUSDR. Some examples relevant for the Black Sea include the following items. (1) The DAVID forms ⁽⁷¹⁾ (three most commonly used border control forms: arrival and departure reports, crew lists and passenger lists) that were officially introduced at all border control points in the region to improve control processes for inland navigation, therefore benefiting both the shipping sector and border control authorities (Hungary, Serbia, Bulgaria, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Romania are using these forms). (2) The FAIRway Danube project ⁽⁷²⁾, which supports waterway administrations in the Danube Region in maintainance and rehabilitation tasks (five new surveying vessels with their multi-beam equipment in Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Bulgaria and Romania; nine new/ rehabilitated gauging stations (Croatia) and eight on the Danube-Black Sea Canal (Romania) ⁽⁷³⁾. (3) Danube Hazard m3c project ⁽⁷⁴⁾, which tackles hazardous substances pollution in the Danube River basin to achieve durable and effective control and reduction of transnational water pollution. (4) Interreg Danube</p>

⁽⁷¹⁾ <https://navigation.danube-region.eu/introduction-of-the-harmonized-david-forms-along-the-danube-successfully-completed/>

⁽⁷²⁾ <http://www.fairwaydanube.eu/>

⁽⁷³⁾ <https://www.fairwaydanube.eu/procurement-of-equipment/>

⁽⁷⁴⁾ <https://www.interreg-danube.eu/approved-projects/danube-hazard-m3c>

		Programme (details provided under Field of cooperation #4: Cross-border cooperation – Black Sea basin programme 2014-2020).
2	EU Global Gateway Strategy 2021	<p>Global Gateway is Europe's offer to connect the world with sustainable investments to boost smart, clean and secure links in digital, energy, transport and climate-relevant sectors and to strengthen health, education and research systems. It will help tackle the most pressing global challenges, from fighting climate change, to improving health systems, and boosting the sustainability and security of global supply chains.</p> <p>In the Enlargement and Neighbourhood countries, Global Gateway is being implemented through the three economic investment plans ⁽⁷⁵⁾. The overall objective of these plans is to boost the economic development of the regions and connect them within and with the EU. These plans were developed jointly with partner countries, and address in particular connectivity gaps: missing infrastructure in digital, energy and transport systems.</p> <p>The Black Sea Strategic Submarine Electricity Cable ⁽⁷⁶⁾ between Georgia and the EU [Romania as an entry point] is set to help increase mutual resilience and enable green energy to be exported from the South Caucasus to Europe, therefore, being of regional importance. While it will directly connect Georgia with EU [Romania], it will also strategically connect the entire South Caucasus with the EU. It will also help the EU achieve its ambitious green targets by enabling exports of green energy from the South Caucasus to Europe and unlocking the capacity for renewable energy generation [Georgia – hydro, Azerbaijan – solar/wind, Armenia – solar]. Work is under way on the feasibility study, conducted by the World Bank.</p> <p>The Black Sea undersea digital connectivity cable: While there are more than 400 submarine cables spanning the globe, there is only one cable under the Black Sea, which is nearly obsolete in terms of capacity.</p> <p>The deployment of a new digital cable under the Black Sea is a regional priority. This is because the internet traffic in the region is expected to grow three-fold every year and because of the strategic location of the region, as a digital hub between Europe, the Middle East and Central Asia. The new cable will be essential to: (i) accelerating the digital transformation</p>

⁽⁷⁵⁾ https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/ebbc379-2bf6-45f9-9549-07fa3caf99e7_en?filename=Global_Gateway_Projects%20-%209%20Dec.pdf

⁽⁷⁶⁾ https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/300f989b-3941-465e-83fc-da77b0021172_en?filename=4.%20Black%20Sea%20Electricity.pdf

		of the region; and (ii) increasing its resilience by reducing its dependency on terrestrial fibre-optic connectivity transiting via Russia.
3	Maritime security in the Black Sea	<p>To increase awareness of the maritime domain at EU level, work has progressed on the Common Information Sharing Environment (CISE) ⁽⁷⁷⁾, developed by the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA), under the overall guidance of DG MARE. In 2024, CISE entered into its operational phase, and is seeking to further increase the sharing of information between authorities involved in the maritime domain ranging from border control and customs to defence and law enforcement.</p> <p><u>State of play</u>: Progress has been made throughout the reporting period and CISE has advanced from the transitional phase (ended in 2023) to the operational phase. The CISE network further matured, while the number of CISE nodes used to communicate is also expanding gradually.</p> <p><u>Results</u>: CISE seeks to ensure that maritime surveillance information collected by one maritime authority and considered necessary for the operational activities of others can be shared to improve operational effectiveness, coordination at sea and the EU common maritime picture. Bulgaria has implemented a CISE node to exchange information with other stakeholders in the network, and Romania is looking to carry out a similar process. The expected connectivity between these two Member States within the CISE network is anticipated to further increase maritime situational awareness in the Black Sea, with a positive impact on maritime safety and security as well as resulting in timely decision-making.</p> <p>Furthermore, the revised European Union maritime security strategy and its action plan ⁽⁷⁸⁾ (24 October 2023), envisages among other things, improved readiness and interoperability at EU level. One way of doing this is via annual maritime security exercises involving EU Member States' navies, coastguards and relevant maritime authorities. This is in order to increase coordination, tackle evolving threats (including hybrid and cyber), strengthen the protection of critical maritime infrastructure and discourage malign actions.</p> <p>The documents include multiple references to the Black Sea and specific actions to be taken forward. For instance, work will be carried out to 'enhance the capacities for coordinated response to marine pollution related to armed conflicts, including by developing new training curricula to tackle pollution from various sources, including e.g. UXO, mines, oil leaks, sunken vessels, etc., which might also affect biodiversity and ecosystems, also utilising Common Maritime Agenda (CMA) for the Black Sea and the Black Sea Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA)'. Attention will also be</p>

⁽⁷⁷⁾ More information at https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/ocean/blue-economy/other-sectors/common-information-sharing-environment-cise_en

⁽⁷⁸⁾ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/67499/st14280-en23.pdf>

	<p>paid to ‘enhancing current capabilities to detect sea mines, including those deployed in the context of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, posing a risk to shipping and navigation’.</p> <p>EU multipurpose maritime operations (MMOs) in the Black Sea: In line with the initial EU maritime security strategy (2014) and former action plan (2018), the EU has deployed each year an MMO in the Black Sea on a regular basis since 2019.</p> <p><u>Characteristics:</u> The MMOs have brought together the EU Agencies with coastguard functions (Frontex, the European Maritime Safety Agency and the European Fisheries Control Agency), their expertise, assets, and those of riparian EU Member states (Bulgaria, Romania). The MMOs also benefited from other non-riparian EU Member States participation and contributions (e.g. France, Germany, Italy, Croatia, Lithuania, Poland, Estonia, Greece, Latvia and Spain).</p> <p><u>Results:</u> The MMOs have helped safeguard the EU's external maritime border by implementing operational activities that focus on: cross-border crime, illicit traffic, illegal fishing, maritime pollution, search and rescue operations for people in distress, and irregular migration. These activities improved security at the EU’s maritime borders in the Black Sea region and strengthened maritime surveillance.</p> <p>The EMSA has regularly deployed remotely piloted aircraft systems to increase maritime situational awareness in support of the riparian EU Member States. Nevertheless, Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine has severely affected regional security including that in the maritime domain. Various provocative incidents caused by Russian military assets also occurred. For instance, in May 2023, in international airspace over the Black Sea, a Russian military aircraft intercepted a Polish patrol plane carrying out activities under the Black Sea MMO, manoeuvring in a dangerous way in its vicinity. Although the MMO continued its activities undeterred, this episode proved once more the unpredictable and aggressive tactics which Russia may use against other riparian countries and EU Member States deploying under the MMO.</p> <p>The EU also continued the process of developing capabilities for the maritime domain, including those connected with the EU maritime security strategy and its action plan – in particular via PESCO projects ⁽⁷⁹⁾ ((e.g. Maritime (semi) Autonomous Systems for Mine Countermeasures, Medium size Semi-Autonomous Surface Vehicle, Deployable Modular Underwater Intervention Capability Package, and the EU network of diving centres). These projects are underway with various levels of maturity. They are expected to improve the EU’s ability to respond to challenges and threats, including those that are hybrid in nature, which may affect its maritime security.</p>
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⁽⁷⁹⁾ <https://www.pesco.europa.eu/>

4	<p>Capacity building in the maritime sector for the Black and Caspian Seas</p> <p>‘Black and Caspian Sea Project I/BCSEA I’ 2017-2022 Overall budget: EUR 4 million and ‘Black and Caspian Sea Project II/BCSEA II’ 2022-2026 Overall budget: EUR 3.5 million</p>	<p>Between 2017-2022, the European Commission (DG NEAR) provided the EMSA with funding and oversight to implement capacity-building activities in the maritime sector for the Black and Caspian Seas under the ‘Black and Caspian Sea Project I/BCSEA I’. In the case of the Black Sea, the beneficiaries were Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Türkiye and Ukraine.</p> <p><u>Results:</u> The project helped improve, among other things, maritime safety, the prevention of pollution, security and labour conditions on board ships. Capacity-building activities focused on flag state implementation (to help beneficiaries’ maritime administrations with the implementation of the International Maritime Organization regulations and standards inter alia), port state control, vessel traffic monitoring and information systems, protection of marine environment, human element/staff training, security of ships and port facilities, and bilateral activities.</p> <p>The outcomes of the initial project were advanced through a follow-up project, ‘Black and Caspian Sea Project II/BCSEA II’, which has been funded by DG NEAR since October 2022. The beneficiaries in the Black Sea remain the same as before – Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Türkiye and Ukraine. The project is divided into five priority areas, namely sustainability, safety, security, simplification of working methods (simplifying, among other things, the work of national administrations through increased digitalisation) and maritime surveillance.</p> <p><u>Boosting capacities for identifying polluters:</u> An example of a concrete capacity-building activity took place between 12-13 October 2022, when the EMSA held an online training session for seven Ukrainian officials (State Service for Maritime, Inland Waterway Transport and Shipping of Ukraine, State Hydrographic Service) on CleanSeaNet for duty officers. EMSA’s CleanSeaNet platform is a satellite-based oil spill and vessel detection service that can help identify and trace oil pollution on the sea surface, monitor accidental pollution during emergencies, and identify polluters. CleanSeaNet has been made available to beneficiary countries. They are also given access to EMSA’s ‘RuleCheck’ web-based tool that includes up-to-date international and European maritime legislation. Beneficiary countries can also access the web-based e-learning platform Maritime Knowledge Centre for additional training opportunities.</p> <p><u>Steps towards including BCSEA I and BCSEA II beneficiary countries in the Black Sea region in the SafeSeaNet EU vessel traffic monitoring and information system:</u> In January 2023, in coordination with the Italian Coastguard, experts from the BCSEA II discussed sharing terrestrial automatic identification systems (T-AIS). Georgia and Ukraine already share T-AIS between them. The T-AIS exchange of data is a three-phase initiative continued from the initial BCSEA I, aiming to ultimately include the projects’ beneficiary countries in the SafeSeaNet EU vessel traffic monitoring and information system. SafeSeaNet has been developed and implemented under the overall responsibility of DG MOVE, with the EMSA ensuring that the system is adequately developed, operated and maintained, including the interaction with users on an operational level.</p>
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(C): Cooperation with regional and international organisations

No.	Main actors	Areas of cooperation, main activities and results
1.	Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) <i>Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Türkiye and Ukraine</i>	<p>BSEC Permanent International Secretariat (PERMIS) was actively involved in preparing the Common Maritime Agenda (CMA) and of its scientific pillar, the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda for the Black Sea (SRIA), both endorsed in May 2019. BSEC PERMIS has remained engaged in implementing the CMA and SRIA, seeking to help address common priorities and objectives through strategic joint actions in the region.</p> <p>The BSEC is engaged in several projects and grants at both regional and EU level in the field of marine litter, marine research and innovation, blue economy, small-scale cruising/yachting, environmental protection, and youth entrepreneurship for coastal communities in the Black Sea region, etc.</p>

Black Sea Regional Map

