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Co-operation in the Adriatic Sea Region

1. Introduction

The Adriatic Sea, with its only entrance through the Strait of Otranto, is a semi-enclosed sea forming a distinct sub-region within the Mediterranean Sea region. Its total surface is 138,595 square km while the total length of the Adriatic coastline is 8,281 km. More than half of the length belongs to the coastline around more than thousand islands, forming an archipelago along the Croatian coast which is one of the most indented coastal regions in Europe.

The Adriatic Sea area is a unique and sensitive marine ecosystem. With regard to its uniqueness and richness in biodiversity and living communities, this region represents an outstanding value not only in European, but also in global proportions. The Adriatic Sea, clean and preserved, remains a vital source of economic development of the countries in the region. At the same time growing urban development along the coast, tourism and shipping pose numerous challenges and require adequate response.

For us in Croatia, a sustainable development based on holistic ecosystem approach is the fundamental pillar of Croatian national strategy, as well as the policy of active co-operation with the countries in the Adriatic region.

2. Areas of co-operation in the field of maritime safety and environment protection

2.1. Being well aware that the environmental protection of semi-closed sea as Adriatic Sea is can not be assured without efficient co-operation of coastal states, the coastal states of the Adriatic region has developed long-standing and fruitful relationship.

For the reference, we would like to emphasize the recent activities that have resulted in the development of measures for increasing the maritime safety and environmental protection standards from ship-source pollution in the Adriatic Region.

2.2. Based on the proposal of all Adriatic States, Maritime Safety Committee of the IMO, at its 76th session (December 2002) adopted the mandatory ship reporting system in the Adriatic Sea (ADRIREP), with the entry into force on 1 July 2003. Participation in the ADRIREP is obligatory for all oil tanker ships of 150 gross tonnage and above; and all ships of 300 gross tonnage and above, carrying on board, as cargo, dangerous or polluting goods, in bulk or packages. The primary objective of the system is to support safe navigation and the protection of the marine environment through the exchange of information between the ship and the shore.

2.3. Based on MOU signed by respective Adriatic States followed by the proposal submitted to the IMO, Maritime Safety Committee of the IMO, at its 78th session (May 2004) adopted new traffic separation schemes and associated routing measures in the Adriatic Sea, which is in force from the 1 December 2004. The schemes were amended at 82 session of the MSC of IMO in December 2006.

2.4. In the year 2006 Croatia has initiated the regional activities with the aim to formulate joint proposal of the Adriatic States for the designation of the Adriatic Sea as the Particularly Sensitive Sea Area to be submitted to IMO. Associated protective measures incorporated in the proposal are, apart from raising safety (additional routing measures), responding to increasing threat to marine environment-spreading of harmful aquatic organisms via ships' ballast water and sediments.

2.5. Development of Regional- Adriatic Ballast Water Management has also been initiated, and Croatia is participating in GLOBALLAST Partnership Project as Leading Country.

2.6. Illegal operational oil discharges along major shipping routes are of particular concern in the Adriatic Sea region. The extent and frequency of that type of pollution in the Adriatic Sea has been fully confirmed by the analysis as performed by DG Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission in their recent studies. The overall Mediterranean reconnaissance study estimated the cumulative annual size of the area of oil spills in the Adriatic Sea to be around 1,228 square km or as regards to the frequency, around 250 illegal oil spills from ships a year, this regardless the Special Area status for the Mediterranean Sea under MARPOL Annex I. These figures clearly demonstrate the need for action. Croatia has responded through enhanced development of its institutional, operational and legal capacities in accordance with international law. Simultaneously, Croatia has initiated regional co-operation aiming to the establishment of Adriatic safety and environmental network.

2.7. Under the auspice of REMPEC, Croatia, Italy and Slovenia have developed Sub-Regional Response and Intervention Plan. It is expected that the Plan will soon be expanded to cover the whole Adriatic Region.

3. Institutional framework

3.1. In the Adriatic region there is a long standing and fruitful history of co-operation in different areas, among which environment protection and maritime safety and security are particularly important.

3.2. Being a basin within the Mediterranean Region, the Adriatic States has developed their co-operation within the framework of Barcelona Convention and its Protocols, as the "roof" treaty for the co-operation within the whole Mediterranean region. On the basis of Barcelona Convention, the Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP) was developed as the regional cooperative effort involving 21 countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea, as well as the European Union under the auspices of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP).

3.3. Broad platform for the co-operation in the Adriatic Region forms the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative (AII) established on the Conference on Safety and Development of

the Adriatic and Ionian Sea, held in May 2000 in Ancona (Italy). The Member states of the AII are: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, Slovenia and Serbia. The role of AII is to promote cooperation among the Member States, in various areas in order to strengthen peace and stability in the entire Adriatic-Ionian area. The objective of the AII is development and prosperity, an uninterrupted and substantive reform process, through a close cooperation, aiming at European Integration by promoting democracy, market economy, and rule of law and respect of human rights. The said objectives are achieved by the co-operation in different fields from tourism, transport, maritime affairs, culture, education, as well as environmental protection and sustainable development.

AII has its organizational structure consist of the Adriatic- Ionian Council, Council of Senior Officials and Round Tables. Particular emphasize of the AII is placed on maritime safety and environmental protection issues. In that context AII through its relevant Round Tables works on promotion of the implementation of IMO instruments, raising safety culture in shipping, development of harmonized vessel traffic monitoring services, prevention of illegal discharges from ships, ensuring co-operation in maritime law enforcement issues, etc. Particular value of the Initiative and its structure is the flexibility which enable the exchange of views not just between the official state representatives but also between different stakeholders in respective states. These practice results in development of concrete joint activities and projects which were formulated and exercised. During the Croatian Presidency in 2008 the following issues relating to the maritime safety and marine environment are on the agenda: Proposal for the Designation of the Adriatic Sea as the PSSA in accordance with the Guidelines of IMO; Ballast Water Management in the Adriatic Sea; Further development of routing measures in the Adriatic Sea, Development of harmonized VTMIS in the Region, Enlargement of preparedness and response arrangement in the Adriatic Sea, Co-operation in designation of Places of Refuge.

3.4. In order to emphasise the particular importance of the co-operation in marine environment protection issues, the countries of the Adriatic Sea has concluded the Agreement on the protection of the Adriatic Sea, which was re-enforced in 1992 by

Croatia, Italy, and Slovenia forming Trilateral Commission for the protection of the Adriatic Sea.

Recently two more Adriatic states have expressed their interest to join the treaty. The main objective of the Commission is to ensure the institutional framework for the harmonized implementation of both global and regional instruments, as well as to insure the adequate response to specific needs of the Adriatic region, in its environmental dimension. In that context, it provides the framework for the co-operation on prevention and response in the case of pollution. In addition, the Commission promotes the implementation of international scientific research programs and co-operation of scientific institutions.

The Agreement presents adequate legal framework for the co-operation of the Adriatic States in the field of marine environmental protection and the work of Trilateral Commission has proved to be efficient model housing different aspects of marine environmental issues, providing for appropriate response to new challenges.

4. Conclusion

From the above short overview of the main activities and legal forms of co-operation of the states in the Adriatic Sea region in the field of maritime safety and marine environment protection it could be concluded that the Adriatic states have well established framework of co-operation through the **Adriatic- Ionian Initiative** and the **Trilateral Commission** which has the prospective of expansion. These organizations, based on international agreements concluded by respective states, with its goals, objectives, on-going projects and activities as well as its supportive structure provides sufficient political, legal and operational framework for overall co-operation in the Region.

When proposing a new form of co-operation, we believe that the shortage of existing ones, possible outcomes of newly proposed capabilities, as well as the absorption capabilities of the countries in the region should be taken into the account. Inflation of different initiatives in our view is time and source consuming and might create unnecessary overlapping.

Croatia is of the opinion that the existing instruments of co-operation of the coastal states in Adriatic Region, namely AII and Trilateral Commission, have sufficient flexibility that enables accommodation of large scale of projects and activities both existing and forthcoming. Furthermore, the adjustable and dynamic structure of the existing instruments enables proactive approach towards future co-operation providing adequate framework for response to new challenges.