

Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the ‘Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council — Better situational awareness by enhanced cooperation across maritime surveillance authorities: next steps within the Common Information Sharing Environment for the EU maritime domain’

(COM(2014) 451 final)

(2015/C 230/16)

Rapporteur: Mr POLYZOGOPOULOS

On 20 November 2013 the European Commission decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 304 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, on the

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council — Better situational awareness by enhanced cooperation across maritime surveillance authorities: next steps within the Common Information Sharing Environment for the EU maritime domain

COM(2014) 451 final.

The Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society, which was responsible for preparing the Committee’s work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 11 November 2014.

At its 503rd plenary session, held on 10 and 11 December 2014 (meeting of 10 December), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion unanimously.

1. Conclusions and recommendations

1.1. The EESC welcomes the communication as the logical sequel to efforts to make maritime surveillance more effective and economically efficient, one of the strategic objectives of the Integrated Maritime Policy (IMP), and emphasises that enhanced information-sharing between maritime surveillance authorities is a crucial to the protection, security, economy and environmental future of the EU.

The EESC recognises the progress made at EU level and nationally since drawing up the roadmap in 2010⁽¹⁾, but nevertheless considers that it would be particularly useful to evaluate more clearly the progress made in respect of the objectives and six steps set out in the roadmap and of the communication of 15 October 2009⁽²⁾.

1.2. Having recently⁽³⁾ drawn attention to the heightened geopolitical, strategic and environmental challenges in the area of maritime security, the EESC urges the Commission to now speed up action on the review process ‘to assess the implementation of a Maritime CISE and the need for further action’⁽⁴⁾, to be launched by 2018, and make it more specific.

1.3. In further developing the CISE (Common Information Sharing Environment), the EESC recommends making full use of the broad scope and opportunities contained in the recent Joint Communication on a European Union Maritime Security Strategy (EMMS)⁽⁵⁾ aiming for an up-to-date, coherent and global approach to maritime surveillance.

1.4. The EESC would ask the Commission to clarify how it intends to encourage Member States ‘to continue to work on modernising their IT [Information Technology] set up’ without more resources than ‘some funding [which] is available at EU level to support small improvements’⁽⁶⁾ and recommends that a proportion of the resources saved be earmarked or reinvested for closing the gaps in the CISE and improving it overall.

⁽¹⁾ A Draft Roadmap towards establishing the Common Information Sharing Environment for the surveillance of the EU maritime domain, COM (2010) 584 final.

⁽²⁾ Towards the integration of maritime surveillance: A common information sharing environment for the EU maritime domain, COM(2009) 538 final.

⁽³⁾ EESC opinion on an EU Maritime Security Strategy (OJ C 458, 19.12.2014, p. 61).

⁽⁴⁾ COM(2014) 451 final, p. 7.

⁽⁵⁾ For an open and secure global maritime domain: elements for a European Union maritime security strategy, JOIN(2014) 9 final.

⁽⁶⁾ COM(2014) 451 final, p. 8.

1.5. Given the voluntary nature of the project and the significance of political commitment and of cultural barriers arising from entrenched mindsets, stereotypes, working methods, etc., the EESC urges the Commission to focus on education/training measures and confidence-building initiatives, drawing on existing successful experiences such as the North Atlantic Coast Guard Forum and the International Association of Marine Aids to Navigation and Lighthouse Authorities (IALA).

1.6. It would also ask the Commission to indicate more clearly the policy mix it intends to use, in the short and long term, to address the legal and the technical hurdles preventing the establishment of an effective CISE.

1.7. The EESC points out that very rapid pace of development of IT will inevitably expose a common information-sharing environment such as the CISE to cyber attacks⁽⁷⁾, as well as terrorist attacks, with incalculable security implications for transport, trade, ports, ships, crews and cargoes, and urges the Commission to address the issue of cyber safety in maritime transport and draw up detailed measures for protecting the CISE without delay. The 2014 report of the US Government Accountability Office on *Maritime Critical Infrastructure Protection* (<http://gao.gov/products/GAO-14-459>) demonstrates the urgency of the situation.

1.8. The EESC emphasises that better situational awareness and enhanced cooperation on the part of maritime surveillance authorities through the CISE will also help to safeguard the ecological integrity of the EU's marine environment by providing better protection of biodiversity and marine resources against nuclear accidents, unlawful discharges of toxic substances, serious accidents involving pollutants and climate change. Moreover, improving the security of submarine cables and pipelines will boost energy efficiency.

2. Introduction

2.1. Timely access to accurate information and a common, reliable representation of the situation at sea are vitally important in addressing risks and threats. Integrating different sources of data and coordination between the competent bodies will make for a fuller understanding of what is happening at sea and create added value by making efficient use of scarce resources.

2.2. Seen in this context, optimum information-sharing between maritime surveillance authorities is one of the strategic aims of the Integrated Maritime Policy. Development of a common information-sharing environment for the EU maritime domain was already the subject of two communications by the Commission, published in 2009 and 2010⁽⁸⁾.

2.3. In 2012, enhancing maritime security through integrated maritime surveillance was made a key component of the Blue Growth agenda, which sets out to promote development and create jobs in the maritime economy⁽⁹⁾.

2.4. The recent (2014) Joint Communication on a European Union Maritime Security Strategy⁽¹⁰⁾ reaffirms and illustrates the role of maritime surveillance and information-sharing as an important building-block of maritime security.

3. Main points of the Commission communication

3.1. The communication provides an update on progress made at European and Member State level since the introduction of the CISE roadmap, which is an ongoing collaborative and voluntary process aimed at enhancing awareness, efficiency, quality, responsiveness and coordination of surveillance operations in the European maritime domain, as well as promoting innovation.

3.2. In addition to the simple exchange of information, the CISE is designed to achieve multipurpose and efficient information use by different user communities with no duplication, based on a decentralised maritime monitoring network that complies with data protection provisions and international rules. It does not replace existing information exchange systems and platforms and will not affect Member State systems or legislation in this area.

⁽⁷⁾ EESC own-initiative opinion on *Cyber attacks in the EU* (OJ C 451, 16.12.2014, p. 31).

⁽⁸⁾ COM(2009) 538 final and COM(2010) 584 final.

⁽⁹⁾ COM(2012) 494 final.

⁽¹⁰⁾ JOIN(2014) 9 final, pp. 7-8.

3.3. More specifically, the roadmap⁽¹¹⁾ sets out six steps for developing the CISE: identifying user communities, mapping of data sets and gap analysis for data exchange, setting common data classification levels, developing a supporting framework, establishing access rights and ensuring respect of legal provisions.

3.4. The CISE covers the following sectoral functions: 1) shipping security (including search and rescue operations), maritime security and prevention of pollution caused by vessels; 2) fisheries control; 3) preparedness and response in the event of maritime pollution incidents and marine environment protection; 4) customs; 5) border controls; 6) law enforcement; and 7) defence.

3.5. The potential savings in administrative and operational costs could yield an overall benefit to the European economy of around EUR 400 million per year, with a direct benefit of some EUR 40 million for public authorities. Investment costs in this area are estimated at EUR 10 million per year in the first 10 years.

4. General considerations

4.1. Underscoring the scale and importance of European shipping for employment and the economy, the EESC has in previous opinions made a number of pertinent comments and suggestions in connection with a range of issues relating to European maritime policy⁽¹²⁾ and has given its view in detail both on general questions of maritime security and on specific aspects of integrated maritime surveillance, highlighting the need for an integrated system of maritime surveillance⁽¹³⁾.

4.2. In particular, endorsing a cross-sectoral approach to maritime governance, the EESC has stressed that a genuinely integrated maritime market calls for closer cooperation between Member States' national surveillance authorities, coastguards and navies, which would require a common information-sharing structure and introduction of an integrated maritime surveillance system⁽¹⁴⁾.

4.3. The EESC has also expressed support for a common EU-wide surveillance mechanism based on a harmonised legal framework for sharing sensitive and non-sensitive information between the EU Member States' authorities, agencies and users⁽¹⁵⁾.

4.4. The EESC attaches particular importance to clarifying and securing governance structures and resources if the present exceptionally complex and ambitious project, involving some 400 bodies handling a vast amount of diverse information on maritime surveillance, is to be viable. These bodies include the authorities of the EU and EEA Member States and various EU agencies, such as the European Fisheries Control Agency (EFCA), Frontex, the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) and the European Defence Agency (EDA).

4.5. The EESC points out that — given the voluntary nature of the CISE and the subsidiarity principle — the Member States play a pivotal role that, in a climate of budget austerity and crisis, places an additional burden on their competent authorities and will incur major expenses in terms of modernising the relevant IT systems or ensuring that they are compatible, as a significant proportion (around a quarter) are based on monolithic and obsolete architecture. (See SWD (2014) 224 final, *Impact assessment*; and *Gartner, 2013. Sustainability and Efficiency of Visions for CISE*, European Commission, DG for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries.)

⁽¹¹⁾ COM(2010) 584 final.

⁽¹²⁾ See, for example: OJ C 211, 19.8.2008, p. 31; OJ C 128, 18.5.2010, p. 131; OJ C 107, 6.4.2011, p. 64; OJ C 161, 6.6.2013, p. 87; OJ C 255, 22.9.2010, p. 103.

⁽¹³⁾ See, for example: OJ C 44, 11.2.2011, p. 173; OJ C 67, 6.3.2014, p. 32; OJ C 76, 14.3.2013, p. 15; OJ C 168, 20.7.2007, p. 57; OJ C 32, 5.2.2004, p. 21; OJ C 61, 14.3.2003, p. 174; and OJ C 458, 19.12.2014, p. 61.

⁽¹⁴⁾ OJ C 107, 6.4.2011, p. 64.

⁽¹⁵⁾ OJ C 44, 11.2.2011, p. 173.

4.6. Taking into account the Risk Assessment Study on the EU maritime domain for the next 15 years, the EESC considers that when ranking information to be shared, priority should be given to effectively identifying risks, threats and vulnerabilities in each individual sector, both in maritime regions and overall. (See Wise Pens International, 2013. *Risk Assessment Study as an Integral Part of the Impact Assessment in Support of a CISE for the EU Maritime Domain*, European Commission, DG for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries.)

4.7. In any event, the confidentiality and protection of sensitive commercial and personal data is an issue of major importance. In the EESC's view, this is a subject that merits attention and more detailed study, and it refers to its previous comments and suggestions on the subject.

4.8. The EESC is pleased with the progress made in implementing the roadmap through the BluemassMed, Marsuno and CoopP programmes, which have reaffirmed the operational need for cross-sectoral information exchange and helped to provide clarification, and urges the Commission to broaden its efforts here.

4.9. The Committee also finds it encouraging that progress has already been made in introducing a range of systems ⁽¹⁶⁾ serving the objectives of different policy areas and in some cases covering more than one policy area.

4.10. The EESC draws attention to the EU's unique marine environment with its six sea basins, its peripheral regions and the particular features of its islands, and emphasises that in a context of heightened globalised threats and risks it does not make sense to enhance awareness and the efficiency of the CISE without promoting international, regional and cross-border cooperation, paying due attention to sharing selected information with third countries in the light of security issues and the reciprocity of the information concerned.

4.11. The EESC considers that a coherent approach to maritime surveillance in the EU and worldwide will also need to take account of issues arising from the planning and deployment of Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and operations.

4.12. The EESC welcomes the significant improvement in information exchange between civilian and military user communities, since the latter are one of the main holders of maritime surveillance data, and calls on the Commission to consider making targeted use of NATO resources. It also points to the best practice in civilian-military cooperation that has been developed, at national and European level, under the European Border Surveillance System (EUROSUR).

4.13. The EESC urges the Commission to pursue greater use of space assets and data in developing the CISE and notes that maritime surveillance is one of the uses offered by the EU's satellite systems. The maritime surveillance services of Copernicus (formerly GMES — Global Monitoring for Environment and Security System), for example, support measures to combat piracy, drug trafficking, illegal fishing and toxic waste disposal in cooperation with services such as Frontex, EMSA and the European Union Satellite Centre for the surveillance of EU land borders, while contributing to security applications in the surveillance of the EU's external sea borders.

4.14. The EESC urges the Commission to explore the issue of cyber security in maritime transport and draw up detailed measures for protecting the CISE without delay, bearing in mind that this will require particularly active horizontal coordination between the authorities involved.

5. Specific comments

5.1. The EESC urges the Commission to intensify its efforts in the area of research, development and innovation in order to tackle the considerable technical issues involved in the interoperability and architecture of applications, systems and services, e.g. variations in data quality between different software and systems, which have a significant impact on the effective implementation of the CISE and on its credibility ⁽¹⁷⁾.

⁽¹⁶⁾ COM(2014) 451 final, p. 4.

⁽¹⁷⁾ COM(2014) 451 final.

5.2. The EESC considers that establishing the common information-sharing environment in the EU maritime domain presents opportunities for employment and innovative entrepreneurship, particularly in the area of information and communications technology (ICT), and calls on the Commission to develop this important aspect.

5.3. The EESC urges the Commission to step up its efforts to overcome cultural barriers to information-sharing and distribution and believes that producing a non-binding handbook containing best-practice recommendations on how to apply the CISE will not be enough on its own to build trust and understanding through a 'care to share to be aware' approach within and between sectors.

5.4. Differences in cross-sectoral integration in maritime surveillance in the Member States are giving rise to pronounced discrepancies in efforts to connect with the CISE, e.g. some countries have simplified their IT systems in the area of surveillance while others have not. A number of countries have built up robust systems of cross-sectoral electronic cooperation domestically, whereas in others individual sectors continue to operate closed sectoral IT systems.

5.5. The EESC welcomes the Commission's initiatives to develop prototypes aimed at designing a common data model, in other words a list of terms, meanings, naming conventions, data formats and data relationships, as a tool for 'translation' between the various maritime surveillance information systems, particularly the civilian and military systems.

5.6. The EESC is pleased with the progress made in setting up National Single Windows, which provide central national information exchange platforms for reporting and sharing of ship-related information linked to the Union maritime information and exchange system, as well as to other systems. Examples of good practice in this area have been identified by the UN's Economic Commission for Europe (ECE/UN) in its Recommendation 33 on facilitating trade and transport, serving as useful reference points for the CISE.

5.7. The EESC believes that the serious matter of vendor lock-in for IT platforms needs to be addressed, as this will impede interoperability. In fact, around 85 % of maritime IT surveillance systems in the Member States have their own specific infrastructure and are not standardised, meaning that a single vendor must be relied on if they have to be upgraded or adjusted.

Brussels, 10 December 2014

The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
Henri MALOSSE
