Maritime Spatial Planning in the EU and problems and prospects for the Eastern Mediterranean

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Abstract

This paper examines the state-of-play of Maritime Spatial Plans (MSP) in the EU through a case studies methodology in order to identify problems and prospects for the development of national and transnational MSP plans in the Eastern Mediterranean (Eastern Med). This research found that of the 22 EU countries which should have had MSP in place as of March 31, 2021, only 12 have approved plans and less than half are implementing them as of February 2022. The two European sea basins which have the greatest percentage of national MSP in place as well as evidence of transnational plans are the Baltic Sea and the North Sea. Meanwhile, the Eastern Med does not have any national maritime spatial plans in place and only preliminary evidence of cross-border planning efforts between Greece and Cyprus. In terms of best practices around transnational maritime spatial plan development, this research found the North Sea to be the most notable. Collaboration in the North Sea basin was largely driven by the spirit of blue growth and mutual economic interest, as opposed to sustainability and conservation, and the efforts were supported politically and economically by the EU and the countries involved. Using the case of the North Sea and the Commission-supported transboundary MSP development toolkits available, this research shows that the Eastern Med lacks even the most basic elements necessary for the development of transboundary MSP amongst EU member states, let alone with non-EU states. And, it asserts that the most important “next steps” for the region involve creating awareness of MSP in the region through a single authoritative platform, developing a political consensus over key issues, and solving protracted legal problems on the delimitation of maritime zones amongst EU and non-EU states. On account of the volatile nature of the region, the EU’s political reach and ability to influence non-EU member states to embrace MSP is expected to be both severely tested and key for the development of a holistic MSP framework in the Eastern Med.

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Introduction

This paper examines the promise of MSP to promote cross-border cooperation, peace and sustainable development in the Eastern Mediterranean. MSP is a concept originating in the late 1970's which came into EU law in 2014 and is now a tool that is used by over 100 countries world-wide to promote the sustainable development of our oceans and seas (MSP Platform). It has been warmly embraced by the European Commission (herein referred to as Commission) for its potential to: reduce conflicts between different activities in the sea, encourage investment, increase cross-border cooperation, and protect the environment amongst EU Member States and neighboring non-EU countries (Ibid). And as a result, the EU passed Directive 2014/89/EU, Article 20 called "Establishing a framework for maritime spatial planning" on 23 July 2014 and mandated that all EU member states bordering the sea establish and implement maritime spatial plans by March 31, 2021. This paper will examine transboundary MSP plans within and around the EU in search of best practices and lessons learned in hope of finding a pathway for MSP in the Eastern Med., a region of great opportunity and also a hotbed for conflict. This paper will not test a theory but rather, through a case studies analysis, observe the dynamics at play which drive and hinder the development of transnational plans between EU and non-EU member states in different EU sea basins, particularly in the Eastern Med, and build potential theories which can then be tested as part of further research.

Literature review

On account of the multidisciplinary nature of MSP, there is a broad range of literature written from the perspectives of various disciplines, including the political sciences, international affairs, hard sciences, management disciplines and more. For the sake of this research paper, the author is primarily interested in research from the political sciences and international relations disciplines, as well as relevant technical reports on the implementation of MSP and transboundary MSP and several background reports on the environmental status of the Mediterranean, which help contextualize the conversation.

The most prominent and widely cited theorists on MSP are Ehler & Douvere who, in 2009, established the most widely accepted definition of MSP as a “public process of analyzing and allocating the spatial and temporal distribution of human activities in marine areas to achieve ecological, economic, and social objectives that are usually specified through a political process” and aims to regulate activities between the shore and the limits of national jurisdiction in the sea. This is slightly different than the definition purported by the EU, which is “Maritime spatial planning (MSP) is the tool to manage the use of our seas and oceans coherently and to ensure that human activities take place in an efficient, safe and sustainable way” (EC MSP).

While the concept of maritime spatial planning has been around since 1976 (Olsson et all. 2008), the European Union (EU) developed its maritime spatial planning policy in 2005-2006 and passed its own maritime spatial planning framework law in 2014 (EU Directive 2014/89/EU). In accordance with the framework law, the Commission stated that all coastal EU member states should establish maritime spatial plans by July 2021 and review these plans every ten years (Commission, MSP). Information on the implementation of MSP on EU country levels are now available on

the EU's MSP Platform through voluntary reports, as well as the EU's 2022 MSP country overview. The MSP tool has been widely embraced by one out of three countries globally with marine waters (Santos 2019) and the Commission notes in its MSP report that the tool is expected to: reduce conflicts between different activities in the sea, encourage investment, increase cross-border cooperation, and protect the environment amongst EU Member States and amongst neighboring countries.

On a theoretical level, scholars have discussed whether or not maritime spatial planning is sustainable and promotes conservation, or if the environment suffers at the expense of blue growth (Santos 2014, 2019). On an EU policy level it has also been purported by the Commission-funded MSPGlobal network that MSP has the potential to improve stability by enhancing regional governance mechanisms and that it favors the weaker states, which is a key argument supporting multilateralism. The Commission has also issued a report in 2019 and 2020 which discusses the importance of promoting MSP beyond the EU context in an effort to improve international ocean governance, even in the deep sea, thus highlighting the role of MSP in EU external relations. Smythe further examined this concept in a 2022 paper and noted the ability of MSP to be an effective tool for regional ocean governance, but concluded that further research is needed to see how it will play out over time.

Scholars and researchers have also examined several legal and social elements of MSP which are worth mentioning. First off, in 2016 Zervaki explores the legal implications for maritime governance on account of the passing of the maritime spatial planning framework. Maritime spatial planning, although helpful, can be perceived as being at odds with the concept of the mare liberum and the sea as a common good, and an argument can be made that it is in the interest of the realist State to discourage further regulation as they seek to explore, defend and claim their right to a variety of

sea-based resources close and not-so-close to shore. In another report, Zervaki explores the EU's shift from a centralized policy making approach to a more participatory approach through MSP as it requires states to engage stakeholders at all phases of the process. Connected to this, Bates (2011) highlights the importance of informal networks in raising awareness of environmental policies and environmental management and the potential for MSP to solve intractable conflicts. And, focusing again on the role of awareness, an INTERREG paper by Petrakos reveals that of all EU environmental policies, MSP is the least known amongst actors in the Mediterranean region.

Governance issues are cross-cutting themes through most research and papers, while implementation-related issues of MSP have also featured prominently in literature on MSP. As more countries develop their MSP plans and several countries are in their second and third round of MSP plans, literature is slowly shifting from focusing on the planning phases of MSP to implementation, review and revision. In the meantime, it is useful to note that the GEF LME toolkit offers guidance on how to establish/evaluate MSP plans including the creation of governance structures (note Cocossis' paper on MSP and governance in Greece). There is also an EU Compendium of existing MSP plans, projects by NSEC, BalticLInes, TEDA, Campos and Halim. While information on implementation was highly fragmented and difficult to find until the start of 2022, the new MSP Platform where the Commission has centralized all country reports, information and EU funded projects on MSP, thus making analysis more feasible.

Moreover and as of 2021, Commission-funded reports have also been published which offer guidance on transboundary MSP, such as iWLearn, which lists why transboundary is important and Khalil's 2021 "Compendium of existing and emerging cross-border and transboundary MSP practice". Considering this compendium and the

2021 final MSP Platform conference of October 2021, it becomes clear that there are not yet many successful examples of transboundary MSP nor analysis of these examples, which was an important factor of consideration for this research project (GEF LME states that cross-border MSP refers to cases between two or more countries that share a common administrative border; while transboundary MSP refers to cases where multiple countries share an ecosystem). Several projects in which a proactive approach to transboundary MSP have been cited by the Commission are HELCOM and BaltSeaPlan and these have been considered in the discussion section. As a result, of the lack of abundant work on the topic and the fact that many resources became "searchable" during the winter of 2021, the author relied upon primary sources from the EU MSP Platform website.

Considering some of the key challenges of MSP, Santos (2019) notes that lack of political will and resource constraints seem to impact the establishment of MSP plans, and that it is important to conduct long-term research to assess whether or not MSP is adaptable enough to price in climate change. Regarding MSP and climate change, for the sake of this paper, the author's considers the UNEP2020 Med report as the basis for information on the impact of climate change in the Eastern Med, as well as pressures, risks and opportunities for regional actors. Like the UNEP2020 Med report, the author also considers that MSP is indeed a useful tool for combating climate change.

Research objectives

The Eastern Med Sea Basin is surrounded by the EU and non-EU countries of Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, Greece, Cyprus, Albania, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina (with coasts on the Adriatic Sea), Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Gaza Strip, Egypt, and Libya (with coasts on the Aegean and/or Levantine Seas), and is no stranger to conflict (MSP Platform). Disputes over issues such as borders, security, migration, energy and natural resources and culture and religion strain neighborly relations, which make the development of highly technical transnational MSP plans, however important, seem unachievable. On top of the existing geopolitical conflicts, it is also a region under severe pressure from population growth and the impact of climate change. In the Mediterranean, the population in the south and east more than doubled from 1980 to 2018 and is expected to continue its growth, with one out of three persons living on the coast and highly dependent upon ecosystem services of the coast and sea (SoED 2020, 6). Moreover, scientists note that the impact of climate change in the Mediterranean region outpaces the rest of the world, particularly in regards to: decreases in rainfall, increases in land and sea temperatures, wildfires, acidification, decreases in biodiversity and increases in the presence of alien species (SoED 2020). This all threatens food and water security, health, human livelihoods and health, thus making the development of MSP plans even more important to stave off further destabilization, to save key livelihoods in the region like fishing and tourism, and to promote sustainable uses of the sea to unlock the tremendous potential of renewables in the region (SoED 2020). The key to addressing the challenges of the Eastern Med is the promotion of a holistic, transnational and ecosystems-based approach to organizing activities in the sea basin. MSP is the most globally recognized and employed tool for

this purpose, and plans are currently under formulation in EU countries bordering the Eastern Med, albeit with a delay. In an effort to prepare for the development of transnational MSP in the Eastern Med once national plans are established and implemented, this research seeks to analyze existing cross-border and transboundary maritime spatial plans in other regions of the EU, particularly those between EU and non-EU countries, in search of challenges, solutions and best practices in the process which can be applied to the Eastern Med. Moreover, this research hopes to build theories about why transnational MSP seems to work/fail in some regions, which can then be considered in the context of the Eastern Med and tested in additional research.

Materials and methods

This master's thesis will be based upon desk research, making use of online documents, reports, journals, books, and committee meetings notes, as well as telephone calls where necessary, to conduct a case studies analysis which is influenced by the political sciences and international relations disciplines. A case studies analysis is most appropriate on account of the fact that this is a fairly new topic of research which has a great level of complexity and moderate to low levels of available data for processing. Additionally, as opposed to looking for quantitative info, the author is looking to identify causal relationships and conduct theory building, which could then be tested further research to derive at generalizable conclusions (iResearchnet).

The primary resources of the European Commission and its bodies, especially the European MSP Platform (herein referred to as the MSP Platform) and MSP Global website, will feature prominently. While the research will touch upon maritime spatial planning in all of the EU's sea basins, the primary sea basin of interest is the Eastern Mediterranean Sea Basin. As defined by the EU, the Eastern Mediterranean Sea Basin is the sea area surrounded by the EU countries of Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, Greece and Cyprus and the non-EU countries of Albania, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina (with coasts on the Adriatic Sea) and Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Gaza Strip, Egypt, Libya (with coasts on the Aegean and/or Levantine Seas) (MSP Platform).

The order of research is as follows:

A. Research the State-of-Play of MSP in Europe through the MSP Platform, the MSP Global websites and by contacting individual country MSP secretariats where necessary;
B. Review the status of MSP implementation in the different EU sea basin regions;

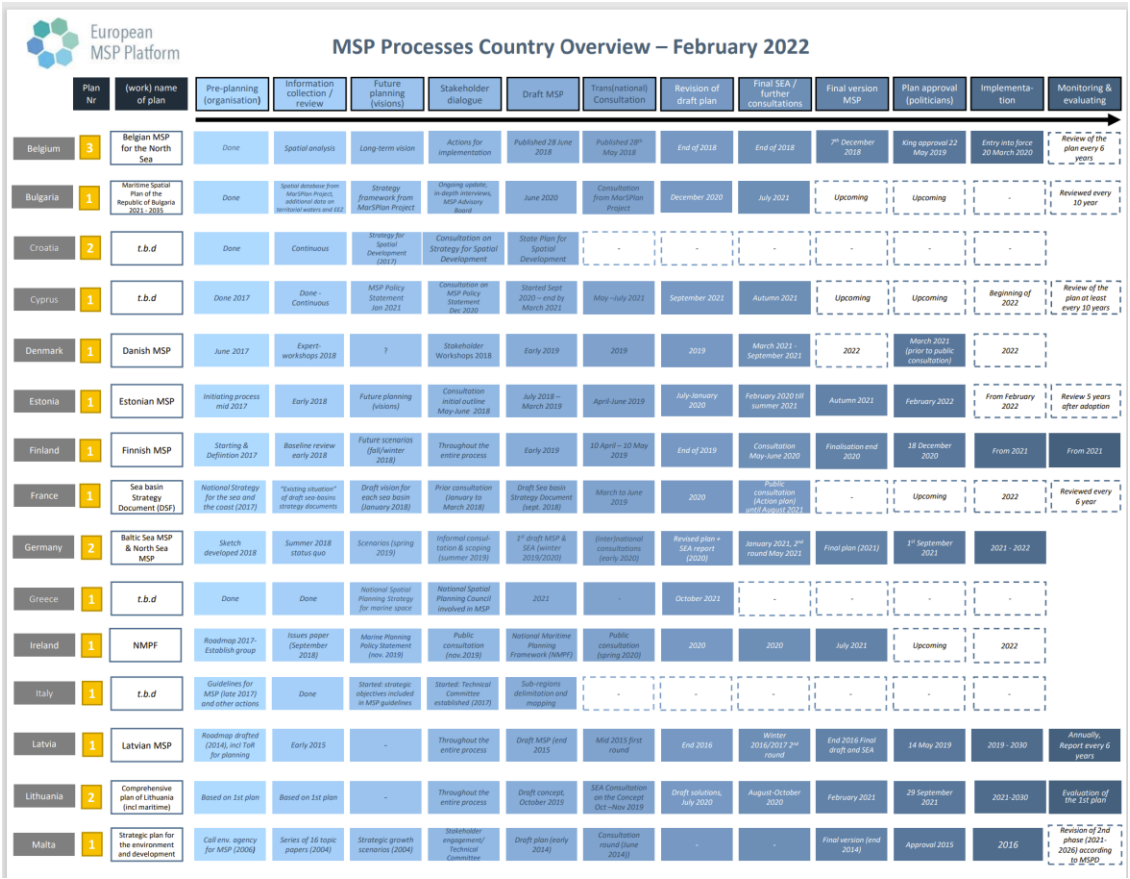
C. Identify the EU Sea Basin(s) to be used as a case study/ies
D. Review Commission-backed toolkits and guidance on how to structure transboundary MSP plans
E. Evaluate cross-border/transboundary plans in case study region/s accordance with toolkits and guidance
F. Apply Toolkit/guidance to East Med

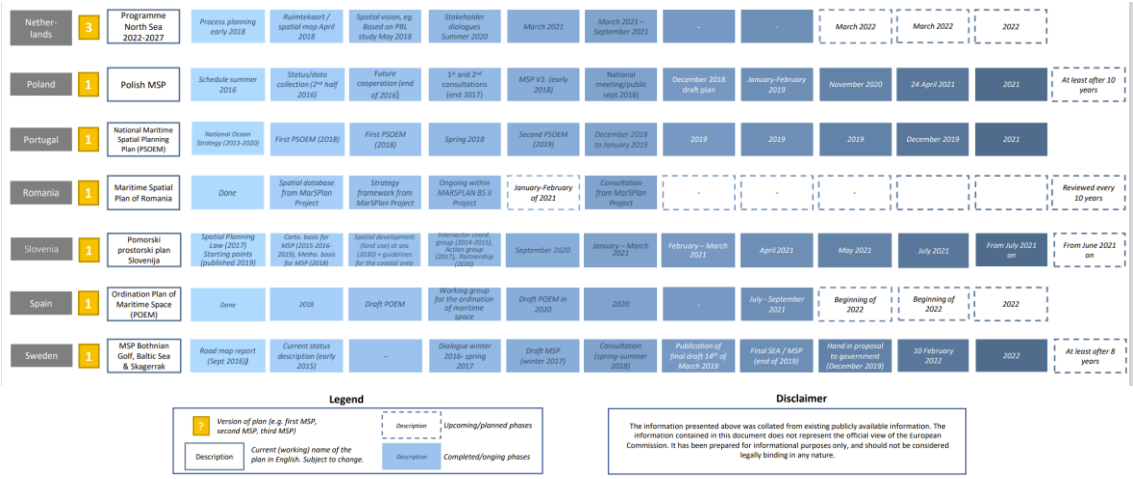
Upon conclusion of the research element of the project, the Discussion section will analyze the results and present opportunities, challenges and recommendations for the development of transboundary MSP in the Eastern Med.

Results

A. *State of Play of MSP in the EU*:

In Europe and according to the MSP Directive, the 22 coastal EU Member States were obliged to develop their national maritime spatial plan by 31 March 2021 the latest. Once developed, they have a minimum review period of 10 years. Research reveals that EU Member States are in different phases of development, adoption, implementation and review of their MSP plans. (MSP Platform, last accessed 11 June 2022).

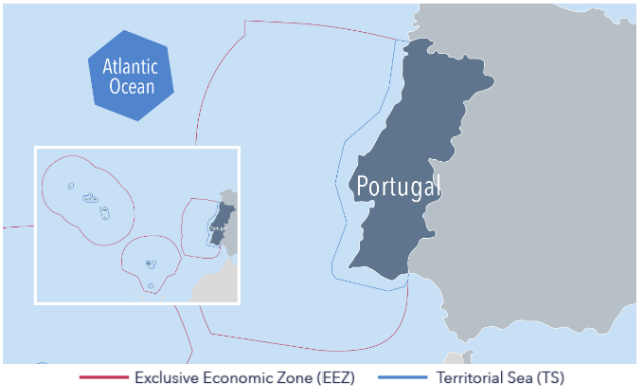




(MSP Processes country overview, 2022)

According to the MSP Processes Country Overview (PCO) above, of the 22 EU countries required to have MSP, 12 have approved plans and less than half are implementing their MSP plans as of February 2022. The author of this research performed a random selection of countries from the MSP PCO to further examine their status in an effort to cross-check the reliability and timeliness of data. The countries selected were Portugal, the Netherlands, Croatia and Slovenia. The author found: conflicting information between the MSP PCO and the Country-by-Country (C-b-C) information indicated on the Commission's MSP website, confusing communication of the status of MSP plans, and issues in the determining the status of MSP plans stemming from the delimitation of maritime zones.

For example, the MSP PCO states that Portugal has MSP plans as of 2021, while the C-b-C information, which has also been updated as of February 2022, states that all regions of Portugal, except the Autonomous region of the Azores, have completed their maritime spatial plans. The status of Portugal in the C-b-C and the map below coincide as the Commission colors the polygons within the coastal zone of EU countries when visualizing the status of MSP on maps. In the image of Portugal below, the maritime zones off of the cost of Portugal are colorless.



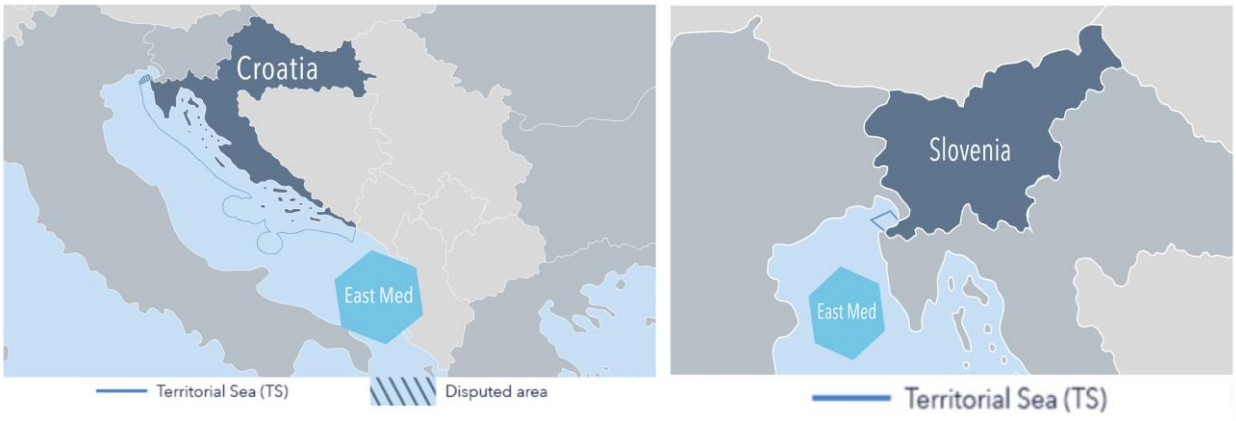
(https://maritime-spatial-planning.ec.europa.eu/countries/portugal, last accessed 12 June 2022)

As a result, in the case of Portugal, it should be considered that MSP plans have not been fully established.

In the case of the Netherlands, the MSP PCO indicates that the country has not completed its MSP plans and that this was scheduled for March 2022. But a closer look reveals that the country is actually in its third round of MSP. Upon contacting the MSP secretariat of the Netherlands, the secretariat clarified that MSP plans have been established and they are in the third phase of review and modification, as per the MSP Directive. As a result, plans should be considered established, according to the Netherlands. This corresponds to the map below:

(https://maritime-spatial-planning.ec.europa.eu/countries/Netherlands, last accessed 16 June 2022).

Determining the status of Slovenia and Croatia is a bit more complex and is indicative of the more intractable challenges of MSP, to be elaborated upon more in the Discussion session.



(MSP Platform Croatia, last accessed 12 June 2022)
(MSP Platform Slovenia, last accessed 12 June 2022)

According to the MSP PCO, Croatia is in the second round of its MSP plans, which are not completed. The Commission has the country's map colorless, indicating that it is not complete, which is accurate as Croatia's voluntary report notes that its boundaries with Italy and Montenegro are complete and with Bosnia and Herzegovina are in provisional application. However, the boarders with Slovenia, as it notes, are still being delimited (MSP Platform Croatia, 12 June 2022). Slovenia, on the other hand, considers the dispute with Croatia to have been resolved and notes:

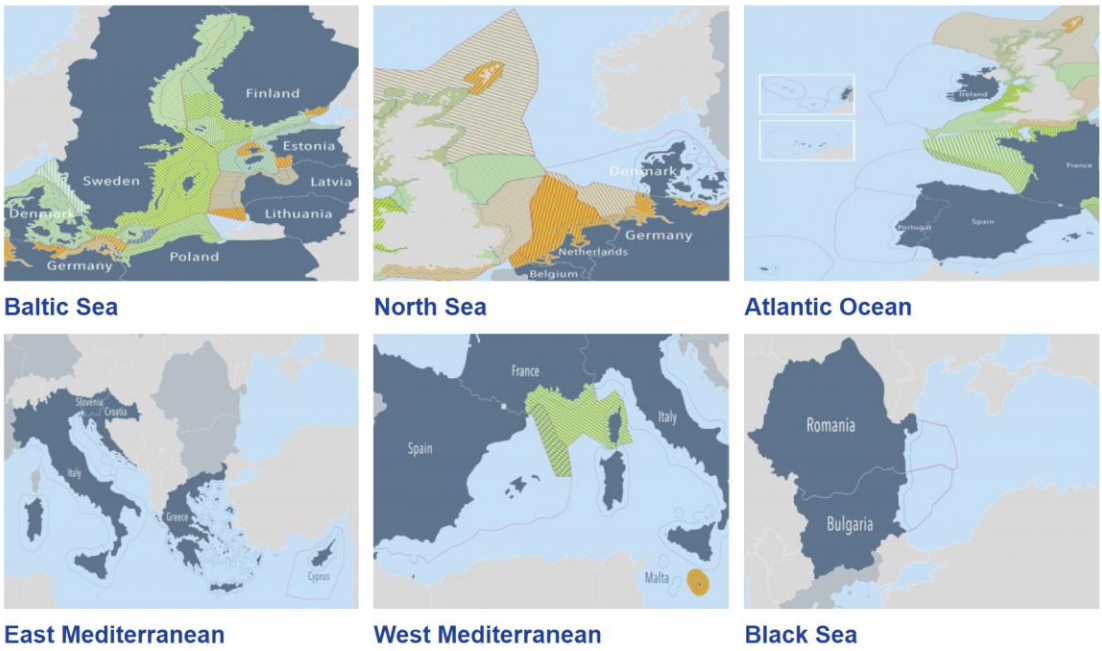
> On 29 June 2017, the Arbitral Tribunal rendered its 'Final Award' in the arbitration concerning a territorial and maritime dispute between the Republic of Croatia and the Republic of Slovenia. According to the 'Final Award' relevant marine waters are defined as: Slovenia's internal waters cover 46.3km² and its Territorial sea cover 166.9 km².
>
> (MSP Platform Slovenia, 12 June 2022)

As a result, due to the fact that much of the information on the Commission's website has been offered voluntarily by the MSP secretariats of each country, the

author suggests that the information presented in the MSP PCO and on the Commission's MSP website is considered to be indicative, rather than definitive.

B. The status of MSP implementation in European Sea basins

A review of the MSP website reveals that there are six European Sea basins as below:



(https://maritime-spatial-planning.ec.europa.eu/msp-practice/seabasins, last accessed June 11, 2022)

The image also depicts in color the different approved maritime spatial plans for EU countries. It does not include information about neighboring non-EU countries, although geographically the non-EU countries are considered to be part of the sea basins. For example, the Eastern Med sea basin is comprised of the EU countries of Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, Greece and Cyprus and the non-EU countries of Albania, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina (with coasts on the Adriatic Sea) and Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Gaza Strip, Egypt, Libya (with coasts on the Aegean and/or Levantine Seas), (MSP Platform East Med, 30 May 2022).

Examining the maps, a viewer notes that there are maritime spatial plans for all of the EU countries of the Baltic Sea, with the exception of non-EU member state

Russia. The C-b-C profile of Russia notes that there are no plans available and that Russia does not have a centralized governance structure dedicated to MSP. This being said, the GEF LME MSP toolkit report, a toolkit that will be elaborated upon in more detail in the following sections, reveals that there are bilateral transnational agreements on sector specific industries between Norway and Russia in the Barents Sea (GEF LME, 106).

The next sea basin with the greatest number of maritime spatial plans is the North Sea (including former EU member state the UK), followed by the Atlantic ocean (which again includes the United Kingdom), and the West Mediterranean. In the Black Sea and in the sea basin of our primary interest, the Eastern Med, the MSP PCO details that no EU member states in the region have completed their maritime spatial plans. As an additional note, it should be retained again that there are discrepancies in the information provided in the MSP PCO and the regional maps, as the PCO states that Portugal is implementing MSP, while other sources note that the plans are not completed yet. As a result, the author cross-checked the information on a C-b-C basis in the region but did not find any countries that were erroneously depicted as *not* having maritime spatial plans.

C. Identification of European Sea Basin(s) to be used as case studies in transnational maritime spatial plans

On account of the sparse implementation of MSP across most sea beds, as seen in the first portion of research, the author further examined the North Sea Region and the Baltic Sea Region for their prospects of being used as case studies. As these regions have the greatest percentage of countries with active maritime spatial plans, it is considered that there are higher likelihoods of the existence of transnational

plans and best practices in these regions. The existence of cross-border MSP plans in both sea basins were confirmed by the GEF LME report and upon closer examination, the North Sea basin is selected as the best practice in which the analysis will be anchored, as it is also declared as a best practice by the Commission and on account of its complexity involving EU and non-EU member states as well as EU member states that have not yet completed national MSP

D. Toolkits and Guidance on how to structure transboundary plans

Prominent MSP researchers Ehler and Douvre stated in 2009 that the most well-known toolkit for the structuring of MSP plans is that of the IOC/UNESCO. This research will use the GEF LME: LEARN toolkit for the development of transboundary plans, which is built off of the older IOC/UNESCO MSP toolkit (GEF LME, 2018). According to the GEF LME toolkit, there are greater chances of success for transboundary MSP if the process:

- Identifies the need for transboundary MSP;
- Establishes a partnership and team for the process with relevant stakeholders and a coordinating body;
- Has clearly defined objectives (overall objective, project purpose, deliverables and assumptions);
- Gathers and shares baseline information with stakeholders;
- Develops a detailed work plan with communication structures;
- Develops an evaluation process at beginning of planning cycle;
- Obtains financial support.

(GEF LME, 2018)

The GEF LME report notes that, due to the fact that not many transnational plans have been developed, most of the monitoring and evaluation frameworks focus on indicators related to the plan-making process rather than results and outputs of planning process (GEF LME 2018, 107). Along these lines, it cites as a best practice the 2015

TPEA evaluation framework that looks at the evaluation of the plan-making process and has established the following checklist:

A. Process evaluation			
Preparation			
Criterion	**Indicator**	**Country**	**yes/partly/no**
1. Legal and administrative framework	a. Formal jurisdictional MSP systems are in place.	Country 1	
		Country 2	
		(Country 3…)	
	b. Legal instruments and administrative processes are in place to facilitate transboundary cooperation in MSP activities.	Country 1	
		Country 2	
2. Institutional capacity and cooperation	a. Authorities have responsibility for transboundary cooperation in MSP.	Country 1	
		Country 2	
	b. The roles and responsibilities of organisations in transboundary MSP have been clearly defined and communicated.	Country 1	
		Country 2	
	c. There are institutional resources (eg. staffing, skills, funding, data availability) for organisations to engage in transboundary cooperation in MSP.	Country 1	
		Country 2	
	d. There is effective formalised communication between organisations across borders.	national level	
		regional level	
		local level	
	e. There is equitable sharing of transboundary MSP responsibilities and tasks across borders.		
3. Trans-boundary MSP area	a. An agreed transboundary area has been defined for MSP purposes.		
	b. Stakeholders have been involved in the selection of the transboundary area.		
4. Formulation of strategic	a. Agreed strategic objectives for the transboundary MSP process have been established.		

Figure 52: An extract of the indicative TPEA quality checklist for trans-boundary MSP processes (TPEA 2015)

(GEM LME 2018, 110)

When analyzing the next steps for transboundary maritime spatial planning in the Eastern Med, the GEF LME toolkit and possibly the TPEA checklist will be used to benchmark progress and next steps.

One final element of the GEF LME that will be taken into consideration in the analysis, if relevant, is the importance of analyzing different portions of the MSP process, such as measurable changes in human and institutional behavior on account of MSP, and measurable contributions of the plans in: increasing the level of sustainable fishery techniques applied in the given area; the reduction of licensing time and costs for new maritime activities; the decrease in legal disputes, and the increase of sustainable maritime activities (GEF LME 107).

Meanwhile, a different Commission-backed report, entitled the “Cross-border cooperation in MSP” notes ten steps that should be followed to promote the development of MSP outside of national jurisdiction. They are:

1. Determine the geographical area covered by the MSP instrument based on ecosystem considerations, as far as relevant and possible
2. Confirm, or agree on, the legal status of the geographical area covered by the MSP instrument and acknowledge the sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction of coastal states in adjacent maritime zones
3. Identify the overarching adherence or commitment to it
4. Agree on mechanisms to ensure as much alignment and consistency between any different governance regimes as possible
5. Agree on the objective of the MSP instrument and the competence of its principal decision-making body
6. Ensure participation in MSP is consistent with applicable international law
7. Cooperate and coordinate with other intergovernmental bodies and instruments
8. Agree on overarching guiding or key principles
9. Acknowledge the particular needs and requirements of developing states
10. Agree on one or more official (working languages)

(Cross-border cooperation in MSP, 58)

E. Evaluation of crossborder/transboundary plans in the North Sea in accordance with toolkit/guidance

The North Sea is bordered by the EU countries of France, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and the United Kingdom (including England and Scotland). Of these countries, France does not have MSP plans in place, Denmark lacks a governing body to negotiate transnational MSP and is working on delimiting maritime zones with Poland, and Norway and now the UK are non-EU member states (MSP Platform North Sea, 22 June 2022.)

Despite the above less than perfect status of existing national MSP plans in all countries of the North Sea, it is considered to be a best practice in transnational MSP by the EU on account of its collaboration in the development of off-shore wind farms. When considered within the framework of the GEF LME toolkit, the formulation of transnational MSP plans around the off-shore windfarm sector looks like this:

GEF LME Toolkit	North Sea Basin Factors
Identifies the need for transboundary MSP	Key driver was estimated key driver was estimated 5.1billion in savings from development of cross border plans for wind farm energy (MSP Platform North Sea, 22 June 2022). “The Blue Growth potential of the North Sea area was analyzed in a 2014 report (‘Blue Growth Scenarios and Drivers for Sustainable Growth’ (Ecorys, et al., 2012) which estimated that the North Sea’s maritime (blue) economy represented at least €150 billion (or approximately 30% of the EU total) and employed at least 850,000 people.” (MSP Platform North Sea, 22 June 2022)
Establishes a partnership and team for the process with relevant stakeholders and a coordinating body	North Seas Countries’ Offshore Grid Initiative (NSCOGI) established through MoU in 2010 following Political Declaration in 2010 which included the transmission system operators/regulators and the European Commission (MSP Platform NSCOGI, 28 June 2022 and MSP Platform Political Declaration on energy cooperation between the North Seas Countries, 25 June 2022). An NSCOGI governance structure was established in 2012 and reconfirmed 2 December 2021. It includes an inter-ministerial committee, steering committee of government officials EC, Program board of governments, regulators, TSOs, Commission and Working groups each chaired by two governments (NSEC, 2021).
Has clearly defined objectives (overall objective, project purpose, deliverables and assumptions	Through NSCOGI structure
Gathers and shares baseline information with stakeholders	Through NSCOGI structure, agreed upon a four year joint work plan focusing on windpower only.
Develops a detailed work plan with communication structures	Through NSCOGI structure and made the key move of integration existing networks instead of replicating them.
Develops an evaluation process at beginning of planning cycle	Through NSCOGI Structure
Obtains financial support	European Commission and Private funds
Other	Significant political support and backing by the Commission including a special Commission support group and link to Brussels’ facilities for the hosting of meetings.

F. MSP and the Eastern Med

This section has little data to present as no countries in the Eastern Med have established MSP plans. The MSP Platform reveals that the promotion of MSP in the region is largely supported by UNEP/MAP, which also promotes ICZM and SPAMIs. There are a host of other international organizations, non-profits and forums working on issues related to the Eastern Med sea basin as a subtopic or cross-cutting issue, but none are dedicated to MSP.

Several EU funded projects have been implemented in the region, such as THAL-CHOR that focused on web-GIS mapping in Cyprus and Greece in 2015 (MSP Platform THAL-CHOR, 22 June 2022). Also, the 2016 ADRIPLAN between Slovenia and Italy and the 2017 SUPREME project focusing on providing a methodology for the development of transnational plans between Croatia, Greece, Italy and Slovenia are noted, but have not resulted in concrete, holistic, multinational plans (MSP Platform Conceptual methodology, 20 June 2022). And finally, it should be noted again, as mentioned in part A, that Slovenia and Croatia disagree about the validity of a ruling on the delimitation of maritime zones between the two countries.

Discussion

The objective of this research project is to take a look at MSP in the EU and ultimately identify problems and prospects for national, cross-border and transboundary/transnational MSP in the Eastern Med region to promote growth and conservation and to mitigate climate change. When looking at the creation of MSP plans on an EU country-to-country basis, it is apparent that only around half of EU member states have made plans. The reasons for these delays in creation and implementation are not always evident from the country reports and could be on account of many of the factors mentioned by Smythe, or maritime governance issues (Zervaki) such as the delimitation of maritime zones and international law of the sea (Slovenia and Croatia), extensive coastlines and limited resources (the case of Greece), or even possibly public administration delays like Covid. Additional independent research is needed on this topic as the primary sources that are available are national reports, which may be biased. While every country seems to be a unique case, a clearer view on the precise source of delays will help improve implementation in the future. An assessment of implementation could also go one step further to measure how holistic the implemented plans are.

As sea basins do not follow political borders, transboundary MSP is very important to ensure a holistic and ecosystems-based approach to resource management, which is bound by the carrying capacity of the environment. As seen from the literature review and results portion, in the end there has been very little progress on MSP in the Eastern Med, only slightly more in the greater Med, with the greatest success in the sea basins of northern Europe. The imbalance between the north and the south of Europe is significant enough to examine more closely. The Petrakos

INTERREG report was very revealing, noting that awareness of MSP in the Med is at the lowest level, compared to other EU environmental policies. It would be interesting for the INTERREG project to be expanded upon to survey additional sea basin areas to see if this is the case there as well, even in sea basins with developed MSP. An additional factor to note which could contribute to the low awareness of MSP in the Med and Eastern Med is the lack of a single body dedicated to promoting MSP. There are many non-profits and international organizations promoting MSP in the greater Med, but they are also promoting other policies, according to a 2017 DG Mare report. This complex, multilayered and ultimately inefficient governance framework for MSP further contributes to MSP getting "lost" among many EU policies. In contrast, the North Sea has one body promoting MSP, which was made through the absorption of several other governing bodies dealing with MSP.

While the North Sea and Baltic Sea basins have great pressures, conflicting uses and non-EU neighbors, the sea basins are in advanced phases of maritime spatial planning. This is even the case of a transnational agreement with Russia, a non-EU country which does not have a governing body dedicated to MSP. This can be viewed as a source of hope that, despite differing political systems and governance structures, transboundary agreements with non-EU countries are possible and MSP can be a way to unite and solve conflicts, as claimed by the Commission and noted by Bates. This being said, as more countries implement MSP and the sea basins potentially change, it would be useful to examine, especially in the Med and northern Africa, the culture of science-based policy making and public participation in policy making, and if this could be factor helping/hindering the development of transboundary MSP. This could also be examined through case studies of countries and transnational MSP in other regions of the world which, according to a 2017 iwlearn report, are unfortunately still limited.

Additionally, the case study of the North Sea lends more insight into what is needed to make ttransboundary agreements work. Observations hearken back to Santos' 2019 work on whether or not blue growth trumps conservation. The Commission's "best practice" on transboundary MSP is a blue growth project focusing on energy efficiency in the North Sea region, and the political declarations and memorandum of understanding make it very clear that the cooperation does not extend into sectors beyond wind farms, such as marine protected zones. Additionally, while the partnership fulfilled all of the GEF LME guidelines on transboundary partnerships, there was one key factor of collaboration which does not appear in the GEF LME toolkit which this author argues made a significant difference; the priorities of the North Sea basin were aligned with those of the Commission and the Commission offered tremendous political support, including the facilitation of financing. Until there are more cases of transboundary MSP focuses on conservation, this seems to affirm that transboundary collaboration rallies around blue growth over conservation, and is an important lesson for the Eastern Med.

For the future of MSP in the Eastern Med, it is clear that the first steps to be made are to support EU member states in their creation of MSP plans. However, this support will have to take into consideration the geography of the region, such as the extensive coastline of Greece, the issues with delimitation of maritime zones of Slovenia and Croatia and Greece (with Turkey). Additionally, to ensure "good MSP", the Eastern Med sea region will need assistance to fill significant environmental data gaps on issue such as sea life (WWF Greece), to create awareness of MSP as a tool to mitigate the impact of climate change, to identify one MSP coordinating body, to find areas of mutual interest, particularly in the sectors of blue growth, and to engage with the southern rim of the Eastern Med. Yet the geopolitical volatility of the region, problems stemming from

significant imbalances in the GDP of Eastern Med states, and strained neighborly relations amongst non-EU countries is not expected to make it easy.

This research came at a time where the MSP Platform concluded its several year project on MSP and transnational MSP in 2021, producing many final reports and facilitating the creation of a website where information on the status of MSP in each member state of the EU is centralized and available, as well as all EU funded projects on MSP. When this research project commenced, none of this information was available in a centralized way and few primary resources were available in the English language. Now, the material can be considered as reliable as the official information by the EU. On account of the newly found ease of gathering primary resources, it is an opportunity for further research to consider the analysis of MSP in Europe and beyond, and to test theories. For example, upcoming research could consider the following questions: “Is political will the most important element for the development of transnational MSP?”, “Is MSP perceived as EU expansionism?”, and finally “Can transboundary MSP thrive if driven by conservation?” The testing of any of these theories through further research would contribute to the body of knowledge and development of MSP, and also hopefully the implementation of this important tool.

Conclusions

This research reveals that understanding causal relationships between MSP and implementation is challenging due to the fact that the political, social, economic, and geographical conditions of every EU Member State are different. As a result, there is no “one size fits all approach”, nor are the problems and solutions for MSP and transboundary MSP the same. There are many technical barriers for EU countries of the Eastern Med to overcome with the proper support and prodded by the threat of EU fines for noncompliance, but for MSP to truly work as a tool, the entire sea basin should embrace it. Yet severe inequalities in the region, the increasing detrimental impact of climate change, and other destabilizing factors in the region like migration and military conflict risk keeping MSP at the bottom of the list of both Eastern Med countries’ priorities and EU policy awareness.

On a macro level, this research hints that MSP can be successful if perceived as being in a state’s interest, and there are mutually aligned strategic interests between the country, its neighbors and the EU. The challenge lies in convincing Eastern Med countries that it is in their interest to compromise on key issues such as fishing, tourism, and conservation in the short term, particularly during a time of global financial instability, inflation and a persistent pandemic, in order to save future generations. The political risk for governments related to curbing sea-based activities in an effort to implement MSP may be perceived as carrying too high of a political cost for leaders in the region, leaving only blue growth projects as an attractive option for collaboration.

The conclusion of this research is that for MSP to flourish in the greater Eastern Med, the EU will need to adopt the position that it is in its best interest to take a proactive role in the region. It will need to assist in identifying potentially common areas for collaboration amongst EU and non-EU states, and possibly employ the same siloed

approach as it did in the North Sea, as opposed to holistic MSP, and match it with the relevant funding mechanisms. The hope is that an amplified EU external relations effort combined with a more limited approach to transboundary MSP in the Eastern Med would create a solid foundation for further collaboration amongst the Eastern Med countries in other sectors, resulting in actions that will effectively curb the impact of climate change in the sea basin and promote sustainability.

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