Integrated maritime policy (IMP) - Evaluation of progress made and new challenges

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The Commission presents a Communication the integration of maritime surveillance: a common information sharing environment for the EU maritime domain. The aim of integrated maritime surveillance is to generate a situational awareness of activities at sea impacting on maritime safety and security, border control, the marine environment, fisheries control, trade and economic interests of the EU as well as general law enforcement and defence so as to facilitate sound decision making.

There is a clear need to share maritime surveillance information. Different sectoral authorities dealing with surveillance of actions at sea gather data and operational information so as to establish the best possible maritime awareness picture for their own use. For many user communities, at present, this picture does not include complementary information gathered by other sectoral users due to the lack of mutual exchange. Developing the necessary means to allow for such data and information exchange should enhance the different users' awareness picture. Such enhanced pictures will increase the efficiency of Member States' authorities and improve cost effectiveness.

The objective of this Communication is to set out guiding principles for the development of a common information sharing environment for the EU maritime domain and to launch a process towards its establishment. To achieve this, enhanced coordination and coherence between the European Commission, the Member States and those interlocutors whom the European defence community may indicate for this purpose, should be established.

The Commission sets out the challenges currently being faced with regard to the development of a common information sharing environment for the EU maritime domain: These include: i) diverse user and operator communities responsible for defence, border control, customs, marine pollution, fisheries control, maritime safety and security, vessel traffic management, accident and disaster response, search and rescue as well as law enforcement. All communities are collecting information for their own purposes; (ii) diverse legal frameworks; (iii) cross border threats and (iv) specific legal provisions particularly on processing data.

The Communication sets out Guiding Principles for the Development of a common information sharing environment for the EU maritime domain, setting out in detail the issues to be considered, and makes certain recommendations in order to give effect to each of these principles:

Principle 1: an approach interlinking all user communities: the common information sharing environment should enable Member States' authorities to make a more efficient use of maritime surveillance information. Common rules and standards should be developed at Community level to optimise the exchange of information between the different user communities. Each of these communities should be given the possibility to provide and/or receive information at national level from international, regional, Community, military and internal security systems and mechanisms on a need-to-know basis, in line with conditions of use and defined user access rights, in order to build up its individual user-defined situational picture.

Principle 2: building a technical framework for interoperability and future integration: a Common Information Sharing Environment for the EU maritime domain may be best achieved through a non-hierarchical technical framework of maritime monitoring and surveillance systems. Such architecture should be designed as a cost effective interaction of different information layers to enable the improvement of user defined pictures. The system architecture must allow data to be inter alia collected, merged, analysed, disseminated and managed at the appropriate level of decentralisation, depending on security concerns (e.g. intelligence) and in compliance with data protection regulations, international rules and functional requirements. Best use should be made of existing systems.

Principle 3: information exchange between civilian and military authorities: surveillance information should be shared between civilian and military authorities to avoid duplications and to be cost effective. Whilst recognising their distinct purposes and underlying mandates, this requires common standards and procedures for access to and use of the relevant information to allow for a two-directional information exchange.

Principle 4: specific legal provisions: obstacles to the exchange of monitoring and surveillance data for the purpose of setting up a common information sharing environment should be identified in EU and national legislation. In removing these obstacles, due consideration must be given, inter alia, to respect for data confidentiality, intellectual property rights issues and protection of personal data as well as ownership of data in accordance with national and international law.

The Commission concludes that an integrated approach to maritime surveillance should improve the effectiveness of the authorities responsible for maritime activities by making available more tools and more information necessary for the performance of their duties. This should result in more efficient operations and reduced operating costs. The potential savings at EU level are significant given the growing need to detect, identify, track and intercept amongst others illegal migration, illegal fishing as well as to prevent accidents at sea, to safeguard the environment and to facilitate trade. The benefits to flow from this process will positively affect national security, maritime security and safety, the protection of the marine environment, border control and, in general, law enforcement.