International ocean governance: an agenda for the future of our oceans in the context of the 2030 SDGs

2017/2055(INI) - 10/11/2016 - Non-legislative basic document

PURPOSE: presentation of a joint communication from the Commission and the High Representative of the EU for foreign affairs and security policy.

BACKGROUND: oceans play a key role in regulating the climate system. They produce half our oxygen and have absorbed most of the worlds extra heat and around 25 % of CO2 emissions.

Some of the most pressing global challenges including climate change, poverty, safe, nutritious and sufficient food for a population projected to reach nine billion by 2050 can be addressed effectively only if the oceans are safe, secure, clean and sustainably managed.

However, oceans are under threat from over-exploitation, climate change, acidification, pollution and declining biodiversity. Access to maritime routes is sometimes impaired by illegal behaviour, increasing levels of piracy, armed robbery and other forms of maritime crime at sea.

The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development identified conservation and sustainable use of oceans as one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 14) and as part of a highly inter-connected agenda. For the first time, the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans are addressed with the worlds other most pressing sustainability challenges in an overarching global policy agenda, and reflected as such across several SDGs and targets.

It is for this reason that the global community must now turn these commitments into action.

The actions set out in this Joint Communication are an integral part of the EUs response to the 2030 Agenda. This is also a priority in the Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy.

CONTENT: the proposals referred to the in the Joint Communication combine a series of measures ranging from the promotion of good governance at sea, to strengthening the sustainability of ocean management, in particular by addressing illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing.

Other measures are aimed at enhancing safety at sea with a more joined-up approach between the internal and external aspects of policies, across external policies and between Member States and EU institutions.

In order to ensure that the oceans are safe, secure, clean and sustainably managed, the Commission and the High Representative propose 14 sets of actions in 3 priority areas, which can be summarised as follows

I. International ocean governance: measures focus on the following actions:

- Action 1: filling the gaps in the international ocean governance framework in particular by implementing multilateral instruments that have been agreed but have not entered into force;
- Action 2: promoting regional fisheries management and cooperation in key ocean areas to fill regional governance gaps by supporting a multilateral agreement that prevents unregulated high seas fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean;
- Action 3: improving coordination and cooperation between international organisations and launching Ocean Partnerships for ocean management through ad hoc cooperation agreements;
- Action 4: capacity building in particular as regards maritime security with other countries and regional organisations - notably in the Gulf of Guinea and the Indian Ocean;
- Action 5: ensuring the safety and security of seas and oceans through targeted actions tackling piracy, trafficking and the smuggling of human beings, arms and narcotics, and through cooperation and information-sharing between civilian and military authorities and the UN fora, the G7 and the G20;

II. Reducing pressure on oceans and seas and creating the conditions for a sustainable blue economy: the following actions are provided:

- Action 6: implementing the COP21 Agreement and mitigating the harmful impact of climate change on oceans, coastlines and ecosystems for instance by reducing shipping emissions and strengthening the future development of renewables;
- Action 7: fighting illegal fishing and strengthening the sustainable management of ocean food resources globally: at least 15 % of fish catches worldwide, worth EUR 8-19 billion a year, are illegal. The EU cooperates with other countries to initiate structural reforms of their fisheries management systems. The objective is to strengthen this action over the next 5 years;
- Action 8: banning harmful fisheries subsidies by 2020 (those that contribute to overcapacity, overfishing and IUU fishing);
- Action 9: fighting marine litter and the sea of plastic through proposing a new strategy on plastics, addressing issues such as recyclability, biodegradability, the presence of hazardous substances in certain plastics, and marine litter, with a clear international component against leakage of plastic to the environment;
- Action 10: promoting maritime spatial planning (MSP) at global level;
- Action 11: achieving the global target of conserving 10% of marine and coastal areas and promoting the effective management of marine protected areas (MPAs) by promoting the exchange of best practices and by supporting the efforts towards coherent networks.

III. Strengthening international ocean research and data: through the following actions:

- Action 12: developing a coherent EU strategy on ocean observation, data and marine accounting building on EMODnet;
- Action 13: strengthening investment in blue science and innovation by maintaining the current level of investment (approximately EUR 2 billion a year on marine research);
- Action 14: strengthening international ocean research, innovation and science partnerships in particular with the US and Canada.

The Commission and the High Representative will report on progress on the above actions at regular intervals and for the first time within two years of the adoption of this Communication.