

**2010-2014: the main results of the European Straits Initiative**  
**Speech of Michel Lefait, Vice-President of Pas-de-Calais County Council**  
**at the conference for the renewal of the Memorandum of Understanding (Brussels, 22 October 2014)**



1. Ladies and Gentlemen,

Following this morning's development of the results of the NOSTRA project, it falls to me to present to you the actions implemented within the wider context of the European Straits Initiative over the last four, even five, years.

There is nothing better than a map to really grasp the breadth of the partnership we enjoy.

So let us set to sea on board the ESI to sail across Europe. From the Baltic to the Mediterranean, via the Channel and the North Sea, we will stop over at a few of the straits involved in the partnership to present the results of the Initiative.



2. It is on the shores of the Dover Strait, one of the busiest in the world, that the adventure of the European Straits Initiative begins.



3. Every day, over 500 ships cross this strait; it is the passage between the Channel and the North Sea but also the stage for constant shuttles between the two shores of the strait, primarily between Calais and Dover.

It was upon the basis of their conviction of the particular importance of this strait that the Presidents of Kent and Pas-de-Calais had the idea, in **2009**, of bringing together the local and regional authorities bordering the straits of Europe, not only to share their experiences but also to make their voices heard more effectively.



4. After a number of working meetings, the European Straits Initiative was born in **2010** with the signature of the memorandum of understanding at Coquelles, the headquarters of Eurotunnel.

15 authorities, all here today to renew their commitment, joined by new partners.



5. The primary objective of the European Straits Initiative is to win Europe-wide recognition for the specific characteristics of straits.

So let us berth for a time in Brussels, where we are today, and which represents the heart of Europe. Europe: the entity we want to convince of the strategic importance of the straits for its development, be it economic, environmental or social and cultural.

As a young network, our initial task was to make ourselves known, increase our visibility and raise awareness among our interlocutors of the specific characteristics of the straits.

To achieve this, **some fifty bilateral meetings** were organised, not only with the representatives of European and international institutions, but also at national and local level, in order to broadcast the Initiative as well as the specific characteristics of the European straits. Because lobbying is only effective if it takes place at every level.

The ESI has also participated in **over 60 conferences** addressing cross-border cooperation or maritime issues.



6. Of these numerous conferences, one could highlight the **International Marine Protected Areas Congress (IMPAC3)** held in Marseille in October 2013, which brought together over 1,000 participants from 80 different countries.

**At this event, three workshops were organised on the issue of the European straits.** This gave our network the opportunity to highlight various challenges faced by the straits, among them:

- maritime traffic and the need to obtain recognition by the International Maritime Organisation,
- or the issue of cross-border governance at strait level.

We were also able to remind congress-goers of the importance of addressing the challenges faced by straits, in United Nations discussions relating to the high seas.

The visibility of our action was enhanced by the **communication** opportunities presented to the Initiative, via a stand (shared with the Environment Office of Corsica, which organised the event), via the press and via conference proceedings.



7. In two weeks a symposium is to be held on the cross-border regions, **the BRIT symposium.**

This international gathering will partly be held in Pas-de-Calais (the last edition was staged in Asia, shared between Japan and Korea) and a particular focus will be devoted to the straits for the first time in the history of this event.

The European Straits Initiative participated in preparing the programme on this theme and is naturally planning to be a contributor.

Thus, decision makers and researchers alike can be reached and made aware of the problems we face in the strait regions.

## The lobbying objective: European consultations

Polish Strategy Ltd	private	shipping and shipping	United Kingdom
Centre for Science and Sustainable Ecosystems (CSSE)	private	shipping and shipping	Belgium
ESG&L - Maritime Union Clean Fuel and Fuel System	public	European	Spain
Europoskaitis, Brussels	public	European	France
European Union Board	public	European	Belgium
ATLANTIS	public	European	France
The European Strait Initiative	public	European	France
UK National Centre of the Physical Sciences	public	general	United Kingdom
International Hydrographic Organization	public	general	United Kingdom
Asst. Prof. Dr. Sc. Sc. Sc.	public	local or maritime	United Kingdom
Central Science Organisation	public	national	Cyprus
Marine Union Board	public	national	Italy
Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Maritime	public	national	Slovenia
Directorate of Fisheries, Belgium	public	national	Belgium

8. Similarly, the Initiative has responded to **6 European consultations** on such diverse subjects as marine knowledge, the Territorial Cohesion Policy and blue growth.

These coordinated responses, by partners who would not necessarily have responded to these consultations individually, confirm the European Straits Initiative as an actor determined to play a full part in the development and definition of European Policies.

The last consultation on the **Macro-Regional Ionian and Adriatic Strategy** mobilised the partners concerned (Albanian and Italian partners from the Straits of Otranto and Messina) to ensure that this strategic European Union document took account of the specific characteristics of the region's straits.

In responding to the questions of the consultation, the ESI honed its arguments and strengthened the partners' positions as compared with individual responses.



9. The coming into being of the NOSTRA project coincided with **preparation of the European programming period 2014-2020**. Lobbying actions were conducted in order to win recognition for the specific characteristics of the straits in **the cross-border cooperation programmes** in which the ESI partners are involved. This was a decisive factor for programmes in the Baltic, the Channel-North Sea and the Mediterranean.

In respect of lobbying, we will hear a witness account from the **Strait of Bonifacio** which has long experience in approaches to influencing, including at international level, at the International Maritime Organisation for example.



10. With respect to the second objective relating to the emergence of cooperation projects, **inter-strait cooperation initiatives** have arisen from the ESI/NOSTRA partnership.

One such is the cooperation between **the Fehmarn Belt and the Dover Strait** on the issue of tunnels linking the two shores of a strait. A contribution is scheduled on this very subject in just a few moments.

The Straits **of Otranto and Dover** are also coming together on the issue of sustainable tourism. Other cooperation initiatives are expected to see the light of day in the course of forthcoming partnership meetings.



**11.** This image is a photograph of the Strait of Kvarken which hosted the first study visit of the NOSTRA project.

The work this morning will have convinced you, I hope, that **the NOSTRA project** really is the first major result, the flagship project of the European Straits Initiative. I will labour the point no further.

In my view, what we need to take away is the fact that NOSTRA **has helped to strengthen the network**, helped it to consolidate as a group of men and women from the four corners of Europe and beyond, but also to flesh out the European Straits Initiative, **to provide the key elements of advocacy that can be brought to Brussels.**



12. We must not forget our **communication actions**, so essential in terms of lobbying. The **website** of the Initiative has attracted over 4,000 visitors over the last two years, in particular thanks to the **quarterly newsletters** and the **fifty or so articles** published in that time.

Hundreds of **brochures and flyers** have been distributed either at conferences or on the occasion of meetings with decision-makers.

Our next stopover is at the **Strait of Messina** which is singularly proactive in communicating on its strait.

2010-2014 : Presentation of the main results of the



13. Our cruise across Europe reaches its end here.

As you have perhaps gathered, all our actions shine a spotlight on the singular nature of our network. An assembly of territories, we have not always had the requisite legitimacy or competence to take action on the problems that concern us, migration or maritime safety to name but two.

Nevertheless, through the intermediary of the ESI, we are taking the initiative in persuading national and European authorities of the need to take account of these challenges. We also have a tool enabling analysis and observation of the phenomena occurring in these geographical zones.

Although not yet recognised - after only four years in existence - as an interlocutor wielding real clout in national and European discussions, we can nonetheless congratulate ourselves on the fact that through our efforts and mobilisation, we are succeeding in demonstrating the importance of what is at stake in these territories.