



EUROPEAN STRAITS INITIATIVE

Report of the Coordinator of the European Straits Initiative (ESI)*

2013

* In collaboration with the Coordinator of the NOSTRA project for part 2.

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www.europeanstraits.eu

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Introduction

During the year 2013, relationships were strengthened among the 8 straits of the partnership (visit of the Danish delegation to the Strait of Dover, visit of the French delegation to the Strait of Otranto, the 4 NOSTRA workshops...) and the voice of the straits was heard during international events (European Maritime Days, International Marine Protected Areas Congress), against the background of preparations for the new 2014-2020 European programming period.

Four years after the launching of the Initiative, 2014 is the year for progress reports and the refinement of arguments in favour of the European recognition of the specific characteristics of straits. It also marks the end of the INTERREG IV C NOSTRA project, which greatly contributed to building advocacy for such diverse areas as the marine and coastal environment, maritime transport, tourism and the cross-border governance of these spaces.

Many occasions will be provided this year to continue the defence of the straits: the Fehmarn Belt Days, the Year of the Gulf of Finland, the Adriatic and Ionian Regional Strategy, the European Maritime Days, etc. The coming year will be full of great challenges for the local communities of the network!

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PART 1: 2013 REPORT ON THE EUROPEAN STRAITS INITIATIVE

The Kent – Pas-de-Calais joint initiative for the European Straits signed on November 23, 2010 by fifteen chairmen of local communities or associations of communities in Estonia, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Italy, Albania, France and the United Kingdom, established two main axes for the future actions of the partnership:

- gain recognition for the specific characteristics of straits throughout Europe;
- develop common actions and cooperation projects within and among the partners who represent the straits.

In the framework of the first axis, which concerns **lobbying**, the European Straits initiative (ESI) conducted actions at various levels.

At the *European level* lobbying actions were conducted through interventions at various meetings which made it possible to make the Initiative and the special characteristics of the European straits known, notably at the Malta Conference during the European Maritime Days – EMD – (May 20-21, 2013), an annual event organized by the DG Mare of the European Commission. The approach for the EMD labelling of the NOSTRA territorial meeting in Pas-de-Calais also made it possible to provide a certain visibility to Europe of the Straits, the only French event labelled EMD.

In addition, the ESI participated in the consultation conducted by the Committee of the Regions on May 31 in Brussels on the proposal for a directive on marine spatial planning and on Open Days 2013

in Brussels (assembly of local communities of Europe) and carried the voice of the straits of Europe on each of these occasions. The ESI Coordinator obtained a meeting with one of the directors of the DG Mare (November 22) of the European Commission in order to present in detail the European Straits Initiative and the NOSTRA project.

Responses to European consultations also make it possible to make known and to gain the recognition of the specific characteristics of the straits of Europe. The ESI coordinated the contributions of different partners and responded in September to the consultation on the surveillance of the maritime domain. A response to the Initiative on behalf of the 5 partners of the Straits of Otranto and of Messina to the consultation on the Adriatic and Ionian Regional Strategy was prepared at the end of the year for January 2014.

At the *international level*, participation in the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR) on the reduction of sulphur emissions in maritime transport (Dunkirk, March 22, 2013) and in the meeting of the International Association of Cities and Ports (AIVP) also made it possible to develop networking and influence in favour of the straits of Europe. The active participation of the ESI in the 3rd International Marine Protected Areas Congress (IMPAC3) in October, which assembled over 1,000 participants from 80 different countries, made it possible to provide international visibility to the European Straits Initiative, through the organization of a workshop on maritime traffic and conservation, the establishment of contact with key actors in the area of the marine environment and a proactive approach to communications: distribution of new flyers, visible positioning of the look'n roll in French and English, placing an article on the IMPAC3 website which remained on the first page for several weeks, and publishing the proceedings of the Conference.

Over and above these direct lobbying actions, as the lead partner, with the Kent County Council, of the European Straits Initiative, the Pas-de-Calais County Council coordinates, animates and mobilises *this network of the straits of Europe* in order to multiply the effects of actions in favour of the recognition of straits. A technical meeting of the European Straits Initiative (ESI) is therefore organized at each NOSTRA meeting: on the Strait of Otranto in Lecce, Italy, in April, on the Strait of Fehmarn in Germany in June and on the Gulf of Finland in Helsinki, Finland, and in Tallin, Estonia in October. These meetings aim at exchanges of information on activities conducted by the Pas-de-Calais County Council as the lead partner of the ESI with the Kent County Council, but also at mobilising the network in order to stimulate the partners to carry out lobbying actions on their own or in coordination (responses to European consultations, contributions to processes for reaching agreements on marine and coastal issues, development of regional and inter-regional operational programmes, etc.). In the appendix is a description of the actions of the Pas-de-Calais County Council in favour of the recognition at the national level of the specific characteristics of straits to serve as an example of activities that could be conducted by partners in their countries.

The preparation of the new 2014-2020 European programmes was a priority for the ESI partnership (one opportunity every 7 years). Tools were developed to better understand the levers of action of the network (survey of the partners directly or indirectly involved in the consultation/drafting of the next regional and inter-regional operational programmes as well as in the partnership agreements), to better explain the process for the preparation of the future European funds in order to exert greater influence on the negotiations (by providing plans) and to assist the partners to propose/negotiate amendments that include the specific characteristics of straits (table in standard wording according to several themes – general, geographic description, integrated maritime policy,

integrated management of the coastal zones, marine spatial planning, transportation, logistics, environment, etc.).

Taking advantage of the AIVP meeting in Helsinki in May, the ESI coordinator organised a bilateral meeting with the partners of the Region of Uusimaa – Helsinki (Gulf of Finland) in order to meet the other key actors who do not participate in the NOSTRA meetings but who are in a position to voice the specific characteristics of straits in their networks. This type of bilateral meeting with one of the partners strengthens the efficiency of network mobilisation and should be continued as much as possible by special visits or by taking advantage of a mission for another occasion.

In the framework of the second axis, which concerns **cooperation and projects**, apart from the NOSTRA project (see Part II), which constitutes the current framework of reference, several actions have been carried out and have resulted in a certain level of success.

The *visit of the political delegation from Lolland*, the Danish municipality located on the Strait of Fehmarn, on April 28-30 2013 to Calais, at the invitation of the Pas-de-Calais County Council, made it possible to achieve this cooperation between straits promoted by the European Straits Initiative. Located at the exit of the tunnel which will be built between 2015 and 2021 to link Germany and Denmark on the Fehmarn Belt, the Danish municipality wished to obtain the experiences and testimonials of the County and of various local actors on the construction of the tunnel under the Channel in order to be better prepared for this major project. The Danish delegation found this study trip very useful for understanding the different impacts of the tunnel on the environment, the economy and social issues. As a result of this successful visit, the Danish delegation intends to organize a technical visit in 2014 on the same theme.

In addition, a project with a specific portal for the Dover Strait on the website of the Franco-British Cross-Channel Atlas Project (<http://atlas-transmanche.certic.unicaen.fr/>) arose in the wings of the 4th Cross-Channel Forum in Caen (March 20). This cooperation with the University of Caen, which is responsible for the Cross-Channel Atlas, and the University of the Littoral, Opal Coast (ULCO), where one of the academics is interested in the issue of straits, in particular that of Dover, was made possible as a result of the national network created by the Pas-de-Calais County Council as lead partner of the ESI, along with the Kent County Council.

Born of the partnership of the straits of Europe, cooperation between the Pas-de-Calais County Council and the Albanian Region of Vlora on tourism is under consideration and resulted in a study trip of the County Council of Albania in October. The return visit in Pas-de-Calais County is planned for June 2014.

Other projects of various kinds are being developed: as part of the strategic plan to extend the ESI to other partners, a presentation on the European Straits Initiative was made in the presence of the Ambassador of Tunisia to France during the meeting of the Tunisian group of Cités Unies France on February 7 in Paris. The Strait of Sicily, currently represented only by the authorities of the Italian shore (Trapani), could also be full partners of the network.

Regarding cultural and artistic activities, projects have been brought to the attention of the Pas-de-Calais County Council, such as: the factory of the strait (artistic activities held in public areas of the Dover Strait), a project conducted by a French PhD student on the literary and artistic representations of the Strait of Messina, which could be extended to other straits. These projects

cannot be financed by the ESI but deserve special attention in the context of the network of the straits of Europe and of their recognition.

Communications are an important aspect of the Initiative that contribute to the objective of a better recognition of the specific characteristics of the straits of Europe.

The website of the Initiative (www.europeanstraits.eu) and the Newsletter have been operational since the autumn of 2012. Between January 1 and December 31 2013, the website recorded nearly 2,600 visits by 1,800 different internet users. The Newsletter started quarterly publication again in October 2012 after an interruption of two years. Four Newsletters in French and English destined for 700 addressees were published in January (N°4), April (N°5), July (N°6) and October (N°7) including a total of 19 articles. The private space of the site contributes to promoting a collaborative working relationship with all of the partners of the network.

Articles have also been published on the ESI in the communication supports of other organizations such as the Newsletter of the International Association of Cities and Ports (AIVP)¹, the Newsletter of the Transfrontier Operational Mission (MOT)² and the website of the IMPAC3³.

A proactive approach is underway in order to obtain more references and links for the website of the Initiative, starting from within the partnership.

New tools of communication have also been developed, including flyers and a look'n Roll (in French and English).

PART 2: 2013 REPORT ON THE NOSTRA PROJECT

Fifteen local authorities bordering eight straits (Kvarken Strait, the Gulf of Finland, the Strait of Fehmarn Belt, the Strait of Otranto, the Strait of Sicily, the Strait of Bonifacio, the Strait of Messina and the Dover Strait) as well as a Rumanian research institute on the Danube Delta are jointly committed to the development of a project.

This project, submitted on April 1 2011, was formally accepted at the beginning of 2012. It was one of the 89 projects chosen by the programme authorities out of a total of 355 projects submitted. As the lead partner of the project, the Pas-de-Calais County Council is responsible for the coordination of 16 European partners and plays the role of interface with the Programme Secretariat, notably for the drafting of the different financial and activity reports of the partnership as a whole.

For three years (2012-2014), a series of meetings, study trips, workshops, seminars and forums took place at each of the straits in order to identify and share best practices in this area, the exchange of best practices being at the heart of the philosophy of the INTERREG IV C programme. This project receives 75% of its financing from the European Fund for Regional Development (ERDEF) through the INTERREG IVC programme.

¹ Article on the multimodal link project for the Strait of Kvarken. Reprint of the article:

<http://www.europeanstraits.eu/News/The-Midway-Alignment-of-the-Bothnian-Corridor-in-the-Kvarken-Strait>

² <http://www.espaces->

[transfrontaliers.org/fileadmin/user_upload/documents/Newsletter/EN_NL94_12_2013.pdf](http://www.espaces-transfrontaliers.org/fileadmin/user_upload/documents/Newsletter/EN_NL94_12_2013.pdf)

³ <http://www.impact3.org/en/news/all/371-conserving-straits-without-putting-them-in-a-cage>

The objective of the project, which will continue until 2014, is to exchange ideas on different ways of managing straits, which are bi-national territories, in order to preserve their biodiversity and natural heritage. The preservation of biodiversity was identified as the nodal point of all the problems that the partners of the project must face.

Four transnational meetings took place in 2013:

- a workshop on the theme of the characterisation of the marine landscape, organized by the Kent County Council on January 16-18;
- a workshop on the theme of sustainable tourism, organised by the Province of Lecce on April 9-12;
- a workshop on the themes of maritime safety and green transport, organised by the County of Ostholstein and the Region of Zeland on June 3-6; and
- a workshop on economic development organised by the Gulf of Finland on September 30 to October 4.

In addition, one of the partners of the project, the Province de Messina confirmed in 2013 that it would be impossible to continue to participate in the project in view of the financial and organizational difficulties that it was undergoing. Nevertheless, the Province confirmed its wish to remain a member of the European Straits Initiative.

Together with the Province of Sassari, the Pas-de-Calais County Council is responsible for certain communication activities that are specific to the NOSTRA project:

- management and updating of the internet and intranet websites of the project - <http://www.nostraproject.eu/> and <http://private.nostraproject.eu/>
- publication of a flyer on the project;
- production of a look'n roll on the project; and
- publication of the [1st newsletter](#) of the project.

The essence of the success of this project, over and above its operational implementation, will be seen in the change in the methods of collaboration among the actors concerned with straits. To do this, the project was designed to organize the procedures of this new governance, notably through meetings of the local authorities of each strait.

The contractor for the study aiming at defining an analytical methodology and strategic orientations for the integrated management of the biodiversity and natural heritage of the straits of Europe was selected following a competition. The study was formally launched in August 2013.

Lastly, following the invitation of the Regional Council of Uusimaa in Finland, the Pas-de-Calais County Council presented the NOSTRA project during the annual event for cooperation around the Baltic Sea on October 17-18 in Helsinki (*Baltic Sea States Sub-regional Co-operation Conference*). This Conference is one of the most important events regarding cooperation within the area of the Baltic Sea.

PART 3: 2013 REPORT ON THE ESI PARTNERS

STRAIT	For a better recognition of the straits (lobbying, communication)	For the emergence of cooperation projects among the straits
1. Dover Strait	<p>A certain number of actions in Pas-de-Calais were carried out on behalf of the ESI (see Part I). Other actions are described in the Appendix.</p> <p>March 22: Conference in Dunkirk on the reduction of sulphur emissions. More information on the ESI website.</p> <p>June: Survey of the Strait of Dover as part of the UICN study on the international recognition of the Strait. More information on the ESI website.</p> <p>March 20: CAMIS Conference. More information on the ESI website.</p> <p>November 21: Presentation on the Dover Strait by the Kent County Council during the final CAMIS Conference in Rouen.</p> <p>December 6: Meeting in London on the risks of maritime accidents and pollution. More information on the ESI website.</p>	<p>May 22: NOSTRA territorial meeting in Saint-Omer in the Department of Pas-de-Calais (labelled European Maritime Days)</p> <p>April 29-30: Reception in Calais for a delegation from the Municipality of Lolland on the Strait of Fehmarn on the tunnel under the Channel. More information on the ESI website.</p> <p>January 16-18: NOSTRA workshop on the seascape in Kent and the project steering committee. More information on the NOSTRA website.</p>
2. Strait of Bonifacio		<p>February 18 : Location: Provincia di Sassari – NOSTRA Crossborder Territorial Meeting</p> <p>May 28 : Location: Bonifacio – City hall : NOSTRA Territorial Meeting</p>
3. Strait of Sicily		
4. Strait of Otranto		<p>April 9-12: NOSTRA workshop in Lecce on tourism and cultural heritage + steering committee + presentation of the progress (1st and 2nd phases) of the baseline study. More information on the NOSTRA website.</p> <p>October 24-25: Visit of a delegation from the Pas-de-Calais to Vlora on tourism. More information on the ESI website</p>
5. Strait of Messina	<p>May 21: meeting on the Strait of Messina organised by the Province of Reggio de Calabria. Memorandum of Agreement between the Province of Reggio de Calabria and the Province of Messina for the integrated development of the strait within the framework of the ESI.</p> <p>Resolution of the City of Messina to approve the proposal to classify the zone of the Strait of Messina as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.</p>	
6. Kvarken Strait	May 23: NLC Conference held on the Wasa Express ferry between Umeå	November 23: Open Days event on the multimodal link in the

	and Vaasa. Theme: Communications and infrastructure across the Kvarken Strait. Conference attended by high-level politicians and civil servants from the Region of Kvarken. Access the ESI website for more information on the project. Several Territorial Meetings held throughout the year.	Kvarken. More information on the ESI website .
7. Strait of Fehmarn		June 3-6: NOSTRA workshop in the Strait of Fehmarn (on the islands of Fehmarn and Lolland in the County of Hostolstein and the Region of Zeland) on maritime safety and green transport. More information on the NOSTRA website . See also cooperation with the Dover Strait above.
8. Gulf of Finland	October 17-18: Conference on cooperation around the Baltic Sea. More information on the ESI website .	October 1-4: NOSTRA workshop on the Gulf of Finland in Helsinki (Region of Uusimaa) and Tallin (County of Harju) on the economic development of the coastal areas and the hinterland. More information on the NOSTRA website .

Appendix
**Actions of the Pas-de-Calais County Council, lead partner of the ESI with Kent County and NOSTRA
on the Dover Strait**

Specific actions have been carried out at the national and local levels, in France and in the Pas-de-Calais, but also in relation with Corsica for the Strait of Bonifacio. These actions can provide inspiration to the partners who are encouraged to carry out the same type of actions by adapting them to the national and local contexts where appropriate. These levels should be taken into consideration in order to efficiently reach the European level.

The active participation of the Pas-de-Calais County Council in the regional bodies in the **preparation of the next European programme 2014-2020** made it possible to ensure the inclusion of the problem of the straits, particularly in strategic places, such as the closing of the contributions of the County Council, but also during interventions in plenary meetings (notably the Territorial Meeting held on July 1). The participation in the seminar on the maritime economy organised by the French Government's Inter-ministerial Delegation for Territorial Development and Regional Attractiveness (DATAR) on May 15 in Paris as part of the coordination of the European programming period also made it possible to make a statement on the straits. In the same way, the contribution of the Council to the consultation on the Partnership Agreement provided broad arguments in favour of these specific territories.

The **deliberations of the County Council** on June 25, 2013, adopted unanimously, granted an important role to the straits of Europe. A separate deliberation made official the adherence of the Council to the Declaration of the Coastal Communities of the Channel on maritime safety.

The County Council also **met with key actors of the different French central authorities** and research institutes concerned with marine and coastal issues: the Ministry of Ecology, of Sustainable Development and Energy (Directorate of European and International Affairs), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the General Secretariat for the Sea and the Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations. In addition, the County Council was **involved in the forums, networks and national processes and their local versions in consultation on marine and coastal issues**: the Maritime Seaboard Council (participation in meetings on March 19 and June 14), the Congress on the Sea and Shore (contributions on the forum dedicated to these subjects), the "Sea and Shore" Mission of the Assembly of the Departments of France (ADF), the National Association of the Elected Representatives of the Coast (ANEL), to which the County Council sent a contribution on the themes of the Congress on the Sea and Shore.

Meetings with local actors made it possible to raise the profile of the Initiative and to ensure that it is well-grounded in local institutions: the Interregional Directorate of the Sea (DIRM), the Regional Directorate of the Environment, of Land Development and of Housing (DREAL), the Departmental Directorate of Territories and the Sea (DDTM), the University of the Littoral, Opal Coast (ULCO), the Regional Operational Centre for Patrols and Rescue (CROSS), the Marine Park, the Agency for Protected Marine Areas (AAMP), the Conservatory of the Coast, the Port of Calais and the Eurotunnel. Two presentations on the Initiative were made as part of the Regional Platform of Communities engaged in international activities, during the Forum of Cités Unies France in July in Paris (with a direct presentation to the Ministry in charge of Development) and during the meeting of the Mediterranean Commission held in October in Dunkirk.

A **strengthened cooperation** was established very early **with the partners of Corsica** in order to coordinate actions at the national level, notably in the framework of the Maritime Seaboard Council and the development of a national maritime policy, but also in the preparation of the regional and inter-regional operational programme for 2014-2020.

As part of its lobbying on the straits of Europe, the County Council was **particularly involved in certain inter-regional projects such as the CAMIS project** (Channel Arc Manche Integrated Strategy) of the France (Channel) - England programme and its Forum on the Channel (4th edition in Caen on March 20, 2013, final conference on November 21 in Rouen). The integrated marine strategy of the Channel, developed in this project, mentions several times the specific characteristics of the Dover Strait, owing to the concerted action of the Council and of our partners of the Kent County Council, who are also stakeholders in this project. It was also in this context that the Council joined the Declaration of intent of the English Channel local and regional government organisations on shipping incidents and maritime pollution (County Council deliberations on June 24) and participated in the first meeting of the working group for its implementation on December 6 in London.

In terms of **communications**, 14 articles on the Straits of Europe were published on the website of the County Council: www.pasdecalais.fr (over one per month).

The international recognition of the Dover Strait

A mission was entrusted to the services of the French branch of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), in collaboration with the professors and students of the University of the Littoral, Opal Coast (ULCO) able to mobilize different scientific specialties (history, geography, geology, biology, marine areas...).

Technical meetings on both sides of the Strait made it possible to work towards the formalization of an overall approach. Feedback of the first results took place in June, in the presence of the partners from Kent, who also presented their approach of “seascape assessment” which could be extended to the French shore of the Dover Strait and strengthen the classification process. The final report was delivered in December. Its main conclusions are the following:

- Regarding the possibility of declaring the Dover Strait a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**, the study concluded that the natural heritage of the strait does not conform to the UNESCO criteria that justify classification as a World Heritage Site. Without being competent on the cultural criteria (ICOMOS is the competent body), IUCN-France judges that the tunnel under the Channel could be classed as a cultural heritage on the basis notably of criteria (i): Represents a work of creative human genius. This would however, be a more limited classification than if the entire Strait were included.
- Nevertheless, the study recommended the exploration of other international designations such as the UNESCO-sponsored **National Geoparks** (which would make it possible to recognize the geological heritage of the Strait) and the **Ramsar Sites** (owing to the exceptional presence of water birds).

Reflection is underway on the follow-up, notably at the political and cross-border levels, to this study.