



**EUROPEAN STRAITS INITIATIVE**

**Report of the coordinators and partners  
of the European Straits Initiative (ESI)**

**2015**

15 December 2015

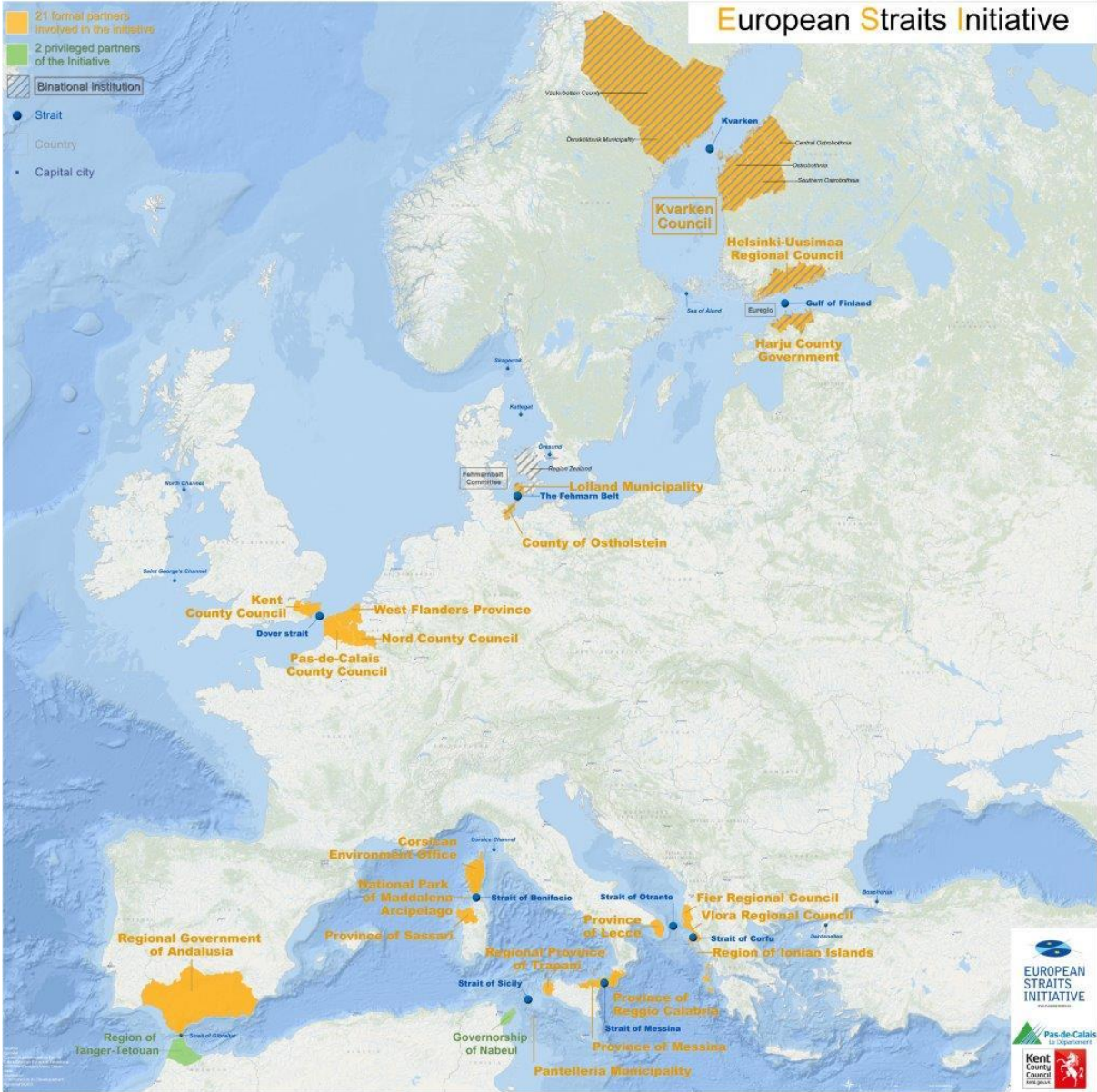
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# European Straits Initiative



## **Introduction**

**Following completion of the activities of NOSTRA project end 2014, 2015 was devoted to the launch of new activities on the basis of the action plan adopted in October 2014.** These included the drafting and submission of an Interreg Europe project involving some of the ESI partners in July 2015 and the creation of four thematic commissions at the occasion of the political conference of the European Straits Initiative in October 2015 in Vlora (Albania). With the arrival of new partners, the European Straits Initiative network, formed in 2010, now numbers 22 members.

The new partners are:

- Region of Ionian Islands (Greece - Strait of Corfu)
- Regional Government of Andalusia (Spain - Strait of Gibraltar)
- Region of Tangiers-Tetouan (Morocco - Strait of Gibraltar)/currently in the process of joining

## PART 1: 2015 REPORT OF THE EUROPEAN STRAITS INITIATIVE

2015 was an important year for the European Straits Initiative, marked by the creation of thematic commissions. As a reminder, a consultation of the members of the Initiative had been organised in 2014 in order to confirm interest in this Initiative and to prepare an action plan for 2015-2016 (Annex 1). Adopted at the occasion of the conference held to renew the Memorandum of Understanding which established the European Straits Initiative, on 22 October 2014, this action plan contains in particular the following objectives for the partnership:

- to hold a political meeting every two years and a technical meeting at least once a year
- to initiate the application submission process for an INTERREG Europe project with the aim of continuing the work of the NOSTRA project, involving all or some of the ESI partners
- to set up geographical/thematic working groups involving interested partners, with the aim of continuing the exchanges of good practices and specifying the arguments for advocacy and lobbying.

In 2015, the members of the European Straits Initiative have worked to implement this plan, in particular:

- the submission of an Interreg Europe project in July
- the formation of thematic commissions, formalised in October at a political meeting.

Lobbying actions were not neglected, with no less than three responses to European consultations and two local events organised as part of the Open Days 2015.

## 1. Further developing the exchange of experiences

Up to the end of 2014, experience exchange activities between ESI partners were primarily structured as part of the NOSTRA project (2012-2014), which in particular enabled numerous technical thematic meetings. The objective for 2015 was therefore to organise new exchanges in order to examine the outcomes of the NOSTRA project in depth and, in addition, to contribute to the emergence of new projects and the development of political advocacy for the Initiative.

- **PASSAGE project**

In December 2014, the European Straits Initiative partners met in Trapani in order to consider the actions to be taken to follow up the NOSTRA project and the existing perspectives within the context of the new Interreg Europe programme (formerly Interreg IVC). Two scenarios were identified with a view to the submission of a new project involving all or some of the NOSTRA project partners and new European Straits Initiative members:

- Scenario 1: project on the development of low-carbon transport solutions in the straits areas
- Scenario 2: project on the enhancement and exploitation of the natural and cultural heritage of the straits, at cross-border level

In 2015, four meetings were organised in Brussels and Paris in order to assess these perspectives in detail. In April, a majority of the European Straits Initiative partners decided to pursue the first scenario, broadening it to encompass the low-carbon economy in general. As discussions advanced, PASSAGE project (*Public Authorities Supporting low-carbon Growth in European maritime border regions*) came into being; it was submitted to the Interreg Europe programme authorities at the first call for projects, in July 2015.

PASSAGE project is based on the fact that, by their geography, the straits of Europe stand at the very centre of the maritime border regions. As important passage points, they concentrate flows and activities that generate significant carbon pressure. Not only do the inland areas of straits not always benefit from the international maritime flows in terms of local economic development, but their populations are also directly impacted by carbon emissions of these flows and by the traffic and activities they generate in the hinterlands, over which local authorities have little control. The maritime border is identified as a direct obstacle to the development of effective and integrated low-carbon strategies for limiting pollution in straits. The Interreg A cross-border cooperation programmes are the main instruments capable of encouraging the development of integrated approaches on maritime borders, but low-carbon economy, which should be the cross-cutting objective, is often underestimated. Approved in February 2016, the objective of the PASSAGE project will therefore be to address the low-carbon challenge in the five maritime cross-border regions, impacting five Interreg VA European territorial cooperation programmes.

Most of the partners of the PASSAGE project are also members of the European Straits Initiative. However, in order to maximise exchanges, the partnership has been enlarged to include new straits. In total, the project includes 11 partners from eight countries straddling five straits.

<b>Dover Strait</b>	
Pas-de-Calais County Council	France – lead partner

Kent County Council	United Kingdom
<b>Corsican Channel</b>	
Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Bastia Haute-Corse	France
Chamber of Commerce of Livorno	Italy
<b>Straits of Otranto/Corfu</b>	
Province of Lecce	Italy
InnoPolis: Centre for innovation and culture	Greece
Region of Ionian Islands	Greece
Regional Council of Vlora	Albania
<b>Gulf of Finland</b>	
Regional Council of Helsinki-Uusimaa	Finland
Harju County	Estonia
<b>Fehmarnbelt</b>	
Fehmarn Belt Development	Denmark

*NB: project partners who are not members of the European Straits Initiative are marked in blue*

If approved, the project activities will be spread over four years, with a phase of intensive exchanges between partners (thematic and cross-cutting seminars) followed by an action plan implementation phase in each strait.

- **The thematic commissions**

At the same time, the European Straits Initiative members worked on plans to create thematic commissions. A survey initiated in April identified the main themes of interest to partners. Three themes were identified as the focus of a commission:

- Transport and Mobility
- Tourism, Natural and Cultural Heritage
- Environment, Biodiversity and Climate Change.

In preparation for the official launch of these three commissions, those partners interested in chairing a commission prepared their Terms of Reference. The aim of these Terms of Reference is to determine the thematic areas to be covered by each commission and to propose a work programme up to 2018.

The creation of these three commissions was formalised at the political conference of the European Straits Initiative, organised on 8 October 2015 in Albania at the invitation of the Region of Vlora. A group work session involving interested partners was devoted to each theme in order to amend and validate the work programme proposed by the chair of each commission.

Since specific time had been dedicated to migration at this political conference, the political representatives of the partner authorities adopted a joint resolution to include the creation of a fourth thematic commission on this issue, in order to optimise exchanges and to propose concrete solutions to the problems encountered in the territories of departure, transit and arrival, within the scope of their competences.



In total, therefore, four thematic commissions were created.

## 2. Lobbying activities

The European Straits Initiative has undertaken lobbying actions at various levels:

- Response to a European consultation on maritime transport, in April
- Presentation of NOSTRA project at the national seminar on the Interreg Europe programme in France, held in Paris on 12 May 2015
- Response to a European consultation on international ocean governance, in September
- Labelling of the political conference of the European Straits Initiative of 8 October 2015 as an "Open Days 2015 Local Event"
- Adoption in October of a joint resolution by members of the European Straits Initiative on migration, followed by the circulation of a press release announcing this stance (taken up in particular by the Committee of the Regions) - Annex 2
- Labelling of the presentation of NOSTRA project implementation plan of the Province of Reggio Calabria as an "Open Days 2015 Local Event", in October
- Response to a European consultation on obstacles to cross-border cooperation, in December



*Presentation of NOSTRA project at the national seminar on Interreg Europe in France*

## 3. Life of the network

A political conference of the European Straits Initiative was held on 8 October 2015 in Vlora (Albania), one year after the conference held on 22 October in Brussels to renew the Memorandum of Understanding. This meeting provided an opportunity to take stock of the actions carried out since the last conference, to formalise the institution of three thematic commissions and to adopt a joint resolution on migration - which provides for the creation of a fourth thematic commission on this issue. The entry in the Initiative of the Region of Ionian Islands (Greece - Strait of Corfu) was also formalised at this conference, followed by the membership of the Regional Government of Andalusia (Spain - Strait of Gibraltar) and confirmation of the intention on the part of the Region of Tangiers - Tetouan (Morocco - Strait of Gibraltar) to join the Initiative.

Closed by a press conference attended by numerous Albanian journalists, this meeting offered participants a deeper insight into the challenges specific to the Strait of Otranto and to the Region of

Vlora, Albania having acquired official recognition as a candidate for accession to the European Union.



*Vlora conference*

The website [www.europeanstraits.eu](http://www.europeanstraits.eu) was consulted by 6,631 visitors between 1 January and 31 December 2015 (3,259 in 2014). Four newsletters were published and sent to almost 1,500 subscribers in French and English.

**PART 2: 2015 REPORT OF THE ESI PARTNERS**

STRAIT	For improved consideration of straits (lobbying, communication, life of the network)	For the emergence of cooperation projects at straits level
<p><b>1. Dover Strait</b></p>	<p>- A certain number of actions by <b>Pas-de-Calais County Council</b> were carried out for ESI (see Part 1).  <b>8 October:</b> joint organisation of the political conference of the European Straits Initiative by Pas-de-Calais County Council and Vlora Region.                      - Chairmanship by Kent County Council of the Environment, Biodiversity and Climate Change commission.                      - Pas-de-Calais and Kent participate in the working group on the implementation of the declaration of intent by the coastal authorities of the Channel on the risks of maritime accidents and pollution.                      - Individual response by Pas-de-Calais County Council to the European consultation on obstacles to cross-border cooperation, emphasising the challenges associated with the strait (ESI mention)                      - Involvement of Kent and Pas-de-Calais as partners of PASSAGE project</p> <p><b>Articles on the ESI website</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <a href="#">The TEN-T programme invests in the Dover Strait</a></li> <li>- <a href="#">Obstacles to cross-border cooperation: one strait highlighted</a></li> <li>- <a href="#">Seascape character assessment for the Dover Strait</a></li> </ul>	<p><b>26 January:</b> technical meeting between Pas-de-Calais County Council, Nord County Council and the Province of West Flanders  <b>18 February:</b> territorial meeting in Pas-de-Calais  <b>16 March:</b> technical meeting between Pas-de-Calais and Kent to discuss bilateral cooperation  <b>9 October:</b> political meeting between Pas-de-Calais, Vlora and Lecce as a side event at the Vlora conference, to discuss trilateral cooperation on tourism.  <b>26 November:</b> visit of a French delegation in Kent - presentation of NOSTRA project</p> <p>Finalisation of <a href="#">Seascape character assessment for the Dover Strait</a> as part of the <a href="#">NOSTRA implementation plan for the Dover Strait</a>. Good <a href="#">media coverage</a> in Kent.</p>
<p><b>2. Strait of Bonifacio</b></p>		<p>Trialling of the deep-sea pilotage service introduced on 1 July 2014, "Bonifacio Strait Pilotage" (<a href="http://www.bonifaciostraitpilots.eu">www.bonifaciostraitpilots.eu</a>), following the designation of the strait by the IMO as a "Particularly sensitive sea area" in 2011. This optional service consists in pilots from ports in South Corsica or Sardinia, experts in maritime safety, boarding vessels crossing the strait. It is managed jointly by France and Italy and was used on two occasions in June and July 2015.                      Website: <a href="http://www.bonifaciostraitpilots.eu">www.bonifaciostraitpilots.eu</a></p>

<b>3. Strait of Sicily</b>	Contacts with Nabeul Governorate and the National Institute of Marine Sciences and Technology	
<b>4. Straits of Otranto/Corfu</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Region of Ionian Island joins ESI: communication on ESI in the local and regional press</li> <li>- Involvement of the Province of Lecce, Vlor Region, Region of Ionian Islands and InnoPolis as partners of PASSAGE project</li> <li>- Hosting and organisation of the political conference on 8 October 2015 in Vlor</li> <li>- Procedure for labelling the political conference held by Vlor Region as an "Open Days 2015 Local Event"</li> <li>- Chairmanship by Vlor Region of the Tourism, Natural and Cultural Heritage commission.</li> </ul> <p><b>Articles on the ESI website</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <a href="#">Political conference of the European Straits Initiative: setting sail for Albania!</a></li> </ul>	<p><b>9 October:</b> political meeting between Pas-de-Calais, Vlor and Lecce as a side event at the Vlor conference, to discuss trilateral cooperation on tourism .</p> <p>Awareness raising among universities on both shores of the strait by the Region of Ionian Islands to encourage their cooperation and involvement in new projects.</p>
<b>5. Strait of Messina</b>	<p><b>7-8 July:</b> visit of the European Straits Initiative coordinator hosted - several technical meetings</p> <p><b>8 July:</b> presentation of the European Straits Initiative by the coordinator on the occasion of a conference at the Mediterranean University of Reggio Calabria</p> <p><a href="#">Article on the ESI political conference</a> of 8 October 2015, posted on the website of the Metropolitan City of Messina</p> <p><b>Articles on the ESI website</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <a href="#">Strait of Messina: gearing up for UNESCO designation</a></li> <li>- <a href="#">Maritime straits at the heart of Open Days 2015</a> (the second part is proposed by the Province of Reggio Calabria)</li> </ul>	<p><b>7 July:</b> launch of the Province of Reggio Calabria NOSTRA implementation plan</p> <p><b>28 October:</b> Open Days 2015 local event - presentation of the Province of Reggio Calabria NOSTRA implementation plan</p>
<b>6. Kvarken Strait</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Communication activities via the website <a href="http://www.kvarken.org">www.kvarken.org</a>, information letters and social networks; with mentions of the European Straits Initiative.</li> </ul>	<p><b>27 May:</b> conference in Vaasa on "the shared future of the Kvarken Region" (68 participants)</p> <p><b>September:</b> week-long event in the Kvarken Strait with study visits as part of the RET-T project "Midway Alignment of the Bothnian corridor", attended by</p>

	<p><b>Articles on the ESI website</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <a href="#">Kvarken Strait Midway alignment in the spotlights</a></li> </ul>	<p>Mr B. Simpson, European Coordinator for the Motorways of the Sea, and the RET-T Policy Manager, Mr J. Anselmo .</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Management of the RET-T project “Midway Alignment of the Bothnian corridor” (aiming to secure communications via the Kvarken Strait over the long-term) and several other cross-border projects.</li> <li>- Development of new Interreg Botnia-Atlantica cooperation projects: MABA Midway Alignment Botnia Atlantica project (transport strategy); Spotlight High-Low Coast (sustainable tourism at the UNESCO World Heritage listed cross-border site of High Coast–Kvarken Archipelago); E12 Atlantica Transport (transport and infrastructure project) - the outcome of this project will be an assessment of the various governance models including the EGCT, as provided for in the NOSTRA project implementation plan.</li> <li>- Financing by the Kvarken Council of crossings for various interest groups wishing to develop contacts on the other side of the strait (student associations, youth sports teams etc.)</li> </ul>
<p><b>7. Fehmarnbelt</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Involvement of Fehmernbelt Development as a partner of PASSAGE project</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Three cross-border meetings as part of the Fehmarnbelt Commission cooperation initiative, one on "The region of Fehmarn between the two metropolitan cities of Hamburg and Copenhagen".</li> <li>- Relaunch of the Fehmarn web portal (<a href="http://www.fehmarnbelt-portal.de/dk">www.fehmarnbelt-portal.de/dk</a>) and publication of three information letters on regional news (approximately 1,000 subscribers in Germany and Denmark)</li> <li>- Start of preparations for the "Fehmarnbelt Days 2016" to be held in Hamburg and which will bring together almost 800 Swedish, Danish and German stakeholders. The Fehmarnbelt Commission is an organising partner for this event and is holding a conference on the theme of regional development.</li> <li>- Involvement of the County of Ostholstein in the Interreg VA "KultKIT" project (2015-2018), whose aim is to support cross-border activities with respect to micro-projects between inhabitants, associations and schools.</li> </ul>
<p><b>8. Gulf of Finland</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Chairmanship by Harju County Government of the Transport and Mobility commission</li> <li>- Involvement of Harju County Government and the Regional Council of Helsinki-Uusimaa as partners of PASSAGE project</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Development of joint projects: Harju County Government and the Regional Council of Helsinki-Uusimaa are both partners of the FINEST Link project (Central Baltic programme); the Regional Council of Helsinki-Uusimaa is the lead partner of the NSB CoRe project (Baltic Sea Region programme), in which Harju County Government is an associated partner. Other cross-</li> </ul>

	<p><b>Articles on the ESI website</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <a href="#">A tunnel to link Helsinki and Tallinn: why not?</a></li> </ul>	<p>border projects involve the cities of Helsinki and Tallinn (FINEST Twins, FINEST SmartMobility).</p> <p>- Joint preparation and signature of a Memorandum of Understanding which lays down the terms and forms of cooperation for the implementation of improved mobility and lays the bases for the Finland-Estonia Fixed Link. This Memorandum of Understanding involves the two ESI partner regions, the cities of Tallinn and Helsinki, the Estonian Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communication and the Finnish Ministry of Transport and Communication. The Memorandum of Understanding can be downloaded from the FINEST Link project website (<a href="http://finestlink.fi/en/">http://finestlink.fi/en/</a>).</p> <p>- Several thematic cross-border meetings were organised by the cities of Tallinn and Helsinki, which involved the regions.</p>
<p><b>9. Strait of Gibraltar</b></p>	<p><b>23-24 February:</b> visit of a Pas-de-Calais delegation to Tangiers, to give a presentation on the European Straits Initiative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Entry of the Regional Government of Andalusia in ESI and agreement on inclusion of the Tangiers-Tetouan Region</li> </ul>	



## Annex 1

Action Plan 2015-2016 adopted by ESI partners on 22 October 2014 in Brussels

*On 22 October 2014 in Brussels, following the NOSTRA INTERREG IV C project final conference, the Memorandum of Understanding about the European Straits Initiative has been signed by political leaders from straits of Europe. This Memorandum of Understanding is aimed at:*

*1- Gaining recognition of the particular characteristics of the Straits within European policies, particularly the Integrated Maritime Policy and the Territorial Cohesion Policy;*

*2- Working for the emergence of cooperation projects, either through INTERREG programmes or other European programmes, developing mutual cooperation and implementing common actions and projects, in order to promote economic development, protection of the environment, transportation and logistics, intercultural working and tourism activities.*

In the view of reaching these goals, the following action plan is adopted by the parties and provides that actions will be taken, as much as possible and depending on available resources, to:

### *At the partnership level*

- meet every two years at a political level and at least once a year at a technical level<sup>1</sup>
- engage in the process of submitting an INTERREG EUROPE bid in 2015 in order to follow up on the NOSTRA project involving all or part of the ESI members
- set up geographical/thematic working groups, with interested partners, in order to continue the exchange of good practices and specify the arguments of the advocacy and lobbying actions

### *At a strait, national or regional levels*

- organise or participate in meetings dealing with straits issues when relevant and taking advantage of existing meetings. In reference to the NOSTRA Project's way of working, 2 territorial meetings, including one cross-border meeting, per partner and per year could be organised to address the 2 objectives of the ESI (projects and lobbying)
- study the feasibility of organising, and if possible organise, a Day of the strait, a cross-border event gathering the business world, Universities, national governments, local authorities and the civil society around a topic concerning the whole strait area (which could be organised back to back to an existing meeting on the same subject)

More specifically on the two objectives of the ESI

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<sup>1</sup> Not including the various preparing meetings for the writing of the INTERREG EUROPE project.



## PART 1. Gaining recognition of the particular characteristics of the Straits

- **prepare the participation of the ESI in several events to promote the particular characteristics of the Straits and voice the concerns and claims of the European Straits**
  - *at a European level:* representatives of the ESI are encouraged to attend the European maritime day, the Open days, or other relevant European events each year, and when possible, set up a special session dealing with straits at a political level
  - *at a strait, national or regional levels:* ESI members are invited when relevant to participate in events (about marine and coastal issues mainly) and consultation processes (on the definition of the national maritime policy for instance) for a better recognition of the Straits particular characteristics
  
- **organise, when relevant and possible, specific meetings on European Straits with members of the European institutions**
  - *at a European level:* such meetings can be organised in Brussels with the help of organisations such as the Seas and Coastal areas European Parliament Intergroup, or the European Bureau for Conservation and Development (member of IUCN), and the European offices of the partners that have one
  - *at a strait, national or regional levels:* partners are encouraged to organise such meetings when possible with the participation of a member of the European parliament according to their privileged contacts
  
- **respond to the European consultations at least once a year if relevant, specifically:**
  - about maritime issues such as marine environment, maritime transport, tourism, blue growth, maritime spatial planning and integrated coastal zone management, etc.
  - about European macro-regional strategies
  
- **ensure a proactive communication about the ESI activities and the European Straits**
  - *at European and international levels:* the ESI quarterly Newsletter and website [www.europeanstraits.eu](http://www.europeanstraits.eu) will be mobilised, articles will be submitted to other media
  - *at a strait, national or regional levels:* partners are invited to dedicate a special section of their website on the ESI activities and news about their strait, propose an article at least once a year for the ESI Newsletter, ensure links exist between partners websites, partners contacts websites and the ESI website

## PART 2. Working for the emergence of cooperation projects

- **prepare the submission of an INTERREG EUROPE project by interested partners**
  
- **implement the new project (if adopted)**
  
- **carry out the NOSTRA implementation plans actions**
  - including through INTERREG V A (and B) projects





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- but also other European funds (European Structural & Investment Funds, Community Action Programmes) to reach out towards complementarities and consistency on the straits area through specific projects
  - and using the ESI geographical/thematic working groups
- **encourage when relevant cooperation/exchange of experience between straits from all parts of Europe on specific issues**
- environment
  - transport
  - tourism, etc.



## Annex 2

### Joint statement of the members of the European Straits Initiative of 8<sup>th</sup> October 2015

Since the beginning of 2015, the European continent has faced a migratory wave which constitutes a major humanitarian challenge. While dramatic situations unfold before our eyes, and beyond the topicality of the phenomenon only, the members of the European Straits Initiative, gathered for their political meeting in Region Vlora, wish to demonstrate the opportunity that is the network of straits. Indeed:

- Although local challenges are not everywhere similar, the movement of refugees escaping from areas of conflict and people looking for a better life is a **shared challenge** for all the territories bordering European straits.
- These areas have always been **privileged waypoints**, which have played a major role in the migration of women and men. The Strait of Bering, from where the Indians of America came from, is an example.
- With the progressive closing of terrestrial borders, **maritime borders become new pathways**. The pressure on departure territories and hosting territories is growing.

Confronted to this challenge, the European Straits Initiative expresses a conviction: the issue of migrations is faced at European and national scales, but its local impact is a **challenge for local authorities** bordering European straits; it is their responsibility to:

- Find human, fair, innovative and sustainable solutions to this challenge, in the field of their competencies.
- Use this human mobility as a way of reinforcing cross-border governance of straits.

This is why the European Straits Initiative proposes to exchange and analyse practices of departure and hosting territories bordering straits, for a better answer to the migrant challenge, by establishing a commission to propose solutions to practical issues to the European community and implement them.

List of signatories present in Vlora: Kvarken Council, Helsinki-Uusimaa Regional council, Harju County Government, Lolland Municipality, Pas-de-Calais County Council, Regional Council of Fier, Regional Council of Vlora, Region of Ionian Islands, Province of Lecce.