



Cross-border cooperation on straits must be saved

After the proposals of the European Commission for the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), the European Straits Initiative expressed its strong concerns regarding the future of cross-border cooperation on maritime borders. The draft regulations published on 29 May confirm the misgivings of straits' territories across Europe: ***cross-border cooperation on maritime borders is the "poor relation" of the European Commission's proposals.***

1) The European Straits Initiative disagrees with the proposal to limit cross-border cooperation programmes to land borders

The objective of the European Commission to specifically target a strategic contribution to prevention and resolution of cross-border issues and development of transnational public services ***cannot justify the exclusion of straits, as maritime borders, from the cross-border cooperation framework:***

- Just as land border territories, strait territories also face cross-border issues on a daily basis, including legal or administrative obstacles. Employment, health, transport of passengers, multilinguism and institutional cooperation are some of the many cross-border issues faced by straits. Among the straits of Europe, many examples can be highlighted, such as the development of an integrated job market between Germany and Denmark across the Fehmarnbelt or the inclusion of Calais hospital in the UK National Health Service - enabling medical care for British patients on both sides of Dover Strait. These issues are topics of daily concern for stakeholders of straits areas and ***justify a full consideration from the European Union to the development of integrated approaches on these specific maritime borders, with a significant financial support.***
- The issue of developing transnational public services is truly a shared issue for land borders and maritime borders of straits. Issues such as (public) transportation of passengers are key for these territories, where the absence of territorial continuity and the mental obstacle implied by the maritime border are real breaks to a sustainable and effective cooperation. The absence of territorial continuity, specifically, does not put the citizens of straits' maritime border regions on equal foot with other EU citizens. Indeed, when most of EU inhabitants are completely free to cross borders to study, work or visit a friend, inhabitants of straits' areas still face a strong obstacle: crossing the border mainly relies on private operators (ferry companies or fixed-links operators), is subject to availability of the market (such as seasonality between Corsica and Italy) and is never free of charge. ***The support to cross-border cooperation in these specific maritime border regions is a core question when it comes to support territorial continuity in Europe.*** In remote straits' areas, especially, it is often easier for



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citizens to access public services on the other side of the border than in their own countries. As such, ***straits' areas are not different from any other land borders in Europe and should not be treated differently in the regulations.*** Examples of development of transnational public services can already be found on straits, such as the creation of a public ferry link between Sweden and Finland in the Kvarken strait.

2) The European Straits Initiative expects a clear definition of the geographical coverage of the future cooperation programmes, for the benefit of all straits

Whether it is stated in the draft regulations that cross-border cooperation programmes will be focused on land borders, the geographical coverage of these programmes leaves the door open to some maritime border regions: *“regions on maritime borders which are connected over the sea by a fixed link shall also be supported under cross-border cooperation”* (section II, article 4 of the proposed regulation for the “European territorial cooperation” objective). This specificity clearly refers to some straits' territories.

In reaction to this proposal, the European Straits Initiative highlights that ***all straits' territories, whether they are connected by fixed link or not, have to be equally considered in the future regulation.*** Indeed, the construction of fixed link, tunnel or bridge, does not fundamentally change the nature of these territories, characterised above all by the proximity and intensity of links and exchanges between the two shores. Such a distinction between straits with a fixed link and straits without fixed link does not make sense, because all straits are and will remain fords at the scale of European maritime borders, whether the connexion is by ferry or fixed link:

- These specific geographic areas really are the connecting points between lands with larger maritime basins; the map of TEN-T network shows very well the eminently strategic character of these connecting points at the scale of Europe.
- Only a few kilometres of water between two lands (11 km between France and Italy across the strait of Bonifacio, 14 km between Spain and Morocco across the strait of Gibraltar, 18 km between Denmark and Germany across the Fehmarnbelt...); populations are not more distant than in many not densely populated land border regions and historic links are very strong.

In fact, straits' territories characteristics fall under “wet land borders” rather than under maritime borders. Thus, ***the European Straits Initiative calls for a consideration of all straits' areas as fully eligible under cross-border cooperation programmes and asks the correction of the formulation in the proposed regulation*** on “European territorial cooperation” objective, to replace in section II, article 4 the mention *“regions on maritime borders which are connected over the sea by a fixed link”* by the mention *“regions on maritime borders in straits' areas, characterised by fixed links or intense mobile links”*.



3) The European Straits Initiative asks for clarification of the “maritime cooperation” framework

Draft regulations propose the inclusion of cross-border cooperation on maritime borders within larger “maritime cooperation” programmes. Many questions remain unanswered concerning the coverage and implementation of these “maritime cooperation” programmes:

- The European Straits Initiative is concerned about the proposed geographical coverage for these “maritime cooperation” programmes, based on functional areas and sea-basin strategies. ***By definition, straits are areas of connexion between two functional areas and two sea-basins and, therefore, cannot find their territorial relevance in such an approach.*** This is particularly true for straits such as Dover Strait (at the crossing point between the Atlantic Ocean basin and the North Sea basin), the Fehmarnbelt (at the crossing point between the North Sea basin and the Baltic Sea basin) or the Strait of Gibraltar (at the crossing point between the Mediterranean Sea basin and the Atlantic Ocean basin).
- The proposed thematic concentration aims to target 70% of funding to the implementation of the sea-basin strategy when such a strategy exists. ***Such a level of thematic concentration does not guarantee a significant budget for cross-border cooperation at a smaller scale.*** Considering the strong inter-connexions between both shores of straits’ territories, the European Straits Initiative requires stronger guarantees on the possibility for stakeholders of these regions to continue their engagement in cross-border cooperation. So far, such guarantee is only offered within the “cross-border cooperation” framework.
- The European Straits Initiative is concerned about the topics that will be covered by the “maritime cooperation” programmes. Indeed, maritime topics are relevant for some of the issues faced by maritime border regions, but the diversity of challenges faced by these regions should not be forgotten in the design of the future priorities of these programmes. The European Straits Initiative asks the European Commission to ***ensure that cooperation on maritime borders, especially straits, will not be limited to maritime topics only*** but can cover all the priorities of the cohesion policy according to the specific needs of each strait. So far, only the “cross-border cooperation” framework can ensure this approach.
- The European Straits Initiative reminds the European Commission that many issues are locally driven and that local authorities have essential competencies to answer these challenges: as such, subsidiarity must remain the driving principle in the design and management of the future programmes. ***NUTS 3, in particular, must be involved in the management of “maritime cooperation” programmes, especially in straits’ areas.***
- The funding resources proposed for “transnational cooperation and maritime cooperation” show a ***decrease of 35% of funding dedicated to such types of cooperation compared to 2014-2020*** (including IPA and ENI covering maritime



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borders). Considering that maritime border regions and particularly straits face some of the most challenging issues for Europe (migrations, blue growth, impact of climate change...), ***such a decrease of funding is raising questions***. The European Territorial Cooperation objective, as part of the cohesion policy, aims to reduce inequalities between territories of Europe; because of their vulnerability and of the challenge of territorial continuity that they face, straits' regions should be net beneficiaries of this solidarity policy. The European Straits Initiative requires to have detailed information on how the 2 649 900 000 EUR budget will be split between "transnational cooperation" and "maritime cooperation", to ensure a sufficient level of funding is dedicated to maritime cooperation and, specifically, cross-border cooperation on maritime borders and straits' areas.

4) The European Straits Initiative claims for equal treatment between internal and external borders of the EU

The European Straits Initiative welcomes the proposal of the European Commission to merge ENI, IPA and Interreg programmes into a single European Territorial Cooperation objective. With this proposal, the European Commission acknowledges that the issues faced by external borders of the EU are equally important as the issues faced by internal borders.

The European Straits Initiative highlights that external maritime borders and particularly straits are confronted to major challenges, the first one being the migration flows that they have to manage and which have direct impacts on many activities and policies in these regions. ***The funding dedicated to EU external borders should be proportional to these challenges***, which in no doubt will continue to grow in the future. The European Straits Initiative asks the European Commission to provide guarantees of such an equal treatment in the partition of budget.

Moreover, ***the European Straits Initiative calls for the full eligibility of neighbour regions on external borders under all cooperation programmes***, whether it is in the framework of the "European territorial cooperation" programmes or Community action programmes. These regions (in Morocco, Tunisia, Albania...) are already involved in such cooperation, but the quality of cooperation and its benefits for the neighbour EU regions truly suffer from a lack of funding from the EU.

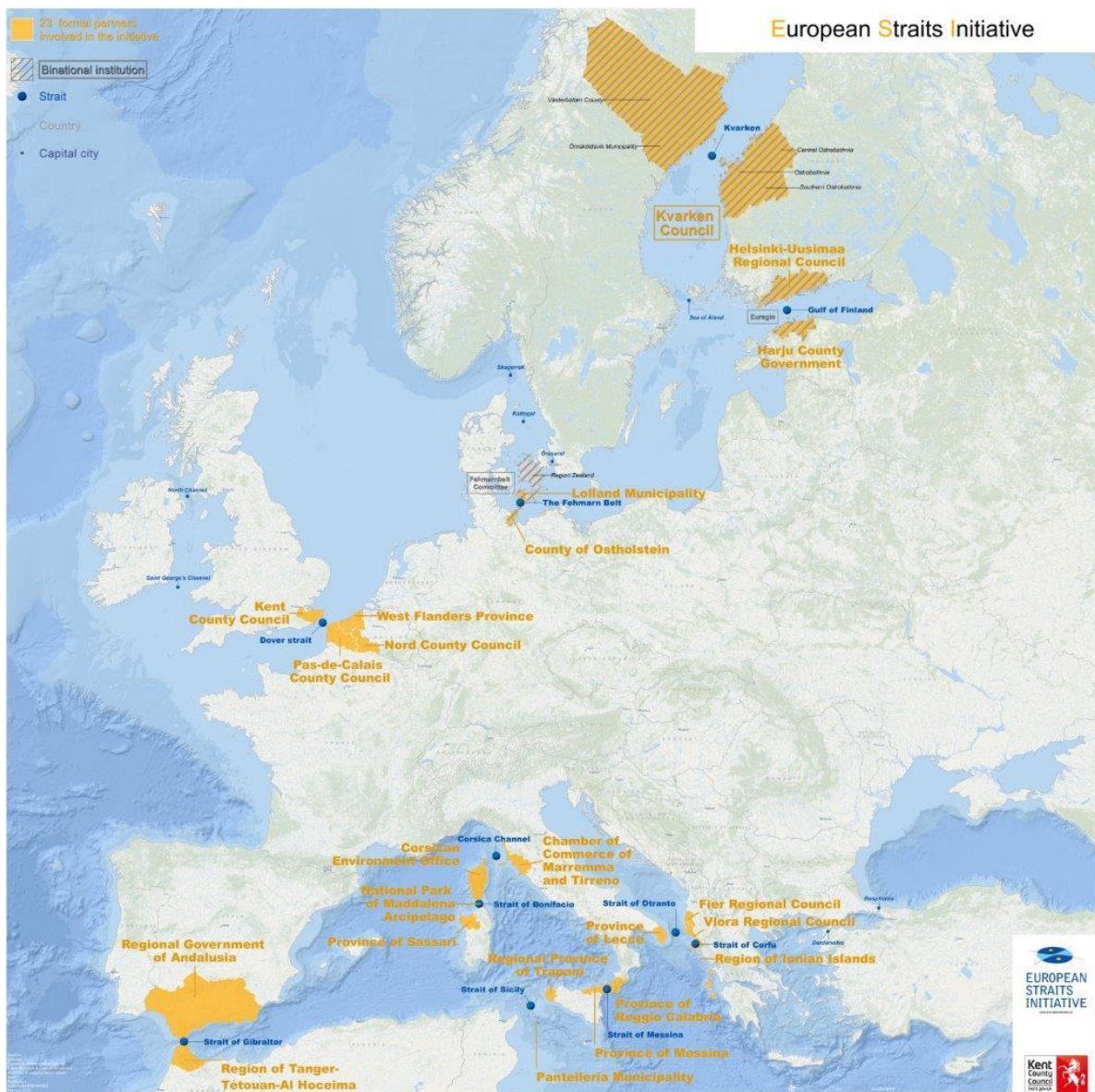


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What is the European Straits Initiative?

The European Straits Initiative was launched in 2010 under the impulsion of Pas-de-Calais County Council (France) and Kent County Council (United Kingdom), on Dover Strait. It gathers 24 local authorities from 14 countries, bordering 11 European straits, with two main objectives:

- Exchange experiences and good practices for an improved management of straits' areas
- Act towards the recognition of the peculiarities of straits' areas around Europe.



More information on: www.europeanstraits.eu

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