4th REGIONAL MEETING

Bremen, 21st May 2014

VIRTUAL KNOWLEDGE CENTRE (VKC)
on marine and maritime affairs in the Mediterranean

Background Information

Since 2011, the European Commission has launched the Project on "Integrated Maritime Policy in the Mediterranean (IMP-MED)"[1]. It is an EU financed project (under the European Neighborhood Policy Instrument (ENPI) South) which is currently being implemented by a consortium lead by *WS Atkins International Ltd* and supervised by the Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE) and the Directorate-General of Development and Cooperation (DG DEVCO). The project, which aims at improving maritime governance in the Mediterranean region, posed as one of its key objectives: "reinforcing existing co-operation processes and initiatives both at regional and sub-regional level, strengthening the links with other programmes and actions at the same levels, and supporting these initiatives on IMP issues"[2].

Following the results of a "Feasibility Study for the Mediterranean Sea Maritime Development Cooperation"[3], and the outcomes of the 12th FEMIP Conference that took place in Athens on 18-19 April 2013[4], the European Commission (EC), European Investment Bank (EIB) and International Maritime Organization (IMO) have proposed a range of priorities, initiatives and actions, including the development of a "Virtual Knowledge Centre (VKC) on marine and maritime affairs in the Mediterranean" allowing for the consolidation and sharing of all relevant available general, technical and sectorial information in the region. This on-line web-portal will improve synergies across different initiatives and projects in the region, facilitate coordination and cooperation, promote investments and innovation, and support blue entrepreneurship.

The Council of the European Union, in its conclusion on 25th June 2013, welcomed "the political commitment for supporting the blue economy of the Mediterranean as expressed at the 12th Facility for Euro-Mediterranean Investment and Partnership (FEMIP) Conference held on 18-19 April 2013 in Athens" and proposed supporting"further marine and maritime cooperation across all coastal States on maritime clusters, networking of training institutes, safety and surveillance and the establishment of a Virtual Knowledge Centre in particular".

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[1]   More information about the project: http://www.imp-med.eu/En/imp-med_9_page
[2]   Extracted from the "IMP-MED Phase 2 Work Plan".
[3]   More information about the results of the feasibility study:
      http://www.amiando.com/eventResources/S/S/JrzRv15gDNofp0/EIB_Study_on_Mediterranean_Sea_Maritime_Development.pdf
[4]   More information about the 12th FEMIP Conference:
      http://www.amiando.com/12thFEMIP_Conference.html?page=906832 and
      http://www.amiando.com/eventResources/1/q/F1SU1gXzfuV5Qb/JOINT_WORKING_DOCUMENT_EN.pdf

Towards the development of aVirtual Knowledge Centre (VKC)

The IMP-MED project has been entrusted with laying the foundations for the development of the VKC, through a feasibility study.The first phase of the feasibility study was recently completed and consisted of an inventory of on-line Knowledge Management Systems (KMS) providing information on marine and maritime data in the Mediterranean region[5].

The inventory provides a mechanism to understand the current situation, identify potential synergies with existing systems and learn from various approaches. In total 45 Knowledge Management Systems (KMS) were assessed against defined criteria to extrapolate some general information and features and on the other hand make full use of lessons learnt towards the establishment of the VKC.

During the 6th Meeting of the Working Group on Integrated Maritime Policy in the Mediterranean (Brussels, 30-31 October 2013), the IMP-MED project presented a report[6] containing the results of the evaluation of this inventory and a background document[7] containing a number of indicative recommendations for the way forward.

On the basis of the recommendations provided, the IMP-MED project received the mandate by the Mediterranean Sea riparian countries to move forward and to:

(a) continue the Feasibility Study (into a second phase) in order to explore different options to maintain the VKC alive and up-to-date after the completion of the IMP-MED Project (November 2014) and the strengths and weaknesses of some potential hosting bodies, and

(b) initialize a "basic version" of the VKC by uploading the results of the inventory on a dedicated portal (within the IMP-MED Project website) through an intuitive interface underpinned by a simple database structure which contains the information collected.

Establishment of a Virtual Knowledge Centre (VKC)

The pilot VKC will be published on-line early May 2014 following a pilot phase during which the Partner Countries, the EU Member States and other Mediterranean Sea riparian countries, as well as the EC services and regional organisations, were invited to provide comments and suggestions regarding: (a) the functionalities and user-friendliness of the testing pilot VKC (b) the possible improvements to its structure and the information published, and (c) the future improvement of the VKC (e.g. additional functionalities, context extension, etc) in order to enhance its utility and added-value for the Mediterranean countries.
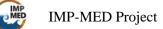
As mentioned, the IMP-MED project website (www.imp-med.eu) will initially be hosting the VKC which will consist of:

1. Home page containing a general description of the background and link to the output of the Phase 1 (inventory of the Knowledge Management Systems);
2. VKC page containing the information collected and links to relative websites and underpinned by a simple database which facilitates the search. Search tools allow both a

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5. In this context, the Knowledge Management System is defined as any IT system that has compiled information collated from multiple sources in different formats and provided a gateway to search for and have access to this information in an organized and structured manner.
6. The report can be viewed on-line from the following link: http://www.imp-med.eu/En/studies-and-reports_89_page
7. The background document can be viewed on-line from the following link: http://www.imp-med.eu/En/image.php?id=426

free-text and an advanced search per several categories. Each system displayed is supported by a dedicated page which includes a general description, some key facts and key contacts along with a standard form to provide direct comments on the specific system;

3. Contribute page containing the VKC Team members' contact and a standard form to facilitate the provision of general feedbacks and potential contributions by the users, as well as by the relevant system managers and data providers;

4. Support page containing helping instruments (FAQs and How To's) in order to respond to users' questions and curiosities and guide them to the correct use.

During the **4th IMP-MED project Regional Meeting in Bremen** (21st May 2014) all key comments received will be discussed to improve the functionalities, user-friendliness and completeness of the VKC. In addition various options for the future hosting of the VKC will be presented and reviewed based on the information collected by the IMP-MED Project team.

VKC in brief

What is the VKC? It is a one-stop-shop / on-line portal allowing for the consolidation and sharing of general, technical and sectoral information related to maritime and marine affairs. In other words it contains general information on and provides linkage to already existent system on marine and maritime issues.

How to search for information and how to contribute? The database available online can be queried through several parameters. All contributions and suggestions are welcome and feedbacks can be easily provided via email or through standard forms directly on-line. All the details are on the VKC portal.

Where is the VKC located? The VKC is temporarily hosted within the IMP-MED Project website (www.imp-med.eu) . Exploration of some hosting options to maintain the VKC alive and up-to-date after the completion of the IMP-MED Project (November 2014) is currently on the way.

VKC

Why is the VKC useful? It acts as a centralized platform for marine and maritime information, therefore improving synergies across different initiatives and projects and facilitating coordination and cooperation in the Mediterranean region.

Who has proposed and developed the VKC? The European Commission (EC), European Investment Bank (EIB) and International Maritime Organization (IMO) have proposed the establishment of a VKC which has been subsequently developed under the IMP-MED Project.