



MARINE SPATIAL PLANNING AS A TOOL TO BOOST AND SUPPORT “BLUE” ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN ISLANDS

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It is indeed a pleasure for me to welcome you as President of INSULEUR on this workshop on '**Marine Spatial Planning as a tool to boost and support “Blue” entrepreneurship in islands**'. Apart from thanking George Asonitis, and Irene Mikelis on behalf of INSULEUR, I would like to thank our partners on this event, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Centre of Excellence on Blue Growth – Shipping – Marine Environment, Insularity of the National & Kapodistrian University of Athens.

As islands we have a very special interest in the sea. We are surrounded by the sea which at times is connected to isolation. However, it is my hope that this webinar will not show our limitations, but our strengths! We speak many a times of 'blue growth' i.e. the economic development that is linked to the sea. However, this does not come out on its own.

It is the result of careful planning, and this is where **maritime spatial planning** comes in. We cannot speak of blue growth, and with the opportunities linked to the sea, if we do not plan ahead of what we require of our coastal regions. This becomes all the more important, when one considers that according to the existing Directive, EU countries had to have their maritime spatial plans in place by March of this year.

A lot of activities on islands are linked to maritime activity. Tourism for example. Unfortunately, and this has been shown by the COVID-19 pandemic we are overexposed to tourism. However, this is not the only activity. There are multiple uses, including for example desalination plants, which can provide essential water to our islands which most often need to import water from the main land. There are also other activities linked to the sea, including commercial and artisanal fishing activity.

However, this also points out to another issue. Yesterday I was participating at the **Conference of Peripheral Maritime regions General Assembly**. A declaration was discussed in which climate neutrality featured as one of the main important aspects. The declaration highlighted that islands are “among those territories that are most vulnerable to the effects of global warming.”¹ This will have significant impact on our coastal regions, and as I also highlighted in a number of my interventions, islands will be the most affected. However, I also believe that islands can achieve carbon neutrality before the mainland, given the required incentives, and show the way forward on how things can be done sustainably. Consequently, in our analysis on maritime spatial planning, sustainability plays a very crucial part.

¹ CPMR, *Amended Draft Final Declaration – 40th Annual General Assembly of the CPMR Islands Commission*, p.5

Consequently when speaking of the tourism demands on coastal areas, we must seek that these promote sustainable forms of tourism. The same relates to energy generation. Here, we must focus on clean energy.

However, in all this we must not forget that coastal regions many a times provide the only access points to some of our islands. To this end, I believe that this is an important aspect that also needs to be taken into consideration. As President of INSULEUR, I wish that this webinar will be an interesting forum of discussion.

I now leave the floor to our friend Mr Eleftherios Kechagioglou, President of the Network of the Small Greek Islands.
