

The 5×5 Initiative and Maritime Spatial Planning: an Opportunity for “Europeanization” in the Mediterranean sea-basin?

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The recent initiative by the Greek Prime Minister to establish a multilateral cooperation scheme titled “5×5” marks an ambitious effort to reposition Greece at the core of Mediterranean developments. Although primarily a political and diplomatic proposal, it also holds significant potential within the framework of Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) and multi-level ocean governance in the Mediterranean. The 5×5 initiative involves five countries namely Greece, Cyprus, Egypt, Turkey, and Libya, and five key themes: migration, civil protection, marine environment, connectivity, and maritime zone delimitation. The latter three are directly linked to the EU’s Maritime spatial Planning (MSP) framework, launched by the 2014 MSP Directive (2014/89/EU).

Rather than another political forum with uncertain outcomes, 5×5 could evolve into a technical dialogue platform supporting joint mapping methodologies, geospatial data exchange, and a shared MSP data system - as well as institutional coordination on sea uses and maritime zones under international law. It could serve as a **pilot transboundary MSP mechanism, fostering cross-border consultation procedures** as required by the EU Directive, even with non-EU neighbours such as Turkey, Egypt, and Libya.

MSP experience has shown that no country can plan in isolation and that stakeholder involvement - from maritime industries to NGOs and coastal communities - is key to success. A forum like 5×5 could therefore act as a bridge between EU national strategies and regional frameworks involving third countries, such as the emerging [“Pact for the Mediterranean”](#) foreseen in the European Ocean Pact. This Mediterranean Pact aims to strengthen regional cooperation and economic ties, building a Common Mediterranean Space that is connected, prosperous, resilient, and secure. Grounded in shared historical and cultural ties, it promotes co-ownership, co-creation, and shared responsibility, focusing on initiatives that deliver tangible added value - from clean energy to private investment - especially benefiting youth, women, and small enterprises.

Through the 5×5 platform, Greece could promote mapping projects, secure funding for cooperation, and establish itself as a hub of knowledge and governance in the coastal and marine domain.

This prospect gains further significance with the forthcoming EU “Ocean Act”, currently in preparation as part of the revision of the MSP Directive (2014/89/EU). The Act seeks to enhance ecosystem resilience, integrate biodiversity and cultural heritage into ocean policy, and build a coherent governance framework for EU members and partners. In this light, the 5×5 could serve as a pilot regional application of the Ocean Act, linking EU policy with the local and geopolitical realities of the Eastern Mediterranean.

However, for the initiative to be substantive, it must develop a concrete structure: working groups with clear mandates, interoperable data systems, and, above all, trust-building among participants. Technical elements - such as agreement on international delimitation standards, data sharing, and methodological harmonization - are indispensable. Without these, discussions risk remaining symbolic or even heightening regional tensions.

The geopolitical complexity of the Eastern Mediterranean cannot be ignored. The inclusion of Turkey and Libya, with conflicting maritime claims and the controversial Turkey–Libya MoU, makes the initiative fragile. Their non-ratification of UNCLOS further complicates equitable dialogue on maritime zones. Yet even a loose institutional framework could enable small, technical, and environmental cooperation steps - gradually building mutual confidence.

If the 5×5 Forum is strategically linked to the Mediterranean Pact and the Ocean Act, while drawing on EU MSP experience, it could become a genuine multi-level governance mechanism - not just another declaration platform, but **a laboratory for regional cooperation, where scientists, diplomats, and policymakers co-develop realistic solutions for the 21st-century Mediterranean.**

Finally, Greece - with its long expertise in the Law of the Sea and its emerging MSP system (even without an approved plan yet) - together with Cyprus, has the opportunity to use this initiative as a lever of knowledge, institutional influence, and representation of the European acquis. The success of the 5×5 Forum will not be measured in statements, but in its ability to embed knowledge, data, and trust into a shared Mediterranean language of planning, inclusion, and sustainability.

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