

## **The EU Hydrographic Service(s)**

### **1. BACKGROUND**

During its 23<sup>rd</sup> Conference, the North Sea Hydrographic Commission tasked France to chair a working group on co-operation strategy with the following objectives:

1. analyse the present status of co-operation between NSHC HOs;
2. identify the need for intensified co-operation;
3. identify and monitor EU activities and documentation on matters of interest to HOs;
4. identify the functions and activities of HOs where the involvement of the EU and its organs could be beneficial to the provision of hydrographic services and those which could be addressed more efficiently at NSHC level;
5. **examine broader European framework of co-operation;**
6. suggest appropriate actions to be taken by NSHC members;

A questionnaire was sent to HOs to initiate the work.

### **2. RESULTS**

All the NSHC HOs filled in the questionnaire, and results were presented at the 24<sup>th</sup> NSHC, Reykjavik, in 2000.

At that time, it was considered that the level of cooperation between NSHC's members was more or less adequate in several domains, but opinions were pretty much divided regarding the need for EU to get involved in hydrographic matters as the benefice for members was not considered sufficient. In addition, the creation of a European Hydrographic Office was considered premature.

### **3. THE NEW ENVIRONMENT**

Since 2000, new European directives and programmes on maritime matters have been launched or are currently under development. These initiatives will impact our national hydrographic organisations, policies and activities, sooner or later. This is already the case with the Inspire proposal and the EU Maritime Green Paper (cf. NSHC 27, Item C3.3). This will become more and more acute for instance with GMES and Galileo. In addition, the EU Maritime Safety Agency should be supported by a coherent set of hydrographic services.

Finland, which is holding the presidency of the EU during the second semester of 2006, considers European maritime policies as one of the main issues and has raised

the implementation of the third maritime safety package in EU<sup>1</sup> on its agenda at a high level priority. There is here an excellent opportunity to reinforce chart and nautical publications carriage requirements when high-risk vessels flying the flag of third countries transit in EU waters. The best way to make this happens is probably to promote a joint EU HO's approach.

Thanks to IHO, European hydrographic offices currently cooperate under its umbrella, and it is admitted that NSHC is one of the most important IHO RHC's "think-tank".

However, we all know that our activities and resources mainly rely on our own national commitments and budgets. In other words, and with the exception of GMDSS, "hydrographic services" in EU are more or less purely national. Is it acceptable? Are our national responsibilities so well-recognised, and our activities so well-appreciated that our destiny is not threatened? Are we sure that our national organisations are strong enough or self-sufficient to thrive as they are? What are the risks that EU's technocrats consider that our organisations are not as effective as they could be from an EU perspective?

As stated in the explanatory memorandum of the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a framework for Community Action in the field of Marine Environmental Policy (named the Marine Strategy Directive)<sup>2</sup> : "The marine environment does not accord with existing geo-political boundaries. It is by essence transboundary and therefore requires co-operation and common principles. In these conditions, applying a purely national approach to the marine environment is doomed to fail."

Although this directive is applicable to the sustainable development and to the protection of maritime environment, it seems that time has come to revisit the need for a broader European framework for cooperation in hydrography. The spectrum of this issue is pretty wide: organisation of MSI, cartography, support to maritime safety agencies, support of sustainable development, of ICZM, maritime spatial data infrastructure, pooling of resources (including programme of work of hydrographic and oceanographic fleets), even existence of national HOs.

Other favourable conditions, also linked to the various applications of hydrography, reinforce the relevance of a more proactive approach. There are, for instance:

- the setting-up of the new European defence agency within which environment matters all together (e.g. geospatial information, hydrography, oceanography, meteorology) will play a decisive role in support of new concepts, in the decision-making processes used at the highest political and military levels, as foundation layers in GIS and Command&Control systems; these concepts such as the REP (Recognised Environmental Picture) are obviously applicable to the civilian community (e.g. in support of the EU's Joint Situation Centre, or to prepare natural disaster prevention measures within the GMES programme);
- the financial possibilities offered by R&D European framework programmes, to develop new and more efficient public services, such as "e-contents"<sup>3</sup>. No doubt that applications to these EU funds and resources might be more

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<sup>1</sup> "third package of legislative measures on maritime safety in EU", COM (2005) 585 final, dated 23 Nov. 2005.

<sup>2</sup> COM (2005) 505 final, 2005/0211 (COD) dated 24 Oct. 2005.

<sup>3</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/information\\_society/activities/econtentplus/programme/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/econtentplus/programme/index_en.htm)

legitimate when they are submitted by EU HOs all together, rather than individually;

- as far as the development of hydrographic and maritime capacities in developing countries is concerned, although a certain level of coordination is provided by IHO CBC and RHCs, access to EU capacity building funds could be more effective through a EU wide structure.

It is therefore suggested to NSHC and its EU's members to anticipate the development of an innovative common strategy to provide efficient and coherent hydrographic services within EU and adjacent waters.

#### **4. PROPOSAL**

NSHC's members are invited to consider the following proposals:

- Creation of an official EU's Hydrographic Offices Correspondance Group (EUHO CG);
- TOR of this group to be developed by voluntary HOs then submitted to EU relevant authorities by 1<sup>st</sup> January 07. Limited mandate: end of 2009.
- Main objectives:
  - ✓ Recognition (cf. NSHC27, Item F3) of the importance of hydrography in maritime matters (safety of navigation, sustainable development, protection of environment, ICZM, spatial infrastructure, etc.).
  - ✓ Development of a common strategy and framework to improve the level of co-operation between EU HOs and to provide more efficient hydrographic services at the regional level.
  - ✓ Creation of a nucleus of hydrographic experts designated to provide advices to relevant EU official bodies and institutions (Maritime Safety Agency, tbc).
  - ✓ Liaison with IHO and no duplication.
- Outputs:
  - ✓ EU common strategy in hydrography compliant with EU policies and directives (Inspire, Green Paper then White Book, Maritime Strategy Directive, etc.).
  - ✓ EU prioritized transboundary plan for surveys and international nautical publications.
  - ✓ Cost/benefit analysis for the possible creation of an EU Hydrographic Agency or coordinating body (vs national HOs) and cartography of relationships with other international bodies (what can be easily mutualized?).
  - ✓ Recommendations for new legislative measures related to hydrography. Assessment and optimization of national assets.
  - ✓ Identification and provision of hydrographic experts in key jobs within EU institutions.