

24th Conference of the Mediterranean and Black Seas Hydrographic Commission (MBSHC) Constanta, Romania, 2 – 4 July

Contribution to the IHO Work Programme 2024	
Task 3.2.1.6	Prepare for and report meetings of the Regional Hydrographic Commission: MBSHC

Following the invitation from the Maritime Hydrographic Directorate of Romania (DHM), the 24th Conference of the Mediterranean and Black Seas Hydrographic Commission (MBSHC) took place from 2 to 4 July 2024 in Constanta, Romania. Sixty-five registered participants from 18 Members of the MBSHC out of 24 (Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, France, Georgia, Greece, Italy, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Türkiye, Ukraine)¹, two Associate Members (United Kingdom and the United States of America) attended the event, together with four Observers (Germany², IC-ENC and PRIMAR, the two Regional ENC Coordinating Centres (RENC), the Mediterranean Scientific Commission (CIESM)), and stakeholders from industry (Esri, Fugro, Exail, Ocean Aero, Teledyne Caris and SevenCs). The IHO Secretariat was represented by Director Luigi Sinapi and Assistant Director Yves Guillam.

The Conference was preceded on 1 July, by successive working sessions led by the Chairs of the MBSHC Working Groups, aiming to finalize the recommendations and proposed actions to be presented at the plenary Conference for decision if appropriate.



Participants in session at the 24th Conference of the MBSHC – Figure 1

The Conference (see *Figure 1*) was chaired and opened by Ms Vinka Kolić Bubić, Director of the Hydrographic Institute of the Republic of Croatia (HHI). VAdm Mihai Panait, Chief of Romanian Naval Forces, honoured the participants with a welcome address stressing the pivotal coordination role played by this Commission in the area. The consequences of the war context were outlined by some critical new requirements such as the need to maintain specific corridors, free of mine threat, to ensure the safety of navigation of commercial shipping as well as up-to-date disaster response plans. Other serious concerns were shared on the possible consequences of the conflict regarding marine pollution. Director Sinapi in his opening speech thanked the host for the wonderful arrangements made for this Conference and highlighted the magnitude and complexity of *“important topics [to be discussed], which are technical in nature, as per the technical nature of the IHO, but can have an impact on decision-making level by Member States of the MBSHC”*.

¹ Apologies received from Algeria, Lebanon and IALA.

² Also as WENDWG Chair.

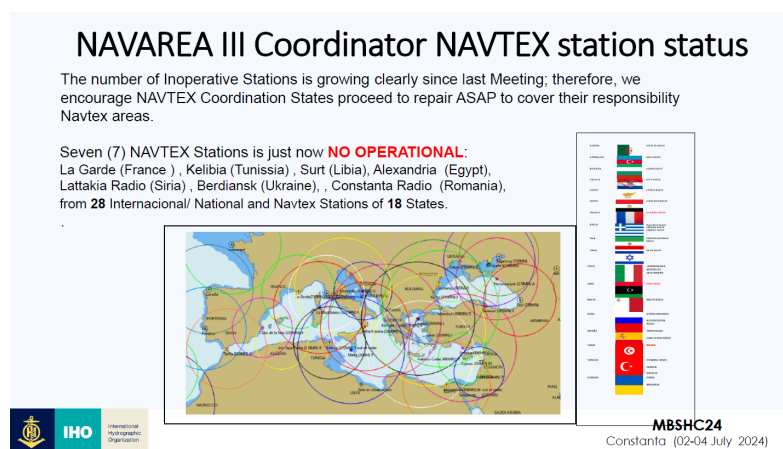
The meeting started, in accordance with the Statutes, by the election of the Vice-Chair, taking effect at the end of the Conference: France was elected by acclamation. It was followed by a very contentious phase: the approval of the agenda. The MBSHC Chair noted the statements made by Greece and Türkiye and finally decided not to accept the objection made by Greece, who claimed the introduction in the agenda of a vote for the approval of their proposed INT charts in the Aegean Sea, as previously announced in the MBSHC CL 02/2023. The MBSHC Chair justified her decision, in line with the MBSHC CL 12/2024 issued prior to the Conference.

The MBSHC approved the designation of Türkiye as new Region F ICCWG Coordinator. The MBSHC also agreed on the dual representation of the MBSHC in the WENDWG, by the Region F ICCWG Coordinator on one hand, for ENC's issues, and by the MBSHC S-1XX WG (France) for S-100 topics other than S-101 on the other hand. After lengthy discussions on the amendments proposed by the Region F ICCWG Coordinator following a consultation by Circular Letter, the TORs and ROPs of the Region ICCWG were finally approved.

Twenty national reports of very high quality were presented by Members and Associate Members, most of them underlining the important efforts and significant progress made to contribute, at the national level as a 1st step, to the S-100 Implementation Roadmap, providing examples of how the respective Hydrographic Offices have started – internally first and engaging with the most important national stakeholders secondly – with detailed and time lined roadmap to produce and implement the S-1xx products related to Phase 1.

Following up on a proposal from five nations of the Black Sea Working Group (BASWG) of the MBSHC, aiming to assign one permanent seat to BASWG Member States in the Council in the future, the Commission decided after fruitful discussions to reject the proposal and not to amend the Annex to the Statutes of the MBSHC for the allocation of seats to the Council. As for the evolution of the “hydrographic interest” criteria also used in the composition of the Council, the Commission invited the five Member States to submit a consolidated proposal to the Council by the 15th of July. Beforehand, the IHO Secretariat advised these Members to consider the Chapter 6 of the report of the Strategic Planning Working Group to the International Hydrographic Conference 2007³.

The IHO Secretariat presented the last developments of INTtoGIS III aiming to offer a platform to Member States and RHCs for planning the coordination of the coverage and production of S-100 based products and data services. The launch of the testing phase by Coordinators (July-August 2024) was announced. The Commission noted the intention of the United Kingdom to grid their current ENC coverage in the region. This is planned to be discussed at the Region F ICCWG level as a 1st step.



NAVTEX station status in NAVAREA III – Figure 2

³ Useful References in Doc. C4-02.3A.

Contentious issues were also raised on NAVTEX coverage in the Aegen Sea leading to additional statements by Greece and Türkiye, and Cyprus.

Türkiye, as Capacity Building (CB) Coordinator, made some suggestions on the possible future themes of the World Hydrography Day, which could be taken into consideration if appropriately shared with the IHO Secretariat before Council-8 for discussion.

The review of the decisions, actions and recommendations at the end of the Conference was delayed for more than 90 minutes due to discussions between Greece and the Chair of MBSHC as well as Türkiye and the Chair of MBSHC on an action captured in session by the Chair table, by which Greece had requested official advice from the IHO Secretariat on the Aegean Sea charting issues. The action was transferred to the list of recommendations as the best possible compromise. In fact, despite promising efforts on the implementation of S-100 by most of the Member States, the issues on INT paper charts schemes in the Aegean have remained unresolved for more than 15 years like ENC overlaps which will potentially jeopardise the regional coordination of the implementation of S-100.

At the end of the Conference, Romania - Captain Lucian Grigorescu, Director of DHM - took over the chairpersonship of the Commission. Noting that the next Conference is planned in 2026, the year of the 4th Session of the Assembly, the IHO Secretariat drew the attention on the dates of the Conference and on the need to launch the selection of the Members of the Commission applying for a seat at the Council, no later than in October 2025. Captain Lucian Grigorescu closed the Conference expressing his gratitude to all participants, his staff for the arrangements and Croatia as former Chair.



Participants in the 24th Conference of the MBSHC – Figure 3