



## INTRODUCTION

This report strongly focuses on security aspects, while also including developments of horizontal relevance.

The first article presents two maritime policy strategies published by the European Commission in early March, the EU Ports Strategy and the EU Maritime Industrial Strategy. The second article reports about the extension of operation ASPIDES, a European maritime security mission in the Red Sea, a topic which is debated at the highest political level given recent developments in the Middle East. The third article provides details about a new European Commission initiative on Ocean Observation. The report concludes with an article on the topic improving aerial surveillance, in particular against unwanted drone incursions.

## European Commission publishes Ports and Industrial Maritime Strategies

In early March, the European Commission published two important policy initiatives: a strategy on Ports and another one on the industrial maritime value chain.<sup>1</sup>

The [EU Ports Strategy](#)<sup>2</sup> focuses on increasing the competitiveness of EU ports, empowering them for the energy transition, supporting them in decarbonisation, making them secure and resilient, while ensuring sufficient financial support. The strategy proposes a few flagship actions to reach those objectives. When it comes to security aspects in ports, in particular drug trafficking, the European Commission announces in the strategy that it *“will propose an EU framework for background checks for port workers”*. Furthermore, public-private information exchange between customs and maritime logistics companies on drug trafficking and illicit trade are encouraged. The Strategy also recalls the EU’s Port State Control Directive, which provides for a system of targeted compliance spot checks of vessels calling to EU ports. On Port State Control, an important development also took place at international level: the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) reports about an updated data-exchange agreement with the Paris Memorandum of Understanding on Port State Control (Paris MoU). This is supposed to *“support harmonization of PSC activities worldwide and improve compliance monitoring by port States”*, according to the [IMO press release](#)<sup>3</sup>.

Alongside the Ports Strategy, the European Commission also published an [EU Industrial Maritime Strategy](#)<sup>4</sup>. The overall stated aim of this strategy is to *“boost jobs, innovation and the EU’s global leadership in shipbuilding and shipping”*. The strategy consists of three topical pillars and three horizontal priorities of relevance to all pillars. The topical pillars are (1) Build, equip and repair, (2) Transport and connect, (3) Secure and protect. The horizontal priorities are (1) Innovation, (2) Finance and investment, and (3) Skills and quality jobs. Regarding the content, the strategy among others includes wording on cyber-security, nuclear propulsion, mutual recognition, marine equipment and the EU’s work in IMO on GHG as well as the future of the EU ETS when it comes to shipping.

The strategies are not legally binding, but they provide a comprehensive overview of the European Commission’s view of the maritime and ports ecosystem in the EU and announce legislative priorities for the coming years.

## European Commission launches OceanEye

The European Commission in a [press release](#)<sup>5</sup> announced the launch of “OceanEye”, an EU-initiated Ocean observation project. Speaking at the [European Ocean Days](#)<sup>6</sup>, a recent conference organised by the

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<sup>1</sup> See European Commission press release:

[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_26\\_484](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_26_484)

<sup>2</sup> [https://transport.ec.europa.eu/document/download/8a1a9516-8efd-44ca-b308-4b3cafc59f38\\_en?filename=communication\\_on\\_EU\\_ports\\_strategy.pdf](https://transport.ec.europa.eu/document/download/8a1a9516-8efd-44ca-b308-4b3cafc59f38_en?filename=communication_on_EU_ports_strategy.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.imo.org/en/mediacentre/pages/whatsnew-2433.aspx?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.imo.org/en/mediacentre/pages/whatsnew-2433.aspx?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

<sup>4</sup> [https://transport.ec.europa.eu/document/download/2cda36ec-b5fc-4cc9-9091-a8014ba8177e\\_en?filename=communication\\_on\\_EU\\_industrial\\_maritime\\_strategy\\_3.pdf](https://transport.ec.europa.eu/document/download/2cda36ec-b5fc-4cc9-9091-a8014ba8177e_en?filename=communication_on_EU_industrial_maritime_strategy_3.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_26\\_507](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_26_507)

<sup>6</sup> [https://maritime-forum.ec.europa.eu/theme/governance/european-ocean-days\\_en](https://maritime-forum.ec.europa.eu/theme/governance/european-ocean-days_en)

European Commission, President Ursula von der Leyen described the project as “major initiative to strengthen the EU's leadership in ocean observation and unlock the full potential of our ocean.” Furthermore, the initiative should “advance scientific knowledge, boost the blue economy's competitiveness, enhance maritime security, and (...) protect the ocean's health.”

The initiative builds on the [European Digital Twin of the Ocean](#)<sup>7</sup>, a virtual replica of the ocean, which integrates data from satellites, sensors, and computer models and thus constitutes a knowledge base of the ocean for scientists, businesses and policy makers. Another pillar of the new ocean observation project is the [Copernicus' marine programme](#)<sup>8</sup>, which provides free and open marine data and services. The European Commission also sees this initiative as the basis for an International Alliance to reinforce and expand ocean monitoring and observation, which will support the [Global Ocean Observing System](#)<sup>9</sup>, sponsored by UNESCO, the UN Environment Programme, the World Meteorological Organisation and the International Science Council. UNESCO's [Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission](#)<sup>10</sup> will also be a central cooperation partner.

OceanEye will be adopted by the Commission later in 2026 and the objective is to have a fully operational European Ocean Observation System by 2030. A pledging event to gather contributions for the International Alliance will be organised in September. The European Commission also pledged to contribute EUR 50 million from its [Horizon Europe](#)<sup>11</sup> funding programme to the International Alliance for 2026-2027.

The initiative shows the European Commission's intention to strengthen Europe's ocean observation technology infrastructure, while supporting international efforts in ocean observation and protection.

## Drones: Antwerp Port builds up protection, Germany plans new rules

Germany and Belgium are implementing stringent military and legislative measures to protect critical infrastructure from the escalating threat of unauthorized drones.

In Germany, the public broadcaster ARD [reports](#)<sup>12</sup> that the national Parliament has passed an updated [law](#)<sup>13</sup> on aerial protection (*Luftsicherheitsgesetz*) to defend airports from drones, which officials warn pose a "hybrid threat" of sabotage and espionage. Even a single drone can paralyze an airport, forcing flight diversions and disrupting international supply chains. To combat this, the new law simplifies the deployment of the armed forces (*Bundeswehr*), allowing the Defense Ministry to authorize military assistance without prior coordination with the Interior Ministry. In extreme emergencies, soldiers are now permitted to shoot down drones to prevent severe accidents. Furthermore, the law imposes stricter penalties, including up to five years in prison for individuals—such as climate activists—who intentionally

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<sup>7</sup> [https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/eu-missions-horizon-europe/restore-our-ocean-and-waters/european-digital-twin-ocean\\_en](https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/eu-missions-horizon-europe/restore-our-ocean-and-waters/european-digital-twin-ocean_en)

<sup>8</sup> <https://marine.copernicus.eu/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://goosocean.org/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.ioc.unesco.org/en>

<sup>11</sup> [https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/horizon-europe\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/horizon-europe_en)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/innenpolitik/bundestag-beratung-luftsicherheitsgesetz-100.html>

<sup>13</sup> <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/21/032/2103252.pdf>

breach airport security zones and endanger civil aviation.

Meanwhile, Belgium, is, according to [news reports](#)<sup>14</sup>, fortifying the Port of Antwerp, a crucial logistical hub that houses a major kerosene pipeline to Marseille and facilitates American military supplies. Belgian Prime Minister Bart De Wever announced that the port will be shielded by the Norwegian NASAMS air defense system starting in 2027. While this system can effectively neutralize large unmanned aerial vehicles like Shahed drones, smaller drones navigating low between buildings remain difficult to detect. To address this vulnerability, the Belgian Defense Ministry is actively investing in specialized "anti-drone drones". These upgrades directly address the growing fears of port businesses, who reported sightings of unidentified drones over sensitive chemical plants last winter. Ultimately, Belgium plans to link these systems with the Netherlands to create a protective defense dome over the entire Benelux region.

The developments in Germany and Belgium show that EU countries see an increased need for building up and coordinating their defence and resilience against aerial threats from drones, in particular against the background of hybrid threats from Russia.

## Mandate of Operation ASPIDES extended

A Council [Decision](#)<sup>15</sup> that extends the mandate of [EUNAVFOR Operation ASPIDES](#)<sup>16</sup> until 27 February 2027, was published in the EU's Official Journal. ASPIDES is the EU's maritime security mission that was launched in February 2024 to protect ships under attack in the Red Sea and to reinforce maritime situational awareness.

Against the background of the escalation in the Middle East, there are reportedly informal discussions to adapt the mandate of the mission more substantially or to start a new mission, but these discussions have not yet reached a formal stage yet. The French President Emmanuel Macron on a recent visit to Cyprus in an official [speech](#)<sup>17</sup> floated the idea of an "ad-hoc mission" to "restore the freedom of navigation" in the Strait of Hormuz when the "right moment" is there. According to President Macron, the mission should have a purely defensive mandate, but his choice of words seems to indicate that the mission will not be launched as long as the open conflict between Israel and US on the one and Iran and its proxies on the other hand is still ongoing.

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.vrt.be/vrtnws/nl/2026/02/26/luchtafweergeschut-haven-antwerpen-bart-de-wever-2027/>

<sup>15</sup> [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L\\_202600439](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L_202600439)

<sup>16</sup> [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eunavfor-aspides\\_en?s=410381](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eunavfor-aspides_en?s=410381)

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.elysee.fr/front/pdf/elysee-module-26087-fr.pdf>