

Colloquy on September 19, 2025 in Saint Malo

"Europe and the Sea: The Role of Parliamentary Diplomacy"

1. We, former parliamentarians, reaffirm the relevant role of parliamentary diplomacy in international negotiations to protect ocean basins and seas, which are essential assets of humanity. Current and future challenges related to ocean basins and coastal areas are numerous and crucial to the global community's future. It is our duty to protect these ocean spaces against all powers that undermine the law of the sea.

Beyond traditional diplomacy, *parliamentary diplomacy* refers to the ways by which parliamentarians and parliaments at different levels conduct dialogues and act as intermediaries to help promote recommended actions. Parliamentary diplomacy is a valuable complement to governments' foreign policy and creates the necessary mechanism for monitoring supranational structures and organizations.

2. Ocean, seas, and coastal areas constitute an important part of global ecosystems. They cover over two-thirds of the Earth's surface and contain 97% of the planet's water resources. More than three billion people depend on marine and coastal resources for their livelihoods, and the ocean are essential to global food security and human health. They are also the main regulator of global climate and a major sink of greenhouse gases. They also harbour immense reservoirs of biodiversity.

The ocean and their marine resources are constantly threatened by degradation and destruction caused by human activities. This reduces their ability to provide necessary ecosystem services. Climate change, marine pollution, unsustainable exploitation of marine resources, and the destruction of marine and coastal habitats are among the most serious threats to the marine environment and human well-being.

Human well-being cannot be ensured without the protection and conservation of the terrestrial ecosystem. To preserve the quality of life that the ocean provides for humanity, good governance based on robust scientific data and adequate multilateral measures which are essential to guarantee a sustainable management of maritime resources and to reduce negative anthropogenic impacts on the marine environment.

3. Europe is already committed at regional and global commitments; it must further develop these commitments.

In Europe, given the threats and geopolitical developments, this issue is being addressed within the European Union, most recently with the draft Ocean Pact adopted by the Commission on June 5, 2025, but also, beyond that, by the member countries of the Council of Europe (the current 46 members) as part of commitments at the regional and global levels.

4. Coastal states that are members of the Council of Europe generally apply the following rules, mainly derived from the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS):

Territorial Sea (0–12 nautical miles / 22.2 km)

Maritime zone adjacent to a state's coast under full sovereignty, including the water column, seabed, and subsoil. The state has exclusive rights to exploit natural resources, while other vessels may transit under the right of innocent passage.

Contiguous Zone (12–24 nautical miles)

A zone where the coastal state does not have full sovereignty but may exercise customs and policing rights to prevent and punish infringements.

Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (12–200 nautical miles)

The coastal state has exclusive rights to exploit natural resources (living and non-living), including fisheries, oil, gas, and minerals, while other states retain freedom of navigation.

Continental Shelf (up to 350 nautical miles or more)

Underwater extension of a state's territory where it may exploit seabed and subsoil resources. Boundaries between neighbouring states must be agreed upon by mutual consent or through international judicial bodies, in accordance with international law.

High Seas (beyond EEZ)

Maritime spaces beyond national jurisdiction. Living resources are managed by regional fisheries organizations, while seabed mineral resources are governed by the International Seabed Authority (ISA). This "Area" is regarded as the common heritage of mankind.

Navigation in all these zones is regulated by the **International Maritime Organization (IMO)**, with states having assumed significant responsibilities for monitoring the implementation of international provisions as port or flag states.

5. Nevertheless, tensions and multiple points of conflict persist at the national jurisdictional level, for example, where unilateral challenges to established international legal frameworks, such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), have given rise to recurring disagreements, notably between Turkey, a non-party to UNCLOS, and Greece, which advocates the peaceful resolution of disputes based on international law, or between Russia and Ukraine (Black Sea and Sea of Azov) in the South China Sea, or even between France and Canada (St. Pierre and Miquelon).

Regarding the high seas, the issue of biodiversity protection appears to be consensual in Europe (BBNJ Agreement), while the exploitation of deep-sea mineral resources is the subject of much debate.

The removal of munitions contamination in the European seas remains important.

6. At the 3rd United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC 3), held in Nice from June 9–13, 2025, several agreements and commitments were made:

- Strong **political and financial shift** toward ocean protection (30% protection goal), launch of key treaties (plastics, BBNJ, subsidies)
- Creation of parliamentary coalitions, massive mobilization of funding;

But also for example :

- Strengthened multilateral ocean governance
- Goal of 30% protected terrestrial and marine areas by 2030

- Enhanced support for small island states and least-developed countries against climate impacts
- Commitment to a legally binding treaty on plastic pollution
- Launch of the *Nice Call*: 96 countries demanding an ambitious plastics treaty with five pillars – reduction, elimination, design, financing, adaptive mechanism

7. However, international opinion noted persistent flaws at this conference, notably the weakness of measures against trawling and the lack of concrete commitments from the EU on subsidies and the implementation of new MPAs (marine protected areas). **Above all**, the absence of the United States at the high level. Several major maritime powers have **not** ratified the BBNJ (High Seas) Agreement, essential for protecting international zones: China, India, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, Brazil, and South Africa. On the issue of the plastics treaty, which includes production caps, nations such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, as well as the United States, South Korea, and China were absent from the bloc of 95 signatories.

8. By strengthening cooperation with non-European countries and international organizations for global governance of ocean basins, Europe must play a leading role in international negotiations on maritime policies.

Parliamentary diplomacy has an important role to play in this - especially within the framework of the UN Ocean Decade 2021-2030, that pushes forward effective measures for protection, research and for truly sustainable use of the ocean and their resources.

9a. Europe can contribute to the protection of the ocean, while promoting a sustainable and resilient blue economy. In this context, priority actions should be strengthened :

9b. **Combat Marine Pollution and the Acidification of Ocean Basins and Seas**

More proactive, even coercive, policies on waste management and the promotion of a circular economy supported by industrial design and production processes would help reduce ocean pollution, particularly through the adoption of an international treaty to combat plastics (8 million tons are dumped into the ocean each year) and the implementation of regulations on chemical and microbiological pollution and excessive nutrient inputs (pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers, detergents, hydrocarbons, industrial chemicals, and wastewater, as well as industrial discharges).

9c. **Prioritize Sustainable Fishing and Sustainable Use of Marine Resource**

Establishing quotas and technical measures to limit fishing effort based on scientific data are effective ways to better preserve fish stocks and prevent overfishing.

Supporting sustainable fishing practices also requires an ecosystem-based approach, taking into account the impacts of fishing on habitats and ecosystems as a whole and recognizing the importance of traditional regional fishing, which often provides a means of subsistence for many local communities.

Developing the fight against illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing would complement existing measures. The involvement of all stakeholders is an essential condition for effective implementation.

9d. **Invest in Marine Research**, particularly by using artificial intelligence to better understand the environmental impacts of human activities and develop innovative technologies for the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources, as well as in desalination techniques, in order to become a global leader in this sector and by supporting businesses in these activities.

9e. **Strengthen actions between the scientific and political worlds and promoting cooperation between existing institutes** by supporting the development of the International Platform for Ocean Sustainability (IPOS), which provides solutions to politicians and researchers, and by promoting the creation of the United Nations University Ocean Institute.

9f. **Educate Young People** in schools to raise awareness about the role, importance, and protection of the sea.

9g. **Promote Renewable Marine Energy** to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. While offshore wind power appears attractive, subject to environmental impact studies, it requires avoiding disadvantages such as visual and noise pollution, which pose dangers to wildlife.

9h. **Understand the Tipping Points of Climate Change of ocean waters and basins leading to irreversible changes and mitigate their impacts**, such as acidification and sea-level rise.

The environment committee of the International Maritime Organisation has in April 2025 agreed a principal proposal to reduce the emission of greenhouse gas by the international shipping. The conference calls on IMO-member states to support this first UN-agreement for a global active sector in the General Council of October 2025.

9i. **Focus on the Arctic Ocean** ; it is home to diverse marine species in unique but extremely vulnerable ecosystems. These ecosystems play a vital role in regulating the global climate. The Arctic also contributes to the circulation of ocean currents, moving cold and warm waters around the globe. It is therefore urgent to protect the Arctic from the worst effects of climate change.

For example, the disappearance of the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC), an ocean current present in the North Atlantic and essential for regulating temperatures, would have serious consequences for the planet.

Growing geopolitical competition amplifies the strategic importance of the Arctic. The impacts of climate change also affect national security making defence and security cooperation in Northern Europe increasingly defined, operational, and binding. Closer cooperation must strengthen the region's political influence and room for manoeuvre.

9j. **Promote Nature-Based Solutions** and in particular the protection of "blue carbon" ecosystems (seagrasses, salt marshes, mangroves).

9k. **Improve cooperation to ensure Maritime Security**, including the fight against piracy, drug trafficking, and human trafficking and Russian or other actors disruptive activities against seabed infrastructure. The idea of an international maritime police force under UN control must be implemented and expanded as well as the suppression of scrap ships, including the so-called Russian shadow fleet.

We condemn the Russian attempts to destroy the nature and the environmental qualities of the Black Sea and ask to invest as quickly as possible in the redevelopment of this important sea.

It's important to considerate to establish a maritime police force.

9l-****To develop the initiative of green shipping, in order to encourage shipowners to invest in modern technologies and more respectful to the environment that participate in the efforts to decarbonize this sector and to reach the objectives of the reduction of green house gases imposed by European and international authorities.**

9m-**** Accelerate and implement policies to protect and enhance the historical and natural resources of the Mediterranean ecosystem, which for tens of thousands of years has connected Europe and three continents, peoples, cultures, and religions. The Mediterranean remains the heart of global trade and transportation, a migratory epicenter for millennia, and still the principal migratory crossroads of the boundless planet. Warming, acidification, and pollution in the small Mediterranean Sea are occurring at a faster and more intense rate than in the large ocean basins and require effective and urgent responses from both European countries and international organizations.**

9n-**** Focus attention and define timely, coordinated actions to slow the effects of global anthropogenic climate change and adapt to sea level rise along all European coasts; in particular, by 2100, tens of millions of European inhabitants of the Mediterranean coasts will be affected.**

10. International events highlight the importance of states' sovereign rights over the seabed and the important role of Europeans.

10a. The seabed is at the heart of humanity's ecological, geostrategic, and human challenges.

Today, the scope of sovereign rights over exploitation and protection is governed by international law, notably by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and related agreements, such as Sustainable Development Goal 14 "Conserve and sustainably use of the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development." These rights must be respected.

10b. While European states must manage and regulate the use of the seabed in accordance with national laws and European regulations, while respecting international obligations, they must cooperate to resolve potential conflicts regarding maritime boundaries, rights to seabed resources, and infrastructure security. Bilateral or multilateral agreements can and must clarify rights and responsibilities.

10c. In summary, each European state has sovereign rights over the seabed within its territorial waters and exclusive economic zone (EEZ). These rights must be respected within the framework of international law and environmental commitments.

With regard to the exploitation of mineral resources and security beyond national jurisdiction, European states must cooperate in establishing and implementing strict environmental and social rules, taking into account the precautionary principle. Rule-based reporting by the participating countries under the auspices of the United Nations is necessary here.

11. By asserting its rights and responsibilities under international law, Europe can strengthen its strategic autonomy and unity in the maritime domain, ensuring a balanced and rule-based approach in a context of increasing global competition.

The sea will thus become a fundamental element of European unity in face of the ambitions of certain other world powers.

According to the latest statistics of UNCTAD, maritime transport plays a crucial role in of the world trade, reaching more than 80% of the volume of the goods traded in the world. It plays a key role in managing a world's valuable network such as transporting raw materials or semi-finished products to production centres. Moreover, it guarantees the delivery of final products to consumers, contributing to a fluent international trade. These flows are primordial for the industry, economic growth and job creation.

12. In this context, parliamentary diplomacy plays an essential role, both within international bodies and at the national level, by relaying recommended actions.

Parliamentarians, **both former and current**, at various levels, contribute their experience and become partners in constructive dialogue, in order to make contributions, particularly in the context of the coming decade.

We propose the establishment of a parliamentary body representing citizens, approved by the UN bodies responsible for the ocean.

As such, the association may confer the title of ambassador to honour any person who has made a significant contribution to the protection of the ocean.

13. This document, adopted unanimously by the associations here present in Saint-Malo, is being sent for follow-up and action to the relevant international organizations, governments, parliaments, and press agencies of the 46 member countries of the Council of Europe.

PS : During the colloquy, Maroc ratified as 60th country the "International Treaty of the High Sea" of the U.N. ; this means that the treaty comes into effect.