

# GTMO 5+5 VTS/VTMIS Initiative

## Review of the Initiative and Future Lines to Be Explored

### Introduction of the GTMO 5+5 VTS/VTMIS Initiative

Enhancing the safety and security of transport, especially maritime transport, is one of the GTMO 5+5's six areas of cooperation, as defined by their protocol for cooperation (Tunis, 2007).

The initiative VTS<sup>1</sup>/VTMIS<sup>2</sup> is the result of the interest in improving maritime navigation safety and environmental protection at sea that has long been pursued by the GTMO 5+5. The initiative was conceived from the Statement of Conclusions of the Ministerial Conference (Algiers, March 2012) with two main objectives:

- To move towards equipping the Western Mediterranean coast with the necessary coastal vessel traffic services (VTS) to guarantee the safety of maritime navigation.
- To move towards achieving a Vessel Traffic Management and Information Service for the Western Mediterranean (WestMed VTMIS) that allows for cooperation between existing and future maritime traffic services by harmonizing procedures and promoting data exchange between the Western Mediterranean countries in order to improve the safety of maritime navigation and protect the marine environment.

### Review of the Steps Done

At the 2012 GTMO 5+5 Ministerial Conference in Algiers, the decision was made to develop an initiative to “create a coordinated VTS/VTMIS network” that would be submitted to the UfM for labelling. During the 2012-2014 period, the GTMO 5+5 experts and Technical Secretariat (CETMO) have made progress on this initiative.

The GTMO 5+5 Technical Secretariat contacted relevant international stakeholders concerned with maritime safety in the Mediterranean, namely EMSA, REMPEC and IALA, as well as the national authorities of the member countries responsible for these matters. It also participated in several meetings on the topic:

- The 10th Meeting of the Maritime Working Group of SafeMed III (Lisbon, Sept 2013).
- The 12th FEMIP Conference on the Mediterranean Blue Economy: Enhancing Marine and Maritime Cooperation (Athens, 18-19 April 2013).

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<sup>1</sup> Vessel traffic service(s).

<sup>2</sup> Vessel traffic management and information service(s).

In parallel, after working internally with GTMO 5+5 countries, the GTMO 5+5 Technical Secretariat published a Diagnostic Report on VTS/VTMIS to Improve Maritime Safety on the Western Mediterranean Coast in February 2014. It included a description of the VTS concept and related international conventions, concepts related to VTMIS, the coastal navigation services operating in Europe and Euro-Mediterranean cooperation on coastal navigation services, as well as a diagnosis of coastal navigation services, including their flaws. The Spanish Maritime Safety Agency provided CETMO with technical support with the revision of this Diagnostic Report.

## Lessons from the Diagnostic Report

With regard to the first objective of the initiative, i.e. “To move towards equipping the Western Mediterranean coast with the necessary coastal vessel traffic services (VTS) to guarantee the safety of maritime navigation”, the Diagnostic Report stated that:

- VTS are regulated by the IMO and specifically by the SOLAS Convention.
- They are established in geographic areas with a high degree of risk or a high density of maritime traffic and can be made mandatory within territorial waters.
- Determining whether a VTS is appropriate usually requires a formal assessment of navigation risk, as described in the IALA VTS Manual.
- VTS coverage on the southern coast of the Western Mediterranean is heterogeneous. At some points, objective facts suggest that coastal VTS are lacking and, at others, there are some gaps in terms of equipment, software, and operator training and certification.
- Coastal VTS usually rely on an automatic identification system (AIS). Therefore, guaranteeing AIS coverage of the entire Western Mediterranean coast is a prerequisite for establishing coastal VTS.

With regard to the second objective of the initiative, which is “To move towards achieving a Vessel Traffic Management and Information Service for the Western Mediterranean (WestMed VTMIS) that allows for cooperation between existing and future maritime traffic services and promoting data exchange between the Western Mediterranean countries”, and according to the Diagnostic Report the basic points to be worked on are as follows:

- Gathering and sharing AIS information among the Western Mediterranean countries.
- Enriching this AIS information with static information gathered from ports and information on maritime traffic gathered by port and coastal VTS and ship reporting systems (SRS) in the region.
- Cooperating on the investigation of incidents and accidents at sea and notifying other countries of any accidents or incidents suffered by a vessel along its route.

This Diagnostic Report was presented and validated at the GTMO 5+5 Experts Meeting in February 2014. The experts at the meeting also agreed on a set of actions designed to continue developing the VTS / VTMIS initiative. One initiative was the proposal to hold a specific Working Session on this matter to clearly define the initiative. This Working Session took place in Barcelona on 5 May 2014.

## Conception and Objectives of the Working Session

The general objectives of the Working Session were to:

- Determine the opportunity and feasibility, as well as the interest and engagement of GTMO 5+5 countries, of giving continuity to this initiative by sharing the knowledge and opinions of the international experts. HELCOM's experience setting up the system on the Copenhagen Declaration was used as a reference of best practice.
- Identify the requirements and potential obstacles related to achieving the objectives in this initiative:
  - Potential barriers to achieving AIS information exchange through connection to the ICG's MAREX server.
  - What is hindering the Western Mediterranean from sharing information on maritime navigation safety at regional level?
  - Would the GTMO 5+5 be interested in establishing a working sub-group of experts on maritime safety in order to develop the WestMed VTMIS action line?
  - Definition of minimum requirements in terms of communication between countries, standardization, and services and systems cooperation in order to ensure an acceptable level of maritime navigation safety (minimum / desired coordination level for the WestMed VTMIS).
- Determine the next activities to be undertaken and the outputs to be pursued under each of the two objectives for the next GTMO 5+5 programming period (2014-2016). Identify financing formulas.
  - What are the potential funding sources for the proposed activities? Is it appropriate and of interest for the GTMO 5+5 to submit any future projects that emerge from this initiative to the UfM?
- Define the fit of the GTMO 5+5 initiative with related initiatives taking place in the region.
  - How can this initiative be coordinated with other maritime navigation safety initiatives in place in the region? How can overlapping be avoided and synergies boosted?
  - Other initiatives:
    - Civil-military collaboration
    - SafeMed III Project and SafeSeaNet participation
    - Feasibility study on maritime cooperation in the Mediterranean Sea in the framework of the IMP-Med Project
    - The marine highway in process of being studied by the UfM

## Conclusions of the Working Session: Proposal of Next Steps

The first and main conclusion reached at the Working Session was that the governance of maritime safety in the region could be improved. This is due mainly to the fact that several initiatives exist but there is a lack of cooperation and coordination among them. The conclusion is that setting up the GTMO 5+5 initiative to Improve Maritime Safety on the Western Mediterranean Coast is pertinent and should be used to coordinate efforts.

Additionally and concerning the specific objectives of the initiative, two different approaches are needed. Since achieving the VTS objective is mainly related to infrastructure provision, the approach of the WestMed VTMIS objective involves interlinking and promoting cooperation in rendering maritime navigation safety services in accordance with commonly harmonized procedures.

### **The VTS Approach**

- A coastal VTS is lacking in the Tunisian waters of the Strait of Sicily. The Tunisian government needs financial backing to develop this VTS project. Funding through the European Union's Connecting Europe Facility should be explored.
- Coastal VTS may be lacking in Mauritanian waters of the Banc d'Arguin. Risk analysis should be undertaken before deciding on the need for VTS.
- Morocco, Algeria and Libya have developed or are developing specific projects to respond to the need for coastal VTS. Therefore, at present, they do not need additional infrastructure projects; they need to conclude the projects currently in progress.

### **The VTMIS Approach**

- The first thing to be ensured regarding the VTMIS approach is communication and cooperation at national level. The second thing is ensuring communication and cooperation at regional level. The exchange of information between neighbouring countries is now limited, except in the case of cooperation among EU Member States.
- One barrier to sharing AIS information between Maghreb countries is ownership of these data. Some data are held by the armed forces, whereas other information is in the hands of civil services and coordination at national level could be improved. The first step to ensure that AIS data could be shared at regional level is complete national coordination.
- Improvements to this coordination have clearly been in progress in recent years due to political commitment to deal with this situation.
- Participants agreed that the VTMIS component of this initiative is important to ensure that vessel tracking covers the entire Mediterranean.
- The roadmap for the WestMed VTMIS proposed by the representative of the Spanish Maritime Safety Agency was deemed appropriate by the participants. It is based on (i) gathering and sharing AIS information, (ii) enriching this AIS information with static information and (iii) cooperating on the investigation of incidents and accidents at sea and notifying other countries of any incidents and accidents.

### **Coordination with other initiatives**

- There are now many initiatives in place aimed at enhancing maritime navigation safety in the Mediterranean. These initiatives are rarely coordinated and rarely complement each other. Synergies between them are envisaged and of interest for the GTMO 5+5 countries.
- The national experts participating in the meeting and the international experts agreed that overlapping and fragmentation of the existing initiatives should be avoided and that the actions to be undertaken for the common interest of covering existing needs in the region in terms of maritime safety should be specified and undertaken.
- The SAFEMED project and EMSA involvement in Mediterranean cooperation both provide a clear framework for continuing the work to improve Mediterranean maritime safety. The MAREΣ server offers the possibility of flexible connections to selected countries.
- The Helcom cooperation platform is a best practice TO BE USED By the GTMO 5+5 initiative to improve maritime safety. It is especially relevant to the Mediterranean case because it started at a level of integration between countries that is the same as the current integration level of the Maghreb countries and because the Helcom cooperation platform improved as a consequence of the positive results achieved from the work done. This Baltic initiative began after an accident involving a serious oil spill. Mediterranean countries should be better at anticipating these potential natural disasters.
- The Maghreb countries expressed more interest in participating in the SafeSeaNet system, which currently manages maritime safety in the European Union, than in

creating their own system. Further steps should be taken to identify the gap preventing each GTMO 5+5 country from accessing the SafeSeaNet system. Political commitment to this objective is also needed.

- Although 5+5 Defence could not send a representative to the meeting, they expressed their interest in approaching the GTMO 5+5 WestMed VTMIS initiative. This collaboration could be explored after the Ministerial Conference in Portugal.
- Environmental protection of the Mediterranean should also be considered a priority and a relevant reason for working on the VTS / VTMIS initiative. A rapprochement to the IMP-Med project and UfM initiatives is therefore envisaged.

## General Conclusion

The results of the work done since 2012 on this GTMO 5+5 initiative to improve maritime safety and especially the conclusions of the Working Session on 5 May 2014 show that work should continue during the next period of GTMO 5+5 cooperation (2014-2016).

Work should be divided into two different approaches:

- Firstly, a cooperation to provide infrastructure to ensure that the needs of VTS services along the entire Western Mediterranean coast are met. Infrastructure approach.
- Then, interlinking and promoting cooperation in rendering maritime navigation safety services in accordance with commonly harmonized procedures. Horizontal approach.

In order to develop the second approach, countries agree on the suitability of exploring ways to set up a working group like the one established in the early Helcom project to work on increasing AIS information exchange and harmonizing operating procedures and technical solutions. This analysis should always take into account the need for coordination and should avoid overlapping with existing initiatives with similar objectives.

This working group would be composed by maritime navigation safety national experts, but it should remain open to the GTMO 5+5 experts' participation, due to the fact that in certain cases, the Administrations in charge of the activities of the 5+5 Dialogue are not the same as the Organisations or Agencies in charge of maritime safety issues. This voluntary participation would allow the Ministries of the GTMO 5+5 countries to be able to monitor, on a regular basis, the progress made by the 5+5 initiative regarding the VTS and VTMIS services for the Western Mediterranean.