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Copernicus Marine Service: freely-available datasets for the Maltese Marine and Maritime Sectors

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The *Copernicus Marine Service – An asset to the Maltese Blue Economy* Event took place at Esplora, Malta's Interactive Science Centre in Kalkara, on the afternoon of the 27th June. Considering Malta's active maritime industry and prospects with regards to the Blue Growth Agenda, this was a marine and maritime-focused session, which followed the well-attended Copernicus Training and Information Session. The afternoon session, organised by French experts in ocean forecasting, Mercator Océan, was targeted at Maltese experts, national and regional users of the Marine and Maritime domains, in the private, public, and scientific sectors. It aims to inform the over 100 registered participants on how continuous satellite images from space and related data may help us in furthering our understanding of marine and maritime challenges.

Mercator Océan, the French centre for analysis and forecasting of the oceans, is a privately-owned non-profit company funded by the five major French institutions involved in operational oceanography: CNRS, Ifremer, IRD, Météo-France and SHOM. Since 2014, Mercator Océan has been responsible for the implementation of the Copernicus Marine Environment Monitoring Service (CMEMS), delivering fully-open and freely-available data on the physical state and dynamics of the oceans in real time. The service delivers datasets on temperature, salinity, sea level, currents and winds, amongst others, and plays a crucial role in weather, climate, and seasonal forecasting. The observations and forecasts produced cover the global oceans, supporting various marine and maritime applications also within Maltese territorial waters.

During his intervention, Minister for Tourism Dr Konrad Mizzi said that: "The maritime sector is highly reliant on innovation, which should be encouraged and strived for through scientific research and product development. It is imperative to mention that further development of the Blue Economy requires innovation based on knowledge. Therefore, Member States are encouraged to contribute and benefit from the use of platforms, such as the EU Copernicus Marine service and Emodnet, to name a few."

In his welcome speech, Secretary for Financial Services, Digital Economy and Innovation Silvio Schembri, said that the Maltese Presidency of the Council of the EU has outlined the importance of an effective and timely

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implementation of a common and integrated Space Strategy for Europe. Schembri said that "Space solutions also play an important role in EU foreign policy, providing data and information to understand migration patterns, deliver an enhanced maritime security and border control, also supporting EU partner countries especially those in the Mediterranean".

Executive Chairman of the Malta Council for Science and Technology Dr Jeffrey Pullicino Orlando said "As Malta is a newcomer to the Space sector, we are at a stage in which we are prioritising awareness-raising of opportunities. The very first National Space Policy, published earlier this year, in fact asserts the importance of awareness-raising and capacity building measures."

During his opening speech, Mercator Océan CEO Pierre Bahurel mentioned that the "sea is an infinite resource for Malta, and Malta is a maritime nation for centuries of years. The Copernicus Marine Service is gearing up to meet Maltese experts and stakeholders of the Blue Economy. Our open, reliable, and free core service aims at being a major asset for Maltese downstream service providers. We share the same values and objectives: boosting Blue Growth and contributing to a Sustainable future for our oceans and seas."

Considering Malta's thriving Blue Economy, from cruise liners to aquaculture and fisheries, the relevance of such modules is indeed immediately relevant to the various marine and maritime stakeholders. The training course covers the four domains: maritime surveillance, security, protection and enforcement; maritime transport and port activities including cruise liners; coastal and marine environment and modelling of ocean dynamics; and water quality and marine resources.

A number of Maltese stakeholders within the marine and maritime sector already make good use of this wealth of freely-available information.

Notably, the University of Malta, which was involved in projects today considered as precursors to the CMEMS services, utilises such datasets for its meteo-marine forecasting models and delivers added-value products and services targeted at the local marine and coastal stakeholders. Additionally, the University also promotes the local uptake of CMEMS data, offering courses at Masters level that empower students in the scientific and professional access and use of CMEMS data resources.

The 'Copernicus Marine Service – An asset to the Maltese Blue Economy' training was organised by Mercator Océan, which have worked closely with the European Commission's Directorate General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, the Malta Council for Science and Technology and IRMCo Ltd, and ensured that the session was a successful continuation of the previous Copernicus events. Malta Marittima and the Malta Maritime Forum have also been instrumental in dissemination to the relevant stakeholders.

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