

## Europe Celebrates EU Maritime Day

*by Brenda Azzopardi*

The European Maritime Day was celebrated on May 20 - an occasion to highlight the important role the oceans and seas play in the everyday life of Europeans, as well as to increase awareness on how the marine sector provides for the other sectors of the economy. As a matter of fact, the European continent is a maritime continent, as it consists of 70 000 Km of coastline, while 22 of the EU's 27 Member States are coastal or island States.

This year, the European Commission teamed up with the Italian government for the organization of a conference marking this day. A number of exhibitions and workshops were also organised by various groups and NGOs from different EU Member States, including Malta. The conference focused on peripheral maritime regions and a number of issues related to the sea and to the EU maritime policy were debated. The maritime regions of the EU account for 40% of its GDP and of its population

Since 2004, the European Union has been working to involve all EU states in the shaping of its own maritime policy. This has enabled further development in Europe's maritime assets and Europe is now expected to tackle the spatial and territorial dimension and governance. Through a maritime policy of its own, the European Union is expected to be in a better position to help both land-based and maritime activities. These would include tourism, climate change, shipbuilding, environment and marine heritage and the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy.

Better governance is being proposed as the key role of the regions, especially in cross-border and transnational areas - which are the interfaces between the citizens and the economic and social stakeholders on the one hand and the EU institutions on the other. Europe's challenges, such as globalization, climate change, energy sustainability and environmental pressures on the coasts and the seas, do have a direct impact on the maritime sector. All these factors, when taken up by both regional and local authorities, can contribute towards shaping and implementing the future of Europe's maritime policy.

*Brenda Azzopardi is Information Executive at the Malta-EU Steering and Action Committee (MEUSAC).*