

2026 SYMPOSIUM: SPEAKERS' BIOS

OPENING & WELCOME

Andrei Alexandru, President of Romania's National Research Authority

Andrei Alexandru is the President of the National Research Authority, the specialised body of the central public administration, with legal personality, subordinated to the Romanian Ministry of Education and Research. He holds the position of Secretary of State, responsible for coordinating research, development, and innovation activities in Romania. He actively participates in high-level discussions and initiatives to improve Romania's research landscape, advocating transparency, ethical standards, and the development of innovative projects.



Fabio Fava, Advisor to the Italian Minister of Universities and Research

Fabio Fava is an Italian expert in industrial and environmental biotechnology and the circular bioeconomy. He currently serves as an Advisor to the Italian Minister of University and Research on European Research and Innovation, following a long academic career as a Full Professor at the University of Bologna and the author of over 220 scientific publications. He holds numerous national and EU-level leadership roles in bioeconomy policy, international research coordination, and strategic committees supporting innovation, sustainability, and biotechnology.



KEYNOTE SPEECH

Antonio Borriello, Scientific Research Officer, European Commission Joint Research Centre

Antonio Borriello is a scientist at the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission, where he contributes to the monitoring of the EU Blue Economy, drawing on his background in Statistics and Economics. He has previously worked in academia and with the New South Wales Government in Australia, as Associate Director of Data Science and Visualisation within the Department of Investments.



COOPERATION ACROSS SEA BASINS: A EUROPEAN APPROACH TO A SUSTAINABLE BLUE ECONOMY

Andreea Strachinescu, Head of Unit for Maritime Innovation, Marine Knowledge and Investment, DG MARE, European Commission

From her position as Head of Unit within the Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Andreea Strachinescu is responsible for developing and promoting strategic innovation of emerging marine and maritime technologies and solutions and ensuring broad dissemination of marine knowledge and research. The Unit drives innovation and provides policy input to Horizon Europe while leading the Mission “Restore Our Ocean and Waters.” It develops EU ocean observation and marine knowledge, supporting EMODNET and the Digital Twin of the Ocean, and shapes blue-economy investment strategies through BlueInvest. Ms Strachinescu previously headed New Energy Technologies and Innovation at the Directorate-General for Energy.



PANEL 1 - NAVIGATING UNCERTAINTY: POLICY, GEOPOLITICS AND THE BLACK SEA DIMENSION

Alexandru Buciui, Deputy Director Business Environment, Ministry of Economy, Digitalisation, Entrepreneurship and Tourism of Romania

Alexandru has experience in developing and coordinating public policies to increase economic productivity and competitiveness, as well as in supporting small and medium-sized enterprises. Throughout his career, he has contributed to the development and implementation of national and European programs and has been involved in projects aimed at supporting the business environment, analysing the impact of economic measures and institutional dialogue with public authorities. His activity focuses on improving the regulatory framework, reducing administrative barriers and supporting a predictable economic environment. He has a degree in economics and has academic training in finance and international economic relations.



Iryna Makarenko, Pollution Monitoring and Assessment Officer, Black Sea Commission

Working at the Permanent Secretariat of the Black Sea Commission since 2010, Iryna became Pollution Monitoring and Assessment Officer in 2014. Previously, she served as a diplomat at the Mission of Ukraine to the EU in Brussels, working on EU-Ukraine cooperation in environment, transport, space, research and education, and earlier held senior positions in the Ukrainian government. She holds a Master's in Environmental and Energy Law (KU Leuven) and certificates in Water Law, Environmental Diplomacy, and Regional Economics from universities in Dundee, Geneva, and Genoa.



Mihai Sebastian Chihai, Policy Analyst, European Policy Centre

Focuses on EU security and defence, maritime security, and EU–Middle East relations, contributing policy analysis, strategic convening, and stakeholder engagement with EU institutions, member states, and industry. His previous experience includes the German Marshall Fund, where he worked on transatlantic cooperation, NATO policy and U.S. foreign policy, and earlier the Secretariat-General of the European Commission.



PANEL 2 - FROM RESEARCH TO RIPPLE EFFECT: EARLY RESULTS FROM OUR PROJECTS

Mihai Datcu, Coordinator DIVE (Romania)

A leading expert in information theory, signal processing and AI for Earth observation. Serves as Full Professor and Director of UPB's Research Centre for Spatial Information, following roles at DLR, ParisTech, and CNAM. Recipient of the IEEE GRSS David Landgrebe Award and the Romanian Academy Prize, and a visiting professor worldwide. Recognised for pioneering work in big data, image analysis and quantum machine learning, and a member of the ESA Big Data from Space Working Group.



Alexander Micallef, Coordinator OCEAN-H2 (Malta)

Associate Professor specialising in maritime decarbonisation and renewable-energy integration. Leads research on offshore green hydrogen, HVDC transmission, shore-to-ship systems, port microgrids, and energy-storage-based grid flexibility. Former doctoral-course lecturer at Aalborg University's Centre for Research on Microgrids. Author of over 60 scientific papers, Associate Editor for IEEE Access and IET Smart Grids, Senior IEEE Member, CIGRE Member, and Secretary of the IEEE Malta Section.



Lena Bergström, Coordinator MSP4MORE (Sweden)

Marine ecologist specialising in coastal ecosystems, marine food webs, and ecosystem-based management. Associate Professor at SLU, where she leads the ecosystem analysis unit at the Institute of Coastal Research. Her research addresses human pressures, biodiversity impacts, environmental assessment tools, and governance applications. Active in expert groups within HELCOM and ICES.



Lionel Camus, Coordinator CliN-BluFeed (Norway)

Lionel leads digital-solutions R&D at Akvaplan-niva, developing technologies to digitalise ocean research and monitoring. Oversees autonomous underwater/surface vehicles equipped with advanced sensors and a cloud-based platform for data collection, contextualisation and visualisation, reducing reliance on research vessels. Has delivered digital applications for Oil & Gas, Aquaculture and Offshore Renewable Energy sectors.



Marta Martínez, Coordinator SEAFOODTURE (Spain)

Tenured Scientist specialising in multi-scale structural characterisation of food biomass and its techno-functional properties, advancing sustainable resource use in food systems. Extensive experience in valorising marine biomass into functional ingredients and bio-based packaging materials. Author of over 100 scientific publications, leader of multiple national and international projects, and former researcher at global institutions including the University of Illinois, Chalmers University, and ANSTO.



Alice Affatati, Coordinator MARVEL (Italy)

Project scientist and PhD candidate with expertise in marine bioacoustics, oceanography and marine biology. Conducted research in South Africa, Namibia, Germany, Spain and Canada on underwater noise impacts on marine megafauna. Held fellowships at leading institutions, contributed to UN initiatives on Arctic underwater noise, led international research projects, supervised graduate students, and currently studies acoustic behavioural responses of megafauna to noise.



INSPIRATIONAL TALK

Bilge Durgut, ECOP, Middle East Technical University

BSc and MSc in Molecular Biology and Genetics at Middle East Technical University, developing a background in molecular ecology and population genetics through comparative studies on anthropogenically fragmented habitats. Current PhD candidate at METU – Institute of Marine Sciences, her research focuses on eDNA metabarcoding and environmental genomics to investigate how rapidly changing marine ecosystems, shaped by both climatic and anthropogenic pressures, drive spatial and temporal biodiversity patterns in the Black Sea and Arctic Ocean. She has participated in research cruises totalling more than 60 days in the Black Sea and the Arctic Ocean.



PANEL 3 - THE MARKET UPTAKE CHALLENGE: ENGAGING INDUSTRY AND FINANCE

Peer Fietzek, Senior Business Development Manager, Kongsberg Discovery

Peer Fietzek works at Kongsberg Discovery with a focus on innovative applications for quantitative acoustic sensors and comprehensive digital ocean data solutions. He is a convinced advocate for science-industry collaboration to mature the Ocean Enterprise, and supports research projects and community activities through work in advisory boards/groups and technical committees. After graduating in Physics, he has been spending his entire career in the marine sector, working for a research institute, a start-up, an SME, and a global corporation.



Ingeborg Frøysnes, Special Advisor Scale-ups and AI, Innovation Norway

Based in Brussels, Ingeborg assists Norwegian businesses in finding funding opportunities, competence and networks within the EU ecosystem and innovation programmes. She closely follows EU policy design for startups and scaleups, as well as initiatives related to finance and investments. In addition, she follows tech developments, particularly AI. Ingeborg has previously worked as Special Adviser for policy and digitalisation at the Norwegian Financial Sector Union. She has also served as a Political Adviser at Tech Norway and as the COO of the Norwegian AI startup Anzyz Technologies.



Christelle Sapata, Senior Manager, PwC

Christelle is a Senior Manager with over 15 years of experience. She is specialised in applied economics, with a focus on access to innovation finance. Over the past years, she has played a key role in promoting investment in the blue economy through her work with the BlueInvest Platform and the EIB, where she has contributed to better quantification of current market and funding gaps and to mapping the European Blue Economy finance landscape. Prior to joining PwC, she was an associate professor and researcher at Aix-Marseille University.



PANEL 4 – BEYOND THE HORIZON: SHAPING GLOBAL IMPACT TOGETHER

Oriana Romano, Head of Unit, Water Governance, Blue Economy and Circular Economy, OECD

Head of Unit at the OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities, she leads work on water governance, the blue and circular economy, urban policies and sustainable development. She launched the OECD programmes on the Circular Economy in Cities and the Blue Economy in Cities and Regions, supporting place-based strategies for sustainable growth. She has coordinated major policy dialogues and multi-stakeholder platforms, with expertise in sustainable resource use and multi-level governance. Before joining the OECD in 2013, she lectured and conducted research in environmental economics in the UK and Italy. She holds a PhD in Institutions, Economics and Law of Public Services.



Raffaele Mancini, Director of the UN Ocean Decade Collaborative Centre for the Sustainable Ocean Economy

Raffaele has twenty-five years of professional experience at the international level in the conservation and sustainable development of ecosystems, biodiversity, and natural resource. He has worked on marine and maritime issues with major national, EU, and regional organisations, including the Italian Ministry for the Environment, the European Commission, the Union for the Mediterranean, UNEP/MAP Regional Activity Centres and WWF. His career includes leading roles in promoting the sustainability, competitiveness, and resilience of enterprises operating along blue economy value chains. He is currently the Director of the newly established UNESCO-IOC Ocean Decade Collaborative Centre.



INSPIRATIONAL TALK

Adrian Stanica, Director General of GeoEcoMar

Adrian Stănică has been the Director General of the National Institute of Marine Geology and Geoecology in Romania – GeoEcoMar since 2016, where he was Scientific Director between 2008 and 2016. His main expertise is in coastal dynamics and natural resource management, and he holds a PhD in geology from the University of Bucharest. He has coordinated several projects, including the DANUBIUS-RI ESFRI project, the HORIZON 2020 DANUBIUS preparatory phase project and the HORIZON 2020 SUST-BLACK project.



CONCLUDING ROUNDTABLE: FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES AND LOOKING AHEAD

Wiebke Pankauke, Deputy Head of Unit Ocean, Seas and Waters, DG RTD, European Commission

Wiebke Pankauke is Head of Unit within the Healthy Planet Directorate of the Directorate-General Research and Innovation. Prior to that, she also worked as Deputy Head of Unit for Future Urban and Mobility Systems in the same DG.



Peter Haugan, Policy Director, Institute of Marine Research of Norway; Chair of JPI Oceans

Professor Peter Haugan is the Policy Director at the Norwegian Institute of Marine Research (IMR). He previously served as Chair of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO and as Lead Expert for the High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy, which convenes 18 heads of state and government. He is also Professor of Oceanography at the University of Bergen in Norway. He brings decades of experience in ocean science and governance at the highest international level, and has recently been elected as Chair of JPI Oceans.



Viorel Vulturescu, Director at National Authority for Research, Romania

Viorel is a senior expert in research, development and innovation (RDI) policies, with over 25 years of experience in European affairs, international cooperation, and programme management. He currently serves as Director of the European Affairs and International Relations Directorate within the Romanian public authority responsible for research and innovation, where he coordinates the European and international dimensions of national RDI policies, including Romania's engagement with the OECD Committee on Science and Technology Policy. He is also the Vice-Chair of the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership's General Assembly.



WRAP-UP & NEXT STEPS

Eva Falleth, Executive Director Sustainable Development, Research Council of Norway & Chair of the Partnership's General Assembly

Eva Irene Falleth has been since January 2025 the elected Chair of the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership General Assembly, its decision-making body. She holds the position of Executive Director for the Division for Sustainable Development at the Research Council of Norway (RCN). She is a professor in Urban and Regional Planning at the Norwegian University of Life Science (NMBU) and holds a PhD in Urban and Regional Planning and a master's degree in Land Use.



Margherita Cappelletto, Coordinator of the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership, Italian Ministry of Universities and Research

Margherita Cappelletto has been seconded since 2022 to the Italian Ministry of Universities and Research to coordinate the European Partnership on Sustainable Blue Economy and serves as co-chair of its Steering Committee. She is a Senior Technologist at the Department of Earth System Science and Environmental Technologies of the National Research Council of Italy, with a background in Astronomy and Astrophysics and a Master's in Science Communication. Her work focuses on the science–policy interface, including international cooperation and projects on marine and maritime research and innovation.

