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A POLICY AGENDA FOR CPLP OCEAN COOPERATION: CAN LUSOPHONE STATES TURN MARITIME SPACE INTO INFLUENCE?

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This article analyses the maritime capabilities of the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP)'s member states, and the conditions under which geography and maritime jurisdiction can be translated into strategic influence. It proposes practical mechanisms of collaboration to increase CPLP's capabilities in ocean governance.

At the opening of the 7th Lisbon Conference on 8 October 2026, President António José Seguro said that Portugal should build alliances and defend collective interests.[1] Portugal's influence could become a greater maritime power if it can turn geographical position, legal rights, institutional relationships and diplomatic networks into practical leverage.

Later that day, at a colloquium marking thirty years of the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP), he called for frank discussion among members and said he would like to see strong, joint action on the oceans.[2] He described the Lusophone space as a priority of Portuguese foreign policy, because Portugal will sit on the United Nations Security Council from January 2027.[3]

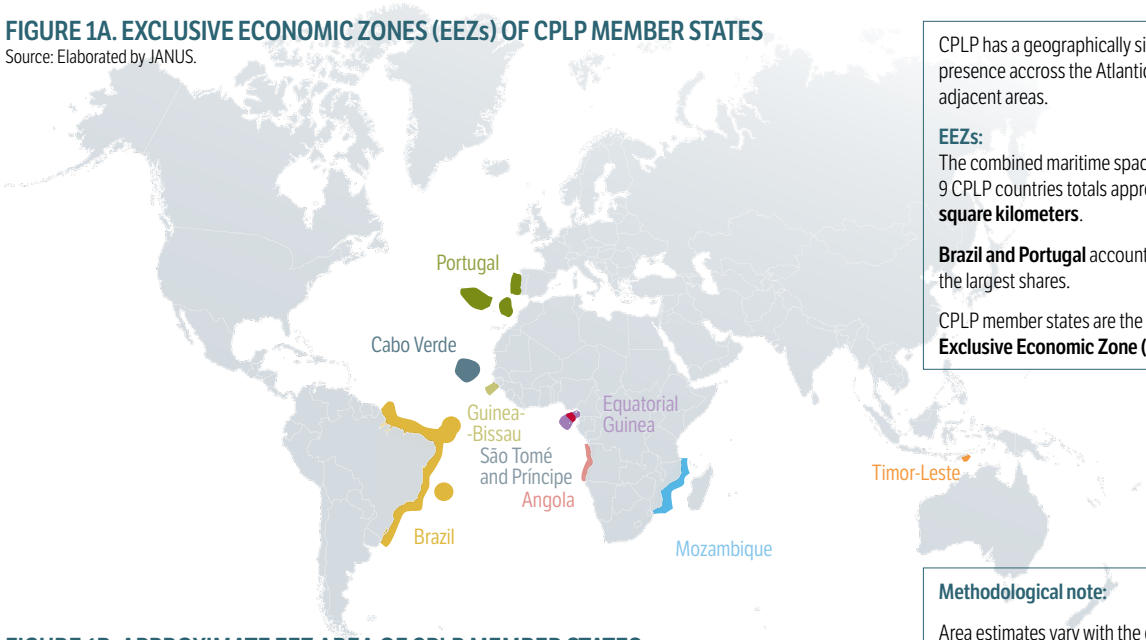
The CPLP Strategic Cooperation Plan for the Ocean 2026–2030 (PECO) had recently entered into force (8 June 2026).[4] CPLP aspires to promote practical collaboration through political consultation, professional networks, technical exchanges, research partnerships and coordinated agenda. This article asks: "When does maritime jurisdiction become strategic influence?" This question is answered through policy analysis and evaluation of CPLP's marine potential.

Lusophone maritime geography

The nine CPLP member states possess approximately 7.9 million km² of exclusive economic zone (EEZ). This gives the CPLP a geographically significant maritime presence across the Atlantic, Indian Ocean and adjacent seas.[5]

Portugal's maritime space is among the largest in Europe. In 2009 Portugal submitted its claim to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS), seeking recognition of an extended continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles.[6] If the outer limits proposed by Portugal are supported through the CLCS process, Portugal would exercise sovereign rights

FIGURE 1A. EXCLUSIVE ECONOMIC ZONES (EEZs) OF CPLP MEMBER STATES
Source: Elaborated by JANUS.



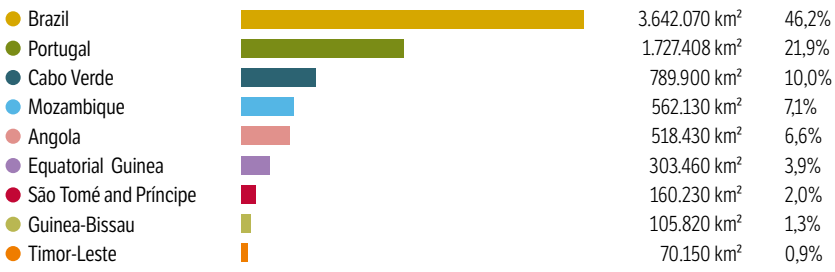
CPLP has a geographically significan maritime presence accross the Atlantic, Indian Ocean and adjacent areas.

EEZs:
The combined maritime space of the 9 CPLP countries totals approximately **7.88 million square kilometers**.

Brazil and Portugal account for the largest shares.

CPLP member states are the **4th largest combined Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the world.**

FIGURE 1B. APPROXIMATE EEZ AREA OF CPLP MEMBER STATES
Source: VLIZ (Marine Regions v12) geodatabase.



Methodological note:

Area estimates vary with the dataset, projection and calculation method used.

These data correspond to the actual computed surfaces (in km²) for the main 200-nautical-mile national EEZ boundaries, and reflect the best available official martime-boundary data, as presented in the Marine Regions Maritime Boundaries Geodatabase: World EEZ (v12), Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ), Released October 2023.

EEZ boundaries may change with new data, bilateral agreements and future legal decisions.

over the exploration and exploitation of natural resources in the seabed and subsoil of the relevant continental-shelf area.[7] Extended continental shelf may hold minerals of potential economic interest.[8]

CPLP maritime capabilities

Maritime capacity encompasses the ability to monitor national waters; to enforce fisheries, security and environmental rules; to chart and study the ocean; to maintain ports, cables and energy infrastructure; to plan and regulate maritime space; and, where relevant, to process marine and mineral resources domestically.

The CPLP members possess extensive maritime geography, yet unequal maritime capabilities. Some can patrol, map, regulate and develop their waters; others lack the vessels, data, infrastructure or institutions to do more than assert jurisdiction on paper. The decisive question is: which CPLP members can convert jurisdiction into practical influence? Table 1 summarises the main opportunities and constraints of five largest member states that illustrate this variation.

The legal and institutional framework

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is the foundation of ocean governance: it defines maritime zones, the continental shelf and the freedoms of the high seas.[9] The Agreement on Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement) extends this framework for beyond national jurisdiction, and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework adds a wider political commitment to protecting biodiversity. The challenge for CPLP lies in implementation. Members differ sharply in ability to carry environmental assessments, monitor fisheries, enforce maritime rules, share data and coordinate policy across minis-

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tries and borders.

The BBNJ Agreement creates a framework for marine genetic resources and benefit-sharing, area-based management tools, environmental impact assessments, and capacity-building and technology transfer beyond national jurisdiction.[10] [11]

The Kunming-Montreal framework, meanwhile, commits governments to protecting at least 30 per cent of land, inland waters, coastal areas and oceans by 2030.[12]

European level

At European level, Directive 2014/89/EU requires member states to plan and review competing uses of sea space.[13] Portugal's Law 17/2014 sets the framework for maritime spatial planning and management, and Decree-Law 38/2015 transposed the Directive.[14] Portugal adopted its Situation Plan for the mainland and Madeira in 2019 and the Azores plan in 2024.[15] The European Ocean Pact (2025) broadens the agenda, linking spatial planning to restoration, blue economy, coastal communities, research, maritime security and ocean diplomacy.[16] [17]

PECO as a cooperation framework

PECO 2026–2030 identifies eight areas for cooperation: governance, fisheries and food security, maritime security, science, conservation, blue-economy development, international cooperation, and ocean literacy. It establishes a political and institutional framework through which member states may coordinate existing rights, responsibilities, and policy priorities.

While it creates a space for collaboration, PECO does not provide funding, enforcement, tools or the political leverage to convert shared priorities into results. Governments should be prepared to commit resources, accept mutual accountability, and embed agreed priorities in domestic institutions and administrative routines.

From strategy to capability

Not all CPLP states can maintain continuous awareness across their entire exclusive economic zones.[18] Surveillance aircraft and vessels, research ships, hydrographic expertise and industrial processing capacity are concentrated in only a few members of the community. Scientific cooperation exists, but is often organised project by project rather than through a durable institution.[19]

While we explore possible mechanisms of collaboration, indicators could show whether cooperation brings results: the extent of maritime-surveillance coverage; the volume and accessibility of shared scientific data; and the share of economic value retained within participating states:

1. Launch a CPLP maritime-awareness pilot.

   Portugal, Brazil, Angola and Cabo Verde hold the four largest exclusive economic zones within the community possess its most developed naval and coast-guard capabilities. They could appoint national maritime focal points and select one priority zone or corridor for a twelve-month pilot within PECO's security axis, without requiring agreement from every member state.

   The first phase would test a common incident-reporting template, procedures for sharing unclassified vessel and fisheries-monitoring information,

TABLE 1. MARITIME OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS IN SELECTED CPLP STATES
Source: Author's assessment.

State	Main maritime opportunity	Main constraint	Relevant cooperation area
Portugal	Atlantic location, EU access, research and diplomatic capacity	Limited scale as a standalone power	Data, cables, ocean diplomacy
Brazil	Maritime scale, resources, industrial base	Domestic political and regulatory variation	Science, industry, South Atlantic governance
Angola	Hydrocarbons, minerals, Atlantic coastline	Governance, infrastructure and value-retention constraints	Minerals, ports, surveillance
Cabo Verde	Strategic Atlantic position and blue-economy profile	Resource and enforcement constraints	Fisheries monitoring, ocean science
Mozambique	Indian Ocean access and energy potential	Security and infrastructure pressures	LNG, ports, maritime security

TABLE 2. OPERATIONAL DESIGN OF THE FOUR MECHANISMS (author's proposal)
Source: Author's proposal.

	1. Maritime Awareness Pilot	2. Science and Data Platform	3. Minerals and Blue-Economy Protocol	4. Security Council Preparation
Lead institution	National maritime focal points; convenor to be agreed	Designated national ocean-science institutions	Ministries or agencies hosting each pilot value chain	Portuguese Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Participating states	Portugal, Brazil, Angola, Cabo Verde	Open to all members; initial core to be agreed	States hosting the chosen value chains	Portugal, consulting willing CPLP members
Legal or institutional basis	PECO security axis; voluntary memorandum, no new treaty	PECO science axis; BBNJ capacity-building provisions; UN Decade of Ocean Science	PECO blue-economy axis; national law; voluntary protocol	Informal diplomatic consultation; no common position required
First-year activity	Twelve-month pilot in one priority zone; common reporting template; quarterly meetings	Dataset inventory; common metadata standards; one pilot dataset	Selection criteria; two or three pilot value chains; value-retention baseline	Briefing note on the Council's likely maritime agenda; consultation channel
Funding route	National in-kind contributions; external funding to be identified	Research, BBNJ and Decade-linked funding, to be identified	Development finance and private partners, to be identified	Existing diplomatic resources
Safeguards	Unclassified data only; agreed sharing and release rules	Data-sharing agreement; attribution and benefit-sharing rules	Contract transparency; environmental and social impact assessment	Consultation without commitment; confidentiality where needed
Measurable output	Alerts exchanged; response times; share of area covered	Datasets deposited; users; joint publications	Share of processing or service revenue retained locally; contracts published	Consultations held; briefing notes issued
Political risk	Sovereignty sensitivities; uneven contributions	Ownership disputes; funding discontinuity	Domestic opposition; dependence on external partners	Perceived instrumentalisation; divergent positions

and a quarterly operational meeting. Its results could be measured by: the number of alerts exchanged, the speed of response, and the proportion of the chosen area covered by participating monitoring systems.

2. Create a shared science and data platform.

   Joint research cruises, academic mobility and an open repository for oceanographic, biological and mineral-resource data would give CPLP states a stronger foundation for participating in BBNJ assessments and maritime spatial planning. Connecting the platform to the UN Decade of Ocean Science could also improve its chances of attracting funding.

   The first year should create an inventory of existing datasets, agreement on common metadata standards, and the production of one shared pilot dataset.

3. Test a selective minerals and blue-economy protocol.

   CPLP could focus on two or three pilot value chains (e.g. lithium or copper processing involving Angola or Brazil; offshore-wind components or port decarbonisation with European partners; common standards for aquaculture). The objective would be: transparent contracts, credible environmental safeguards, and a larger share of processing or service revenue retained locally.

4. Prepare diplomatically for Portugal's Security Council term.

   Before maritime and energy questions reach the Security Council (piracy, cable sabotage, climate-related disputes or sanctions affecting energy trade) it could consult CPLP partners and arrive with a clear understanding of how proposed measures would affect their interests.

   In the first year, this could take the form of a concise briefing note on the Council's likely maritime agenda, together with a standing consultation channel between foreign-ministry and maritime-affairs focal points.

Conclusion

To stay relevant in global ocean governance CPLP members should act together in practical ways: improving surveillance, strengthening scientific capacity, retaining more value within the blue economy, and enabling more effective diplomatic coordination.

Portugal's 2027–2028 UN Security Council term and the expected European Ocean Act in 2027 create an opportunity for sharing CPLP's expertise experience in governing large, unevenly resourced maritime spaces. That opportunity will depend on whether member states can demonstrate, by the end of 2028, that at least one of the four mechanisms proposed here (maritime awareness, a shared data platform, a selective minerals or blue-economy protocol, or structured consultation ahead of Security Council debates) has moved from design into operation.

CPLP's experience with Portuguese-speaking African states in the Gulf of Guinea, including cooperation within the Yaoundé Architecture, gives it direct experience with piracy, illicit trafficking, illegal fishing, search and rescue, and coastal surveillance. ●

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Notes

[1] António José Seguro, 2026a.
[2] António José Seguro, 2026b and Diário de Notícias, 9 October 2026,
[3] United Nations General Assembly, election of non-permanent members of the Security Council (3 June 2026), electing Portugal (together with Austria, Kyrgyzstan, Trinidad and Tobago and Zimbabwe) for the term 1 January 2027–31 December 2028.
[4] CPLP, 2026 and Diário de Notícias, 9 June 2026.
[5] VLIZ Maritime Boundaries Geodatabase values (MarineRegions.org); CPLP Directorate for Economic Affairs (reported by Lusa, May 2024) although the exact aggregate depends on the maritime-boundary dataset and method of calculation used.
[6] United Nations, 2009.
[7] United Nations, 1982.
[8] EMEPC, s.d.
[9] United Nations, 1982. UNCLOS (n 8), arts 56, 76, 77 and 87, and Part XII.
[10] United Nations, 2023.
[11] United Nations, 2025; and the Decreto n.º 7/2025, 9 May, Diário da República n.º 89/2025, Série I (approving the Agreement for Portugal).
[12] United Nations, 2022 Target 3.
[13] European Unions, 2014, arts.º 4–6 and 12.
[14] Portuguese Republic/Government of Portugal, 2014, 2015. See also European Maritime Spatial Planning Platform, "Portugal" (confirming transposition of Directive 2014/89/EU through these instruments).
[15] Portuguese Republic/Government of Portugal, 2024. The plan was prepared under the lead of the Azores Regional Government (Direção Regional de Políticas Marítimas) and regionally approved by a Resolution of the Council of Ministers n.º 77-A/2024, 5 july 2024.
[16] European Union/ European Commission, 2025.
[17] Calado H et al, 2024, analyses the implementation of Directive 2014/89/EU and remaining operational gaps in the Portuguese MSP system.
[18] Author's assessment based on publicly available capability indicators, including: number and type of offshore patrol vessels and coast-guard cutters (Portuguese Navy / Marinha and Autoridade Marítima Nacional; Brazilian Navy and Brazilian Coast Guard; Angolan Navy; Cabo Verde National Coast Guard); coverage of national vessel-monitoring systems (VMS) and AIS; access to satellite imagery and maritime domain awareness platforms; and published naval and coast-guard personnel and budget figures. Comparative overviews can be drawn from the International Institute for Strategic Studies, The Military Balance (latest edition) and national defence white papers or budget documents (Portugal, Brazil, Angola, Cabo Verde).
[19] Author's assessment. Scientific and technical cooperation within the CPLP has largely taken the form of discrete projects and capacity-building activities rather than a standing joint institution. See, for example, CPLP programme records and the outcomes of successive Meetings of Ministers of Maritime Affairs; the PECO-CPLP 2026–2030 itself (section on science and knowledge); and bilateral or multilateral projects funded under EU, FAO or UN Decade of Ocean Science initiatives involving two or more CPLP members.

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