

PRESS RELEASE

10 July 2019

Portuguese President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa visits EMSA

Today, EMSA Executive Director Ms Maja Markovčić Kostelac welcomed to the agency His Excellency President of the Portuguese Republic, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa. The visit follows an invitation made in May at the close of European Maritime Day when the Portuguese President made an impromptu tour of the ‘Live By The Sea’ exhibition on Praça Europa. Today’s visit offered the opportunity for a more in-depth look at EMSA and its role in the European maritime sector. It also gave the Portuguese President the chance to exchange views with Ms Markovčić Kostelac who took up her position in January of this year.

“It is always a pleasure to welcome a head of state to EMSA, and particularly when it is the head of our host state” said Ms Markovčić Kostelac. “We work closely with the Portuguese maritime authorities and I am keen to strengthen our local connections even further.”

During the visit, the President saw how the agency contributes to maritime awareness for many different user communities in the Maritime Support Services centre, where the agency’s maritime information applications are displayed on a large video wall. Through these applications, authorities working in the maritime domain get reliable, tailored information about what is happening at sea, in real time.

EMSA’s emergency pollution response services were also highlighted, using the example of the Grande America which sank in the Bay of Biscay in March 2019. During this incident, EMSA was able to support the French authorities in several ways. Through the satellite-based CleanSeaNet service, an oil spill was detected and its evolution monitored over the following days. Then, two of the agency’s oil spill response vessels (the VN Partisan and Ria de Vigo) were deployed to assist in recovering the oil using specialised equipment (sweeping arm, boom, skimmer, radar detection system, etc.). And, finally, each of the vessels had on board a remotely piloted aircraft system (RPAS - quadcopter), adding a flexible means of more easily monitoring the situation.

In Portugal, oil pollution response exercises involving EMSA are held annually, and in May of this year the EU civil protection exercise ‘Cascade 19’ saw again EMSA’s response assets deployed under the coordination of the Portuguese national maritime authority. These assets included a fully equipped oil pollution response vessel, together with an RPAS quadcopter and satellite images to detect a simulated oil spill.

Portugal remains a very active user of EMSA’s services and has been one of the first member states to request EMSA’s RPAS services for the purposes of maritime surveillance. For this, EMSA provided support to several Portuguese authorities including the Navy, the Air Force and the Guarda Nacional Republicana (GNR), among others.

The visit to the agency concluded with a group photo and the opportunity for EMSA staff to meet briefly with President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa.