

OPINION&LETTERS

Making Pardo proud, 50 years on...



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Pardo, who? This is the reaction most youngsters would have to one of Malta's most eminent sons on the international scene, the diplomat and scholar who 50 years ago, on November 1, 1967, delivered his landmark speech to the 22nd session of the United Nations General Assembly. But his legacy certainly lives on, and not exclusively in the form of the commemorative plaque and bust gracing one of the entrances to the University of Malta.

Arvid Pardo extended the 'common heritage of mankind' principle to the marine domain (since to date the principle had solely been applied to the protection of cultural heritage in the case of armed conflict and in non-proliferation of nuclear weapons treaties), asserting in his famous electrifying speech that the seabed should be considered to be the common heritage of mankind.

This compelling principle holds that components of the natural or cultural realm which are of fundamental importance should be preserved for posterity, since we have been assigned their stewardship by future generations. The same incisive principle has been invoked, for example, by Unesco to advocate for the designation of World Heritage Sites.

Pardo's speech set in motion more than he would have bargained for: a 15-year-long process culminating – after interminable negotiations – in 1982 with the completion of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and its coming into force in 1994. To date, 167 countries, and the European Union have adhered to UNCLOS.

Fifty years down the line, Malta stands once again at an important juncture in terms of ocean governance, ocean literacy and the marine and maritime realms in general, poised to play a seminal role on the international scene as in Pardo's time.

Over the space of one week (October 4 to 10), Malta will in fact host thousands of delegates hailing from the EU, North America, Asia, Africa and beyond, within the framework of three back-to-back high-profile meetings on our shores. These include a meeting being held on October 4 by NORA (the Nordic Atlantic Cooperation Council) on the development of the blue bioeconomy on small island states, the Our Ocean conference behind held by the EU Commission on October 5 and 6, and the 5th EMSEA (Ocean literacy) conference behind organised by the University of Malta between October 7 and 10.

Malta also hosts the HQ of the International Ocean Institute (IOI), which has been instrumental, through its founder Elisabeth Mann Borgese, in promoting ocean governance on a global and regional scale. Each year, the IOI Malta Training Course hosts 20 international participants.

The build-up to the looming bonanza of discussion has been equally impressive. For instance, within the ambit of Malta's EU presidency, we observed a windfall of pivotal regional and international meetings on the islands addressing the complex challenge of espousing Blue Growth with sustainability. Among the meetings which immediately spring to mind are the one held on civil protection maritime challenges (January 19), on the Union for the Mediterranean (March 7), a stakeholders' meeting on maritime safety (March 28), a ministerial meeting on fisheries (March 29), the Blue Med meeting (April 19-20), a meeting



Europe's seas are currently being assessed more than ever for their blue potential, as Blue Growth gains greater traction throughout the continent. Right: Fifty years on since Arvid Pardo's landmark speech at the UN General Assembly, all eyes are once again on Malta to lead the way in the discussion on the future management of our ocean.



The 5th EMSEA conference is being held in Malta between this week, an unparalleled opportunity to promote ocean literacy on the islands.



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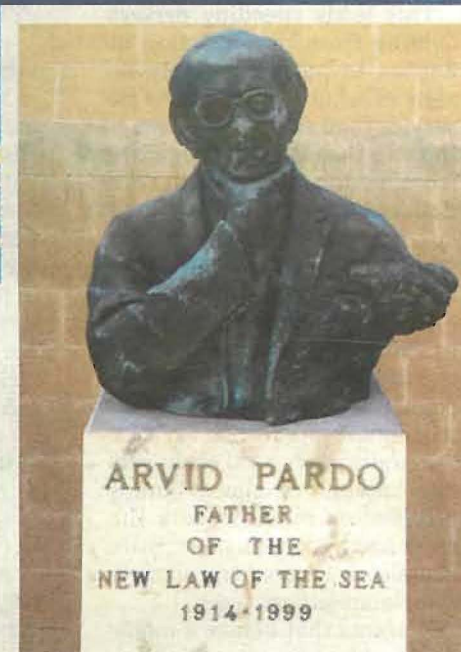
on MPA management (March 31), an MSP meeting (June 15-16) and a Copernicus satellite services meeting on June 26. This list is obviously not exhaustive since it does not include the various Environment and Fisheries Councils held in Brussels during the same time span.

Ricocheting back to the upcoming meetings, the Our Ocean conference will play out in the form of two parallel meetings – the Ministerial meeting and the Youth Leadership Summit. The latter meeting features over 100 committed young people hailing from all over the world and willing to brainstorm and to take commitments about safeguarding our oceans. Further details about this summit can be consulted at ourocean2017.org

The EMSEA (European Marine Science Educators Association) conference is an unparalleled opportunity to draw the lime-light to ocean literacy on these islands. The conference will kick off with a teachers' training seminar being held at the Malta National Aquarium, during which the 40 or so registered local teachers will be trained by ocean literacy practitioners hailing from the US, the UK and even locally, on how to stimulate their pupils about ocean literacy through the props they find directly in the field.

Europe's seas are currently being assessed more than ever for their blue potential, as Blue Growth gains greater traction throughout the continent. We are plumbing our seas to greater depths in search of elusive minerals, cures, genetic resources, energy sources and a plethora of other as yet untapped assets. In the race to unlock more and more of the ocean's secrets, ocean literacy assumes a more compelling role, in an attempt to revise the paradigm of human impacts on our ocean so far.

In fact, the narrative of the human exploitation of the ocean so far has seen us first exert deleterious impacts on the ocean environment, only to become aware of the



same impacts and to resort to ocean literacy to generate awareness at a successive stage.

The challenge now is to anticipate things; to resort to the precautionary approach when venturing into uncharted grounds in our ocean by highlighting potential impacts of our actions before these actually happen, through 'foresight'.

For us to reach this stage, governments and institutions must invest heavily in ocean literacy to ensure a more responsible Blue Growth. It is imperative for potential investors to have a grounding in ocean literacy principles, paralleling the considerable success that we are having with introducing ocean literacy concepts within school curricula and initiatives across Europe. Ocean Literacy is thus crucial to achieving a more sustainable and responsible Blue Growth.

We are gearing up to the International Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, designated from 2021 till 2030 by the UN last June in New York at the Ocean Conference. The considerable number of abstracts submitted for the EMSEA Malta conference is ample testimony to the profile that EMSEA has managed to achieve since its establishment a decade ago and to the status that Ocean Literacy has acquired across the European continent and beyond.

More information can be gleaned from: <https://www.um.edu.mt/events/emsea2017>.