

Pantier Report

Austria in the Maritime Century

Jeremy Stöhs, Paul Trautendorfer

Nº09 | May 2026

ACIPSS

Media owner, editor and publisher

Austrian Center for Intelligence, Propaganda and Security Studies (ACIPSS)
Universitätsstraße 15/A1, 8010 Graz, Austria
office@acipss.org
www.acipss.org

Editorial processing

Jeremy Stöhs
Paul Schliefssteiner
Stefan Auer

Layout und Cover

Alexander J. Pflieger
Coverfoto: Thomas Horig / Ocean Image Bank, free to use, <https://www.theoceanagency.org/ocean-image-bank/coastal>.

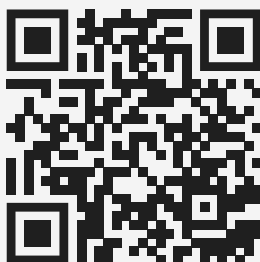
ISSN (Print): 2791-5050
ISSN (Online): 2791-5069

With the kind support of:

UNIVERSITÄT GRAZ
UNIVERSITY OF GRAZ



Pantier Reports can be downloaded as a PDF directly from the ACIPSS website:



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)

Editorial policy

The Pantier Reports provide precise and fact-based strategic analyses with concrete actionable recommendations on current hot topics and challenges, primarily in the areas of intelligence, security studies and propaganda research. They are aimed at decision-makers and those responsible in politics, education, research, business and an interested specialist audience. The Pantier Reports and their contents are independent of political parties, institutions and interest groups.

Die Pantier Reports liefern präzise und faktenbasierte strategische Analysen mit konkret umsetzbaren Handlungsempfehlungen zu aktuell brisanten Themen und Herausforderungen, primär aus den Bereichen Nachrichtendienste, Sicherheitsstudien und Propagandaforschung. Sie richten sich an Entscheidungsträgerinnen und Entscheidungsträger und Verantwortliche in Politik, Bildung, Forschung, Wirtschaft und ein interessiertes Fachpublikum. Die Pantier Reports und ihre Inhalte sind unabhängig von politischen Parteien, Institutionen und Interessengruppen.

Legal disclaimer

All opinions expressed are those of the individual authors, and not necessarily those of the editors or of ACIPSS. Despite intensive efforts and careful processing, no responsibility is taken for the correctness of this data or information. Any liability of ACIPSS, the editors or the authors is excluded. All photographs, images, graphics and drawings etc. used (except in cases where otherwise noted) are supplied by the authors, who are, as it is explicitly stated in the guidelines for authors, ultimately responsible for adhering to copyright laws and, if necessary, the acquisition of reproduction rights. In the event of any copyright or reproduction right infringements, the owners of said rights have to contact the individual author(s) directly.

Die Beiträge geben die Meinungen der Verfasserinnen und Verfasser, aber nicht zwingend jene der Redaktion oder von ACIPSS wieder. Trotz intensiver Bemühungen und sorgfältiger Bearbeitung erfolgen alle Angaben und Informationen ohne Gewähr. Haftungen von ACIPSS, der Redaktion oder der Autorinnen und Autoren sind ausdrücklich ausgeschlossen. Die verwendeten Fotos, Bilder, Grafiken und Zeichnungen etc. wurden – außer in jenen Fällen, in denen es anders vermerkt ist – von den Autorinnen und Autoren geliefert, die laut Autorenrichtlinien ausdrücklich für die Beachtung und gegebenenfalls den Erwerb der notwendigen Bild- bzw. Reproduktionsrechte verantwortlich zeichnen. Bei allfälligen Verstößen gegen die Urheber- oder Werknutzungsrechte haben sich deren Inhaber direkt an die Autoren zu wenden.



Austria in the Maritime Century

May 2026,

Jeremy Stöhs, Paul Trautendorfer

Summary

Although Austria is a landlocked state, it is highly dependent on maritime developments. The country's prosperity ultimately rests on free and stable trade at sea and access to marine resources. Geopolitical tensions – ranging from the strategic competition between Europe, China, Russia, and the United States to regional crises, conflicts, and hybrid attacks – are threatening the rules-based order across the world's oceans. Despite having no coastline, Austria must define its interests in the maritime domain and translate them into actionable policy, all the while ensuring economic viability and ecological sustainability. A national maritime agenda, closer cooperation within the European Union and the United Nations, as well as the involvement of domestic actors from industry, academia, and civil society are key to reducing dependencies and risks and strengthening Austria's ability to act in this maritime century.

In a nutshell:

- Austria's prosperity and security are closely linked to the maritime domain. The growing importance of the oceans calls for forward-looking action.
- Austria must not remain a passive observer as maritime security and international law are undermined but should engage actively as a maritime actor.
- Austria should use its unique position to strengthen its role in protecting the global maritime commons.



Maritime security as a guarantee for Austria's security and prosperity

“Without maritime security, there can be no global security,” UN Secretary-General António Guterres stated before the UN Security Council in May 2025.¹ He called on the international community to address three key areas with determination: respecting international law, addressing the root causes of maritime insecurity, and building partnerships at all levels. This call is all the more urgent as the maritime domain continues to be affected by both traditional and emerging threats – ranging from interstate conflicts, piracy, and organized crime to cyberattacks on ports, the sabotage of undersea cables, and the illegal exploitation of marine resources. The oceans, which constitute a global common, are now being drawn ever more deeply into geopolitical rivalries. Consequently, we are witnessing a re-militarization of the seas and rising insecurity along global sea lines of communication.²

Maritime security, as political scientist Christian Bueger reminds us, encompasses far more than naval operations or trade-related issues. It encompasses economic, ecological, legal, and human dimensions.³ However, neither the United Nations nor other actors have developed sustained and systematic efforts to address these issues globally.

These developments are highly relevant for landlocked countries such as Austria. Every state's society and economy today are highly dependent on secure maritime trade routes, resilient maritime infrastructure, the protection of the global order at sea, and the sustainable use of marine resources. Austria is therefore not merely a bystander that is indirectly affected by what goes on at sea, but forms part of the maritime security landscape – despite not having a coastline of its own.

Austria's vulnerability

Economic dimension

Over 90 percent of global trade in goods is transported by sea. Austria's import and export flows are largely channeled through seaports such as Trieste, Koper, Hamburg, and Rotterdam.⁴ In addition, the Danube provides a direct connection to the Black Sea, while the Rhine-Main-Danube Canal links Austria to the North Sea. These transport routes and transshipment hubs are crucial for trade and connect the mountainous, landlocked country to overseas markets. Critical imports such as crude oil and liquefied gas, industrial components, agricultural raw materials, and consumer goods enter the country via these routes. Export goods – a key pillar of the Austrian economy – including machinery and vehicles, electrical equipment, chemical products, and food are likewise shipped around the world through these ports.

The strategic importance of these maritime lifelines is often underestimated. Supply disruptions, rising freight costs, or the loss of key maritime trade routes have immediate effects on industrial production, energy supply and consumer prices in Austria. The COVID-19 pandemic, the accident-related blockage of the Suez Canal in 2021, and the partial closure of the Strait of Hormuz in February 2026, demonstrated how rapidly global supply chains can be destabilized, thereby jeopardizing domestic businesses and the supply of essential goods to the population.⁵

Importantly, this dependence goes far beyond the physical trade of goods. Submarine cables, which carry the majority of international data traffic, as well as offshore energy and supply chain infrastructure (including offshore wind farms and pipelines) form the lifelines of a highly interconnected society. Disruptions or acts of sabotage have immediate consequences for industrial production, financial systems, energy supply and consumer prices. In recent years, incidents affecting digital underwater infrastructure across Europe's maritime approaches have become a frequent occurrence. Many of these incidents are considered hybrid attacks by hostile actors.⁶

Contrary to popular belief, Austria is also economically active in the maritime sector, often as a supplier and technology partner in areas such as offshore energy, communications and information management, and marine equipment. Consequently, even without its own coastline, Austria is part of global maritime value chains and has a direct interest in safe, stable, and rules-based order at sea.

Security policy dimension

The Armed Forces' yearly *Risk Assessment Austria (Risikobild)* points to a geopolitical "ring of fire" surrounding Europe – stretching from the Black Sea through the eastern Mediterranean to the Strait of Hormuz and the Indo-Pacific.⁷ Tensions in these areas impact Austria's supply chains and economy within days. Blockades of sea routes (such as the Strait of Hormuz), sabotage of undersea cables, or attacks on port infrastructure quickly lead to rising consumer prices, declining exports, and economic downturn.⁹

For Austria, this means that security policy considerations must not end at the country's borders. As a member of the European Union, Austria is not only part of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP),¹⁰ but also operates within the context of the EU's Maritime Security Strategy (EUMSS). These frameworks call for the protection of sea lanes, critical maritime infrastructure, and the rules-based order at sea.¹¹ The European Ocean Pact, presented in 2025, further reinforces this integrated approach by connecting maritime security with five additional core priorities, including ocean health, the sustainable blue economy, coastal and island communities, research and innovation, and EU ocean diplomacy and international governance.¹² The concomitant Ocean Act, which is expected in 2027, makes clear that even without a coastline, Austria must become a more active player in ocean affairs. It can thereby draw from its expertise, personnel, and long-standing diplomatic experience. Moreover, maritime security is currently receiving increased attention in the UN Security Council and at the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR). This further unlines the relevance of the maritime domain in global security.¹³

For Austria, this means that security policy considerations must not end at the country's borders. As a member of the European Union, Austria is not only part of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP),¹⁰ but also operates within the context of the EU's Maritime Security Strategy (EUMSS). These frameworks call for the protection of sea lanes, critical maritime infrastructure, and the rules-based order at sea.¹¹ The European Ocean Pact, presented in 2025, further reinforces this integrated approach by connecting maritime security with five additional core priorities, including ocean health, the sustainable blue economy, coastal and island communities, research and innovation, and EU ocean diplomacy and international governance.¹² The concomitant Ocean Act, which is expected in 2027, makes clear that even without a coastline, Austria must become a more active player in ocean affairs. It can thereby draw from its expertise, personnel, and long-standing diplomatic experience. Moreover, maritime security is currently receiving increased attention in the UN Security Council and at the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR). This further unlines the relevance of the maritime domain in global security.¹³

Ecological dimension

The oceans constitute a global common: they regulate the climate, influence weather systems, and absorb more than a quarter of human-made CO₂ emissions. Nonetheless, they ensure food security for billions of people and harbor unique biodiversity. Austria is directly affected by climate change; the health of the oceans is therefore also a matter of national concern. As a riparian state of the Danube, Austria bears responsibility for reducing ecological pressures on the Black Sea. Through international and European agreements, as well as national legislation, the Republic is closely integrated into global efforts to protect the oceans. Ongoing negoti-

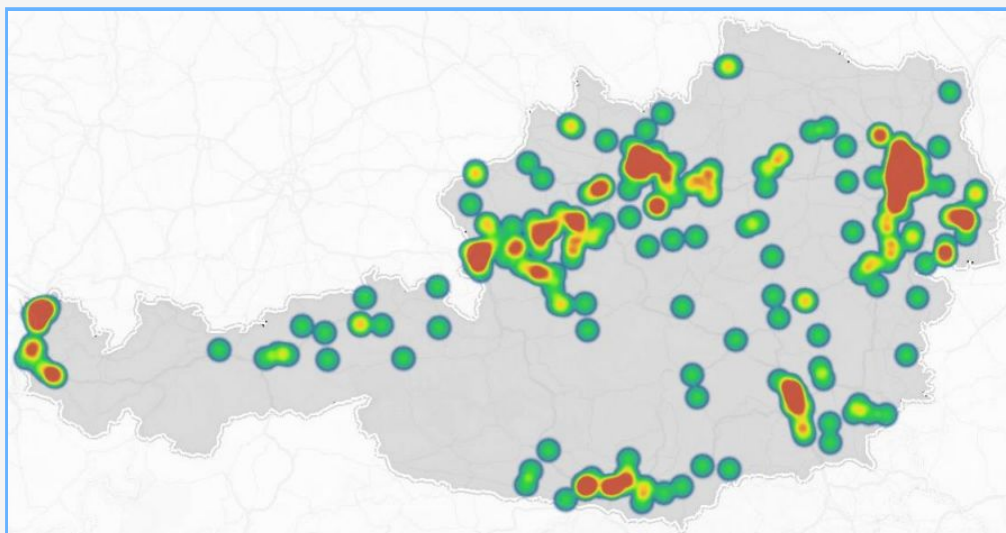


Fig. 1: Heat map of maritime companies in Austria.⁸

ations, in particular the new Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Agreement and the planned UN Plastic Convention, require active engagement to advance environmental protection and sustainability objectives for the marine environment.¹⁴

Austria's role and potential

Political and diplomatic role

Austria's profile as a mediator is less visible today than it was during the Cold War. At the same time, Austria's track-record in the areas of arms control (e.g. nuclear weapons and autonomous systems) and space policy demonstrate that in an environment that hosts numerous international organizations and has sufficient domestic expertise, proactive and sustained networking can help forge alliances and build thematic ecosystems linking diplomacy, science, and industry. As a host of international negotiations, Austria can benefit from a "maritime turn" in multiple ways, including enhanced visibility, increased know-how, and expanding networks.

Vienna can draw on a historically established role in maritime affairs. This tradition dates back to the Congress of Vienna, when Austria, under Klemens von Metternich, contributed to commissions addressing the abolition of the slave trade and piracy. In later decades, Austria played a formative role in representing the perspective of landlocked states during negotiations on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.¹⁵ This tradition continues today through established expertise in maritime law within the Foreign Ministry, as well as a broad base of ocean-related knowledge across the country. Moreover, it is reflected in current efforts to strengthen the perspective of landlocked states in the BBNJ Agreement,¹⁶ proactive engagement in the International Whaling Commission (IWC),¹⁷ a ban on the import and trade of shark products¹⁸ and support for a precautionary pause on deep-sea mining.¹⁹ Vienna is also home to numerous international organizations addressing maritime-related issues, including a delegation of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) focused on combating maritime crime. Relevant expertise is further concentrated at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA), and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO). Closer coordination with neighboring landlocked states, such as Switzerland, which has its own maritime strategy since 2023,²⁰ could further strengthen the landlocked-states perspective and feed it more effectively into the processes of the European Ocean Pact and the proposed Ocean Union.

Security policy contributions

Even without commanding maritime forces, Austria contributes to maritime security in a meaningful way: E.g. by de-

ploying personnel to EU naval missions (the Austrian Armed Forces are currently participating in EUNAVFOR ASPIDES in the Red Sea and in Operation IRINI in the Mediterranean Sea), but also by providing specialized expertise on underwater munitions, crisis management, and logistics, as well as by supporting the development of maritime situational awareness. The latter could be linked ideally to the Austrian Armed Forces' current satellite program. In addition, Austria could seek to fill specific positions within EU and UN bodies in order to contribute its expertise more systematically.



Fig. 2: Beate Meinl-Reisinger, Federal Minister for European and International Affairs, during a visit to the headquarters of the EU naval mission "Operation IRINI".²¹

Austria's candidacy for the UN Security Council for the 2027–28 term offers an ideal opportunity to place maritime security firmly on the agenda and to further consolidate the country's profile as an agenda-setter within the UN's First Committee on Disarmament and International Security. One possibility would be to convene a meeting in Vienna, together with the UNODC Global Maritime Crime Programme, aimed at improving coordination across the currently fragmented governance landscape involving UNODC, the International Maritime Organization (IMO), and other UN actors. Austria could also propose a UN resolution (potentially in cooperation with current Security Council members Greece, Panama and Somalia) calling for an annual report on maritime security by the Secretary-General.

At the European level, the publication of the European Ocean Pact likewise presents an opportunity to build on existing policy frameworks and, with relatively little effort, to strengthen Austria's positioning on maritime security within the EU. Austria's pioneering role among landlocked states could, for instance, be reinforced through a "Landlocked States Briefing on Maritime Security" organized by the Austrian representation in Brussels. This would demonstrate how landlocked states can contribute to EU flagship initiatives: from the protection of critical maritime sea lines and infrastructure to strengthening European naval operations and global partnerships to technological advancement in security and defense, and enhanced cooperation between coast guards, navies and maritime border management authorities.

Technological and scientific contributions

Austria showcases robust technological and scientific expertise in the field of maritime security. Companies such as Frequentis (mission-critical communication and information systems), Scotty (secure communications), Schiebel (unmanned systems), SEA.AI (AI-supported navigation), and Subdron (underwater inspection) provide key building blocks for safe shipping, port operations, and the protection of critical maritime infrastructure.

The Austrian Institute of Technology (AIT) is involved in European maritime security research projects, while at the University of Vienna a research group focuses on ocean governance. In addition, Austria displays a surprisingly substantial level of civil society engagement in maritime security, marine research, and ocean conservation NGOs.

This potential could be further leveraged through targeted coordination, for example via an *Oceans Hub Austria* that visibly connects industry, public authorities, research institutions, and NGOs, while anchoring the security policy think-tank landscape more firmly in ocean affairs.²² Through additional targeted funding to foster international research cooperation between Austrian universities and companies and potential partners abroad, Austria could further strengthen its international profile as a maritime knowledge hub and open up export and pilot opportunities for domestic technologies.

In this vein, ACIPSS, the University of Graz, and their partners are building on this momentum through a multi-year research project entitled “Dependent but Oblivious? Austria’s Maritime Role in the 21st Century”. They demonstrate that platforms such as the Austrian Maritime Conference, in November 2025, can provide new forums with international reach to strengthen exchange on maritime affairs between policymakers, academia, industry, and civil society.²³

Recommendations

- National maritime agenda:** Define strategic maritime objectives at federal government level and across key ministries; establish an interministerial coordination mechanism; integrate maritime security into the National Security Strategy.
- Networking & public awareness:** Establish *Ocean Hub Austria* as a networking and coordination platform (politics–industry–research–civil society); systematically develop research cooperation with foreign institutes and corporate partnerships in the maritime sector; integrate maritime topics into education and research programs; support specialist conferences and NGOs.
- Resilience of critical supply chains and infrastructure:** Strengthen links to existing EU early-warning systems; diversify sources of supply and transport routes; contribute Austrian expertise on legacy underwater munitions to clearance efforts foreseen under the European Ocean Pact.



Fig. 3. The Austrian Maritime Conference provides a new forum for discussion on Austria’s role in the maritime twenty-first century.

- Capabilities & operational contributions:** Strengthen Austria’s personnel and qualitative contributions to EU NAVFOR ASPIDES and Operation IRINI; pursue targeted appointments within the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA), IMO & UNODC; align Austrian Armed Forces satellite projects with maritime situational awareness requirements, including integration into European information platforms; embed a maritime security track in education and professional training.
- EU processes from a landlocked states perspective:** Organize a *Landlocked States Briefing on Maritime Security* in Brussels and strengthen the role of landlocked states in negotiations on the European Ocean Act.
- UN & Vienna diplomacy:** Establish a *Vienna Dialogue on Maritime Security* together with UNODC; introduce a resolution in the UN General Assembly calling for an annual report by the UN Secretary-General on maritime security; ratify the BBNJ Agreement and actively contribute to its implementation; strengthen engagement with the International Seabed Authority (ISA) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO) with regard to marine protection.

1 United Nations (2025). *Security Council Press Statement on Maritime Security*. UN Press Release SC/16065. <https://press.un.org/en/2025/sc16065.doc.htm> (accessed on 20 October 2025).

2 Bueger, C. / Edmunds, T. / Stockbruegger, J. (2024): *Securing the Seas: A Comprehensive Assessment of Global Maritime Security*, UNIDIR.

3 Bueger, C. (2015): *What is Maritime Security?*, in: *Marine Policy*, Vol. 53, 159–164.

4 Austrian Parliament (2025): *Dossier EU & Internationales zum Thema Maritime kritische Infrastruktur*. https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/dossiers-eu-internationales/Maritime-kritische-Infrastruktur_BF.pdf

5 In the case of the Ever Given, which ran aground in the Suez Canal, the total damage to the global economy is estimated at up to several billion euros. Greco Services (2021): *A World Loss Event and Its Far-Reaching Consequences: Ever Given.*; Austrian Institute of Economic

- Research – WIFO (2021): *Verzögerungen und starke Preissteigerungen im Containerfrachtverkehr – Bedeutung für den österreichischen Außenhandel*, WIFO Research Briefs Nr. 7/2021.
- 6 Stöhs, J. (2025): Sabotageakte im Meer: „Russland und China versuchen, uns auszutesten.“ Interview with Johannes Arends. *Kurier*, 18 January 2025. <https://kurier.at/politik/ausland/nato-sabotage-unterseekabel-pipeline-hybrider-krieg-russland-china-schattenflotte/402999101> (abgerufen am 20. Oktober 2025).
- 7 Austrian Federal Ministry of Defence (2024): *Risikobild 2024 – Österreichisches Bundesheer*, Vienna.
- 8 Schneider, H. W. et al. (2021) *Maritime Wirtschaft Österreich: Kurstudie*, im Auftrag der Außenwirtschaft Austria, 12.
- 9 Oesterreichische Nationalbank (2026): *War in the Middle East clouds economic outlook for Austria.*, Vienna. <https://www.oenb.at/en/Media/Press-Archives/2026/20260324.html>.
- 10 The EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) also includes the mutual assistance clause under Article 42(7) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU). The so-called Irish clause ensures that the special character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States – in Austria's case, neutrality – remains unaffected.
- 11 European Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (2023): *Update of the EU Maritime Security Strategy and its Action Plan – „An enhanced EU Maritime Security Strategy for evolving maritime threats“*, Joint Communication JOIN (2023) 8 final.
- 12 European Commission (2025): *The European Ocean Pact*, Communication COM (2025) 281 final, Brussels.
- 13 Bueger, C. / Edmunds, T. / Stockbruegger, J. (2024): *Securing the Seas: A Comprehensive Assessment of Global Maritime Security*, UNIDIR.
- 14 United Nations (2025): *BBNJ Agreement – Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction*; United Nations Environment Programme – UNEP (2025): *Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution (INC)*.
- 15 Jayakumar, S. (2025): *The Role of Maritime Security in a Changing Global Order*, in: *Maritime Studies Journal*, Vol. 18 (1).
- 16 United Nations (2025): *The Role of Landlocked Countries in the Implementation of the BBNJ Agreement – Concept Note*.
- 17 Bundesministerium für Land- und Forstwirtschaft, Regionen und Wasserwirtschaft – BMLUK (2025): *International Environmental Policy: IWC – International Whaling Commission*.
- 18 APA-OTS (2024): *Österreich verbietet Import und Verarbeitung von Haiprodukten weitgehend*, Press Statement from 22 April 2024.
- 19 International Seabed Authority – ISA (2024): *Statement by Austria under Agenda Item 16*, Kingston, 31 July 2024.
- 20 Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs – EDA (2023): *Maritime Strategy of Switzerland 2023–2027*, Bern.
- 21 Operation IRINI – European Union Naval Force Mediterranean (EU-NAVFOR MED) (2025): *Federal Minister for European and International Affairs of the Republic of Austria visits Operation IRINI's Headquarters in Rome*. Online: <https://www.operationirini.eu/federal-minister-for-european-and-international-affairs-of-the-republic-of-austria-visits-operation-irinis-headquarters-in-rome/> (accessed on 20. Oktober 2025).
- 22 FFG – Austrian Research Promotion Agency (2025): *Aktionsplan „Wasser & Gewässer schützen und wiederherstellen“*, Vienna.
- 23 Austrian Center for Intelligence, Propaganda and Security Studies – ACIPSS: *Aktivitäten und Projekte*. Online: <https://acipss.org/austrian-maritime-conference-2025-oesterreich-im-maritimen-jahrhundert/> (abgerufen am 20. Oktober 2025).

Jeremy Stöhs

Dr. Jeremy Stöhs is an Austrian-American political scientist specializing in security and defense policy. He is Managing Director of the SICHER LEBEN LLC, Deputy Director of ACIPSS, and Senior Fellow at the Institute for Security Policy at Kiel University (ISPK). His publications include “European Naval Power: From Cold War to Hybrid Wars” (Palgrave Macmillan, 2024) and “The Decline of European Naval Forces: Challenges to Sea Power in an Age of Fiscal Austerity and Political Uncertainty” (Naval Institute Press, 2018). He regularly teaches at several universities and defense colleges and currently heads a project on Austria's maritime role in the twenty-first century.



Paul Trautendorfer

Paul Trautendorfer is a Science Policy Advisor at the transgovernmental organization JPI Oceans in Brussels, where he works on ocean observation and the issue of legacy munitions at sea. He previously completed internships at the Austrian Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York and with the Austrian Defense Attaché in Ethiopia. He holds a joint Master's degree in Global Studies from University of Leipzig and Ghent University, specializing in ocean governance and maritime security. Trautendorfer is Hub Lead of the Sustainable Ocean Alliance Austria and was co-organizer of the Austrian Maritime Conference.

