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A Maritime Policy for the European Union

*Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort*

World Maritime Technology Conference

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for your invitation to be here today. I am delighted to note the broad participation in this Conference. I am convinced that this opportunity to meet and discuss with people from different sectors of the maritime community will be of great benefit. I am particularly pleased about the cross-sectoral approach that marks this event, since such an approach is a key feature of the Maritime Policy of the European Union that is currently under development.

I would like to present you with a brief overview on where we are in this process of developing an integrated Maritime Policy for the Union, and what our thinking, on the related fields of technology and innovation, is at this point in time.

To start with, let me underline that my Commission portfolio of Fisheries *and* Maritime Affairs reflects the real and tangible political priority that has been ascribed to maritime affairs by the Barroso Commission. The idea is to develop an all-embracing and integrated Maritime Policy for the EU that will bring together those sectors related to the oceans and seas. To this end, I currently chair a Steering Group of seven Commissioners with sea-related competencies, namely – apart from fisheries, my area, there is environment, transport, industry, energy, research and regional development. This group provides guidance to an inter-disciplinary Task Force that has been drawn from representatives of the various services of the Commission.

This process cannot however be an introspective one. We have therefore already engaged in consultations with Member States, maritime regions and other main stakeholders. From this we have collected some very valid information and ideas for a future Maritime Policy. I am very pleased with these informal discussions - when one receives 17 written contributions out of a total of 20 coastal Member States - one certainly cannot grumble. And over the past months, we have also established dialogue with countries beyond the EU, such as Canada, Australia, the United States, Japan and Norway. All of this has been geared towards the search for best practice.

The next step will be the adoption by the Commission of a so-called Green Paper. This will form the basis for an even wider consultation process with all interested parties, including all those who have already provided comments and input during the phase of preparation.

This consultation phase will last for one year and will provide the opportunity for a broad debate that, in turn, will provide us with ideas and guidance for our future work on developing a maritime policy for the EU. The publication of the Green Paper is due on 31 May of this year, that is, in three months time. I would extend my invitation to you all to not only read it but also to submit your comments to us in the period that follows.

It is my intention to ensure that the Green Paper will address, in a holistic, comprehensive and cross-sectoral way, the challenges we are facing in relation to the sustainable use and exploitation of the oceans and seas. It will also put forward some of the options and features of a future Maritime Policy that will maximise the benefits that Europe draws from its maritime sector in terms of increased growth and employment.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Overall economic growth in Europe has been slowing in recent years. Indeed, it is vital for us to re-invigorate Europe's economy if we are to face up to the challenges of global competition. The maritime sector has been identified as an area where Europeans do well by any standard and within which we should be suitably placed to pursue the Lisbon goals of stimulating economic growth while creating more and better jobs. The economic potential of the maritime sectors is clear - there is an enormous global market out there for EU maritime products and services to tap into.

However, ensuring the sustainable use of the marine environment is clearly a prerequisite before any potential can be fully realised. The challenge ahead thus is: how can we create a basis for growth in areas such as coastal tourism, fisheries, aquaculture, offshore oil and gas drilling, wind, tidal and wave energy, biotechnology, shipbuilding and maritime transport, *without* jeopardising the environment?

I would like to offer one of the most obvious answers to this question, and this is namely: science and technology.

Marine science and research have been identified by the Commission in its strategic priorities for 2005-09 as one of the key components of a future Maritime Policy. European research and technology in maritime-related areas is already in a favourable and competitive position.

We need ground-breaking research and technology in order to take the lead in advanced production. We also need it to form the basis for sound policy decisions, for example as regards measures to protect the marine environment. A future maritime policy should therefore aim, not only at preserving this situation of European excellence in research and technology, but also aim at further enhancing its role.

We will continuously need to improve our knowledge and technical know-how. We must re-examine our scientific research programmes to make sure that they address key priorities and that the necessary procedures are in place to maximise the delivery of both the results of the research, and the associated spin-offs, to industry and governments as fast as possible. We shall also be examining what gaps there are in the data collected, whether data collection can be better managed, what analytical capabilities we should be developing, and what data is required in which timeframes and for whom.

How can this be done?

Against the background of a high degree of fragmentation in European marine research activities, I think that an obvious objective would be to strengthen the co-ordination and co-operation between the different sectors. The idea would be to ensure that there is also a sufficient degree of horizontal research, apart from specialised sectoral areas, such as marine biology, biotechnology and geology, oceanography, energy, shipbuilding, or fisheries.

We are of course doing our best so that this ambition will be reflected in the European Community's 7th Research Framework Programme which runs from 2007-2013. In this programme, better co-ordination and the integration of maritime-related research should be one of the clear objectives with a view to creating a European maritime research area. In this context, it has been foreseen to set up in the 7th Framework Programme, appropriate structures to facilitate the integration of research areas that cut across different themes and disciplines in dialogue with the scientific community. Given the cross-sectoral ambitions of our Maritime Policy, this will clearly be key.

It is important, nevertheless, to understand that, although I hope the funds available under the 7th Framework Programme will be substantially higher than they are in today's Framework Programme, they will still only constitute a small part of the overall public financial support to research. In fact, they correspond to less than 10% of the total funds currently spent on research in the EU. This clearly means that the same guiding principles, wherein the co-ordination of research activities is upheld, must also be applied by other actors, including Member States and their main marine science institutes.

We need a strategy to make the most of European marine related research, which improves the co-operation, co-ordination and dialogue between decision-makers at various levels: industry, technology-developers and scientists. European technology platforms, which bring together different types of stakeholders, and which develop strategic research agendas, are important in this respect.

As I said a little while ago, it goes without saying that, whatever shape we give to a future Maritime Policy, it inevitably has to fulfil the requirements for environmental sustainability. The Commission has in fact, recently adopted a proposal for a "Thematic Strategy on the Protection and Conservation of the Marine Environment", which will constitute the main environmental pillar of the EU Maritime Policy. Clearly, this will need solid underpinning from excellence in science and research, inasmuch as this is true for all the other aspects of the Maritime Policy.

Another aspect I would like to highlight is the need for well-trained human resources. Knowledge and skills are two of Europe's major assets in the field of maritime affairs. We think that, to ensure the continuing prosperity and competitiveness of Europe's maritime sector, we must re-double our efforts to safeguard and further improve these skills.

The steady decline in the number of Europeans opting to work in the maritime domain is due to various factors, such as low wages and the widespread perception of poor and insecure working conditions in many of the sectors concerned, particularly in maritime transport and fisheries. This means that renewed efforts are required on our part to stimulate the interest of individuals in maritime careers. We are paying particular attention to what is underway in a number of Member States, such as here in the UK itself, with regard to the Programme *Sea Vision*.

Maritime training and education should not only be of a high international standard, but should also enhance the mobility of the workforce between maritime sectors. Training should ensure that recruits gain additional competences that will justify wages at European levels. Last but not least, we have to be able to improve the image of the maritime sector and to promote better and safer working conditions for employees. In this regard, the Maritime Labour Convention adopted overwhelmingly just 10 days ago, is an important beginning. In setting out the rights, for the world's 1.2 million seafarers, to decent conditions of work, health, safety, hours of work and other issues, the Convention has shown just how crucial these are to the long-term health of the sector.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Clearly we need more technology and more innovation to exploit the huge wealth that can be derived from ocean and sea related activities. Technology and innovation must also be applied if we are to do this in a sustainable manner. Marine science and technology are therefore essential to achieve the goals we have set for our maritime policy.

I would like to conclude my intervention with a reminder – by inviting you once again to send any input on the Green Paper once that the consultation procedure is launched. All of you are part of this project, and, clearly, the level of participation in the debate will determine the success or otherwise of the proposed Maritime Policy for the EU, the broader the participation the better are the prospects of success.

Thank you very much.