

VIDEOMESSAGE by Kristalina Georgieva to the GMES Workshop in Sofia, 25th March 2010

I would like to begin by thanking you very much for giving me the opportunity to join - from Brussels - this seminar on Global Monitoring for Environment and Security. On behalf of the European Commission I would like to express my gratitude to Prime Minister Boyko Borisov and the Bulgarian government for organising this event.

Earth Observation matters to the international community because it can help us deal with some of the most pressing problems our world faces today – such as the necessity for a quick and effective response to major disasters and global challenges such as climate change.

Better satellite based imagery will also help us design the most effective policies to improve land-use and agriculture and by doing so it can help increase food security. It will allow more effective humanitarian operations and it can help improve our response to issues that include border control, terrorism, illegal immigration, and drug trafficking.

Also important is the opportunity for Europe to seize the first mover advantage in these essential technologies. If we do this there will be many important business opportunities for European companies.

And GMES will also form a central element of the European contribution to the Global Earth Observing System of Systems which will benefit all countries.

As the Commissioner responsible for crisis response I have a very particular interest in the successful development of GMES. Effective monitoring systems will be essential when it comes to improving the response to major disasters.

Following the terrible recent earthquakes I visited Haiti and Chile. It is absolutely clear that quick access to up-to-date information is a basic need for the emergency response services. It is also

crucial for strategic decision makers and operational planners. Here, GMES has a vital role to play with the rapid production of maps from disaster scenes.

This type of information is a central part of crisis response – precise mapping of different locations is also essential for disaster prevention as well as for the delivery of post-crisis assistance. To give a concrete example of what can be done, the Commission - working together with the UN and the World Bank - has produced highly detailed damage assessment maps that will be used in the upcoming donor conference on Haiti.

The Haiti and Chile earthquakes have dominated the headlines. They are reminders that catastrophic natural disasters are not "one-in-a-million" events and that they need to be actively planned for. With a warming climate we also need to prepare for increasingly frequent extreme weather events such as storms, droughts, forest fires and flooding. The need to reinforce our crisis management capacity is self-evident.

The best possible scientific understanding of the world around us allows us to prepare the best possible policies. Developing capacity for monitoring probably looks like a dull technical project. In reality, the providing of reliable information about the state of the environment on Earth is absolutely necessary if we want to protect citizens from the growing threats they face.

There is a huge amount of work to be done to improve our mapping capabilities. While there will be costs involved these costs need to be understood as investments. I know from personal experience that for every Euro invested in services like metrology is repaid many times over.

Climate change is probably the best example of why the Global Monitoring for Environment and Security service is essential. It is the biggest environmental, social and economic threat the planet faces. Climate change will have serious impact on nature and society.

Only if we understand correctly the changes affecting our planet, we will be able to anticipate them and react to them. Global Monitoring for Environment and Security has this potential. By

developing services for land, seas, oceans and atmospheric monitoring we will have accurate data that will help us meet environmental and security challenges.

It is absolutely essential that policy makers seize upon the opportunities offered by new technologies to improve the way that we deliver key services. I am therefore very pleased that President Barroso has underlined that the success of EU flagship programmes, such as GMES, needs to be guaranteed. These programmes can help us better manage the risks to our societies and can also play a part of the strategy for accelerating the competitiveness of Europe.

I wish you every success for a productive and fruitful workshop in Sofia. And I can assure you that, over the next five years, the successful development of GMES will be a dossier that I will follow very closely.

Thank you for your attention.