Black Sea Stakeholder Conference

Odessa, 14-15 June 2016

Closing remarks

- Dear maritime stakeholders, today's 3rd high-level Black Sea Stakeholder Conference was important because it brought together a big maritime community and showed that the EU is there to support it, and to stimulate regional cooperation initiatives on marine and maritime affairs in the Black Sea.

- I am very happy and also impressed by the quality of the debate and your active participation. In the working sessions we touched upon wide range topics: coastal and maritime tourism, smart planning of the sea space, skills, marine research and investments in *sustainable* solutions for blue growth, to name a few of them.

- I believe that following our exchanges of views a number of conclusions can be drawn (and support from our side could be provided):

- In the **first place**, the coastal and maritime regions *have a huge role to play in boosting blue growth* and they *need support at national level* for setting long-term innovation priorities, incl. smart infrastructures and planning. As in the case of maritime spatial planning, the European Commission supports and will support such initiatives as well as the opportune transnational partnerships to maximise their potential, while taking into consideration the aspirations and capacities of each country.

- To respond to this challenge, we will support a seminar on maritime spatial planning later this year, organised by the MEDCOAST foundation in Turkey. This seminar is meant to build up the capacities of the public administrations in charge of planning the sea from the Mediterranean and the Black Sea regions.

- **Secondly**, I think many good examples have been mentioned today of how cooperation between stakeholders at different levels can produce concrete results. *In the research sector*, for example, scientists from the region have developed specific objectives for a *Strategic Research Agenda for the Black Sea*. Through the EU Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation programme they will obtain the necessary means to implement it and plan further actions of mutual benefit. By applying science diplomacy we can improve the multi-stakeholder dialogue in a changing but also interconnected world.

- **Third**, to advance the blue economy and create the necessary conditions for investment *we need to gear up and build up proper capacities* in the public administrations and *work with the business*. Bringing businesses on board, be it to develop together new opportunities *(for example expanding our ports as is the case with Georgia)* or to work on innovation and skills of people is crucial.

- Funding is available to fulfil your ideas and there are already some very good and authentic examples of successful entrepreneurs coming from the region. I can only encourage you to follow their path, find the right partners and apply in the open calls.

    - In this respect, let me remind you about our info day for the small- and medium-sized enterprises tomorrow morning. It is meant to showcase the opportunities for SMEs under the EU COSME programme, the EU Horizon 2020 SME Instrument and the Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs programme. The event will start at 9.30 and will take place here, in the same hotel.

- Allow me to repeat what Commissioner Vella emphasized this morning: the European Commission and its services are there to listen. Your input will help us shape our policies in this sea basin.

- In the meantime, we all have a lot of work to do, to make things happen, to develop the different activities in and around the Black Sea.

- I would like to conclude here by thanking all of you again, as well as the interpreters and the organisers for all their hard work that went into this excellent event and of course our hosts in Odessa region and Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.