Speaking Points

"ATLANTIC STRATEGY IN ACTION"

BRUSSELS 8 JUNE 2016

Opening Plenary session

INTRODUCTION

- Great pleasure to be here for an Atlantic event and - hopefully - to see the "Atlantic Strategy in Action"!

- On behalf of the Director General of the European Commission's DG for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, I would like to ***thank the Committee of the Regions*** for hosting and supporting this event. We are very lucky to be able to gather here, and we couldn't have a better venue for this event.

- Thanks also to our colleagues from the "***Support Team*** for the Atlantic Action Plan" for helping organise the event and for being with us today. And ***thanks to you all*** for being here today to discuss how we can ensure that EU funds can effectively contribute to the implementation of the Atlantic Strategy and Action Plan.

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

- Two years ago, a first workshop aimed at helping stakeholders in the Atlantic area understand how the proposed actions could be financed by programmes that are "directly managed" by the Commission; Horizon 2020, COSME, or LIFE.

- At the time, the Operational Programmes for the "shared funds" were still under preparation. Now that these programmes are coming to full speed, with calls in the process of being launched, the challenge is to move from information to action, and to make the most of these

programmes, to the benefit of the blue economy in the Atlantic Area.

- Our main objectives for today are
    - to improve knowledge and awareness of the Action Plan,
    - to allow managing authorities to present their work on embedding the Action Plan in funding instruments (national, regional, crossborder and transnational), and
    - to learn from other participants about current or forthcoming funding opportunities relevant for the Strategy and the Action Plan.
- Today should also provide an opportunity to outline possible barriers or difficulties that you encounter to support the implementation of the Action Plan. To this purpose, you can engage directly with the *"Support Team for the Atlantic Action Plan"*. This group of experts is there to help stakeholders build projects that are in line with the priorities of the Action Plan.
- This is of course a two-way (or even "circular") process: to achieve this task, the "Support Team" needs information from those managing EU and national funds, so that it can be relayed to targeted stakeholders. "In return", the team can provide information about potential projects and initiatives to funding managers. Such information could then also help the same funding managers to design new programmes and instruments.

OUTCOMES AND FOLLOW-UP

- So, what to expect from this day?
- Firstly (and logically), better and reinforced ***cooperation among key actors*** in the implementation of the Strategy. These key actors are the stakeholders and project promoters, the "Support Team", and the officials at local, regional, national and EU level who are involved in the management of funds.

- Secondly (and perhaps most importantly), I hope for a renewed impulse to the Strategy and the Action Plan in terms of ***funding opportunities***. In concrete terms, this could mean new, or more targeted, funding options for projects and initiatives in the Atlantic area.

- As you may know, the Commission is supposed to carry out a ***mid-term review*** of the implementation of the Atlantic Action Plan before the end of 2017. As part of the process, an independent evaluation of a sample of completed projects will be carried out. The implementation of the Action Plan will thus be assessed on the basis of real projects that have benefited the Atlantic area.

CONCLUSION (COMMUNICATING THE ACTION PLAN)

- Whatever way we look at it, I believe that results must not be confined to this room. In other words, please make all possible noise about the Atlantic Strategy and the Action Plan. We should spread the positive message and stories of project implementation. Communication and engaging others will be the key to leveraging and maximising success.

- As the European Commission, we will do all we can to make the Strategy a reality. But of course we will continue to rely on the commitment and ownership of all actors concerned by the Strategy and the Action Plan, that is, <u>you</u>.

- Ladies and gentlemen, I wish you a very productive event. I trust that you will make good use of the opportunities offered to you to network, engage in the break-out sessions and learn more about each other's initiatives and actions, in order to make the Action Plan a reality.

- I hope that we can see already the results of our work today at the next Atlantic Stakeholder Platform Conference that will be held in Dublin on 27 September 2016.

- Thank you for your attention.