REMARKS BY MARCELLA SMYTH

Speakers: Meeting with Regional and Managing Authorities 8 June 2016

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. On behalf of the Atlantic Strategy Group, I firstly want to express our gratitude to our kind hosts here today and our thanks to you all for accepting the invitation to today's meeting.

So you may indeed be asking who or what is the Atlantic Strategy Group? The Group is composed of representatives from the 5 Member states as well as the committee of the regions, the CION, the EP, the Economic and Social Committees, CPMR and its role is to oversee and offer policy guidance on the Atlantic Strategy and its Action Plan. The chair of this Group rotates annually-Ireland has the pleasure of being in the chair this year, standing on the shoulders of our predecessors France and Portugal who did so much to take this forward.

The Strategy and its Action Plan, are, as you know by now, designed to be responses to identified need. The Atlantic Strategy was borne of a broad-based consultation exercise-and there were not only national Member States submissions but also from interested bodies and organisations and from regions so that what we have is a framework that identifies and promotes shared economic opportunities in the marine. That presents us with a common goal

We are now however, at a crucial juncture with the Strategy and the Action Plan-our focus now (as Felix has stated) must be on implementation.

The Action Plan identifies 4 overarching priority actions linked to the Strategy's themes. These actions are

Promote entrepreneurship and innovation

Protect, secure and enhance the marine and coastal environment

Improve accessibility and connectivity

And create a more socially inclusive and sustainable model of regional development

The Action plan also identifies collaboration and cooperation as an essential means for its achievement. One means for achieving this is through the operational programmes as the plan encourages the member states to take the action plan into account in their partnership agreements on the structural funds-which is why you are here!

We are all aware that the operational programmes cannot alone respond to every need –that each Member State, each Region is faced with choice-with the need to prioritise competing interests but sustainable economic growth cannot be achieved if we omit the marine. It is now, more than ever, exceedingly clear that seeking to develop the blue economy is central to sustainable economic development. The recent OECD Ocean Economy report notes that the ocean economy holds the promise of immense resource wealth and great potential for boosting economic growth, employment and innovation. In 2010, it is estimated, the global ocean economy contributed

2.5% of the world gross added value and some 31 million direct full time jobs. The report estimates that these growth figures could double by 2030, with areas such as marine aquaculture, offshore wind energy, port activities leading the way. For all this to happen we will need more technologies, more data, more research, better infrastructure- all areas highlighted within the action plan- The size of the Atlantic Blue Economy was conservatively estimated by a CION 2014 survey as at least 26.8 billion, providing for at a minimum some 800, 000 jobs. Its growth potential is massive- we have, with the Strategy and the Action Plan, and the funding through the EU funds, the tools and means to achieve that.

We are all working towards this common goal of a strong economy, sustainable jobs, sustainable growth. What we learn from each other today should go some way to helping us achieve that

Thank you.