Maritime stakeholder platform in the Baltic Sea Region
Kick-off conference

Thursday, 26 March Venue: GEOMAR Helmholtz Centre for Ocean Research, Kiel Wischhofstr. 1-3

Dear Deputy Prime Minister, Dear Commissioner, Honorable Madam Rodust, Prof. Herzig, Excelencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an exceptionsl privilege to address this distinguished audience of friends of the Baltic sea.

Latvia holds its historic first Presidency of the EU Council at an exciting and challenging time – the new European Parliament and the European Commission have commenced their work; new innovative financing tools have been launched – the Connecting Europe Facility and the so-called Commission President Juncker's Package; the follow-up phase of the EU 2020 strategy's mid-term review is on high agenda, and, at the same time, the Baltic Sea Region states are actively working on the revision of the Action Plan of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR).

It is the opinion of the Latvian Presidency that the EU as a whole and the Baltic Sea Region in particular should continue implementing a clear and forward-looking strategy also in the following years despite the challenges it faces - such as the global economic slowdown, limited investment resources in the EU and Member States, increasing competition from other developed and developing countries, population ageing, internal and external migration flows, youth unemployment and social exclusion, climate change.

In this context, let me remind you that the Blue Growth initiative is aimed at highlighting the sustainable potential of marine and coastal resources, thereby also contributing to the goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy for a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

Representing both the EU presidency and also a Baltic Sea Region country, I would like to focus on the following three important topics of discussion which shall be covered extensively during this important stakeholder conference:

1. maritime spatial planning
2. renewable energy
3. traditional sectors, including ports and shipping,

and, of course, the EU Strategy for Baltic Sea Region as the guiding umbrella for all the above mentioned issues.

These topics are very much in line with the defined six Blue Growth indicators, i.e. innovativeness, competitiveness, employment, policy relevance, spill-over effects and sustainability.

1. Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) is an important tool to support growth and sustainable development in the maritime sector, considering economic, social and environmental aspects in sea use. Latvia emphasizes that regional cooperation can play an important role in facilitating the national maritime spatial planning processes and the implementation of the EU MSP Directive. And we are especially proud that as one of forerunners, the Baltic Sea Region can share regional MSP experiences at the European level, particularly from the successfully implemented projects - *BaltSeaPlan* and *PartiSeaPate*. When it comes to national planning, the experience in public participation, cross-sectorial balancing and cross-border cooperation gained in these projects ensures the capability of managing the coexistence of relevant uses and activities at sea. Nevertheless, in order to facilitate a sustainable maritime growth in the future, Latvia considers MSP as an important tool to promote a better overall investment climate, by increasing the trust of investors through transparency and reduced red tape.

2. Regarding renewable energy, it is our strong opinion that the Baltic Sea, like other seas and oceans, has the potential to become an important source of clean energy. Marine renewable energy, which includes both offshore wind and ocean energy, presents the EU with an opportunity to generate economic growth and jobs, enhance the security of its energy supply and boost competitiveness through technological innovation. We think that this is a real challenge which needs collaborative research and cross-border cooperation to boost its development.

3. As a ports and maritime nation with deep traditions, Latvia strongly believes that also traditional sectors of marine economy, such as shipping and port activities, are important for achieving the goals of the Blue Growth initiative.

   During the first half of 2015, Latvia presides over the National Coordinators meetings of the Baltic Sea Strategy. Together with the European Commission and other key stakeholders, our goal is to arrive at a revised Action Plan of the EUSBSR by May/June of 2015. And in this context, we need to identify and better clarify what additional benefits the Baltic Sea Strategy can create on top those benefits stemming from the work already undertaken - in particular in the field of transport (for example, in the context of the development of the TEN-T Network, as well as the Northern Dimension Partnership on Transport and Logistics), given that the Baltic Sea is amongst the most navigated in the world.

   In the era of globalized, integrated and multimodal supply chains, Shipping and ferry companies always emphasize the importance of efficient land connections in the Baltic Sea region to serve as extensions of the sea connections. Intermodality is the name of the game, and there are few players more qualified

than Schleswig-Holstein's own ports of Kiel and Travemunde. I had the privilege to visit these ports a couple of months ago with the intention, among other, to learn about their experiences in creating state-of-the-art solutions for piggyback transportation.

Latvia and the Baltic States, for example, serve as gateways to connect Northern and Western Europe over the Baltic Sea with further land connections to Russia, CIS, Central Asia and all the way to the rapidly developing overland transport corridors to China and the Far East.

Baltic Ports are included in the TEN-T Core Network. This allows our ports together with shipping companies and ports on the other side of the Baltic sea to engage in the EU Motorways-of-the-Seas projects, attracting sizable EU funding under the framework of the new Connecting Europe Facility instrument. All our international partners are most welcome to participate in this process in helping establish more efficient West-East sea-land connections.

At the same time, the support from the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and in particular Priority area Maritime Safety and Security (EUSBSR PA Safe), in Latvia's opinion, helps enhance the safety in the Baltic Sea area.

In this regard, the project *Finalising Surveys for the Baltic Motorways of the Sea (The FAMOS)* is worth mentioning. The upcoming FAMOS project aims at improving the safety of navigation in the Baltic Sea by increasing hydrographic survey efficiency. This will enable the participating countries to map the remaining areas of interest for commercial shipping in the Baltic Sea according to the Baltic Sea Hydrographic Commission/HELCOM harmonized re-survey plan.

The Danish Maritime Authority and the Finnish Transport Safety Agency, acting in their joint capacity as Priority Area Coordinators in this area have expressed their support to the FAMOS project led by the Swedish Maritime Administration. The Maritime Administration of Latvia participates in this project along with partners from other Baltic Sea countries. The letter of support to the FAMOS project has been endorsed by the Priority Area's international Steering Committee consisting of maritime authorities and stakeholders from the EU countries around the Baltic Sea.

Based on the previous experiences with EU Trans European Network for Transport (TEN-T), the project participants have prepared a project proposal for EU co-financing. Specifically, the project has applied for funding from the Connecting Europe Facility transport program under the horizontal priority of *Motorways of the Sea*.

The FAMOS project will help to resurvey a large share of the remaining areas with commercial potential for shipping, and it is believed it would result in safer and more efficient shipping.

This might be one of the examples where synergies between EU policies could be useful to promote sustainable growth.

In conclusion let me remind you that Latvia will host the VI Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region on June 15-16 in Dzintari Concert Hall, Jūrmala. The title of the forum is „ACHIEVING e-QUALITY by CONNECTING the REGION" where discussions on Baltic Sea region's future, competitiveness and digital connectivity will take place. Other issues such as energy, science, communication, culture, health, diversity will also be discussed.

It is envisaged that during the Forum the revised Action Plan will be presented and an exchange of views on the future of the Baltic Sea Strategy will take place. We hope that this conference will greatly contribute to this important process, just as this important stakeholder platform would.

I wish you a productive exchange of views and experiences!

Thank you very much!