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Transport challenges in the context of the call

Good morning, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am glad to speak to you in this info day on the second “Ocean of Tomorrow” call. Our meeting today, with the presence of two Commissioners, is a clear indication of our steady commitment to implement the EU Strategy for Marine and Maritime Research.

Commissioner Geoghegan-Quinn gave you an overview of the progress in the implementation of the Strategy and there is no need for me to expand further on that. I will therefore focus on the call and its relevance for the maritime transport industry and my directorate.

Besides our role as the coordinators of the EU strategy for marine and maritime research, my directorate manages directly the transport thematic priority of the Research Framework Programme. From that perspective, we have a direct interest in 3 of the topics of this call: topic 1 on multi-use offshore platforms, topic 2 on the characterisation of human pressures in the environment of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea and topic 3 on the necessary planning of maritime activities in the Mediterranean and Black Sea alongside the design of networks of Marine Protected Areas.

The rationale of our participation in this call is dual: on one hand we need to maximise new opportunities for our maritime transport and shipbuilding industries in these extremely challenging times, on the other hand we need to bring our contribution to the sustainability of maritime activities, as required in particular by the Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

I will start with the opportunities.

We are all aware of the difficult situation that our shipyards have been facing since the major economic downturn, which started in 2008. In addition to the increasing competition from Asia and other emerging economies, the crisis has hit considerably global shipping and orders for new container ships. Part of the policy answer to these challenges is to support with our research projects the development of new opportunities for EU maritime industries.

In the drive to explore and make use of the possibilities of the open sea, marine renewable energy and in particular offshore wind energy has taken the lead and is gaining a strong momentum. This is linked to the EU commitment to produce 20% of its energy through renewable sources, an objective to which offshore wind is poised to contribute significantly, together with other ocean energy sources. EU member states, which are seeking to develop this major opportunity, are facing logistical bottlenecks in relation to the capacity of the shipping and maritime industries to deliver the necessary support to build these wind farms and the necessary services to sustain their operation. These challenges will be compounded by the need to move offshore wind farther from the coasts to deeper areas, with new technologies to be developed accordingly.

Similarly there is a drive to move aquaculture activities from crowded coastal activities to the offshore, which offer much more space, better physical and

environmental conditions for fish farming but challenging physical and logistical conditions.

Whatever technological solutions and offshore platforms are eventually developed for it, the occupation of the open sea by marine renewable energy starting with offshore wind, aquaculture and other human activities will in any case require a strong and critical support from maritime transport industries. Our participation in this topic is critical to ensure that maritime industries contribute to these developments and can benefit from the opportunities they offer. These opportunities might also cover, in combination with the energy and aquaculture functions, the possibility to move offshore some port activities, if this can help achieve the expected impacts of the call.

Our participation in topic 3 of the call reflects both a challenge and an opportunity for the maritime transport industry.

In the framework of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, and its major goal of attaining Good Environmental Status in our seas by 2020, it is important that we understand the impact of maritime transport on the ecosystems of the Mediterranean and Black Sea. Maritime transport is an efficient and relatively clean transport mode but, like all human activities, it does have an impact on the environment, for instance the possible transport of invasive species.

But we also have an opportunity to contribute to the knowledge, monitoring and management of the marine environment. Indeed we do lack means to undertake research and survey the marine environment in shallow coastal areas, estuaries or ports. So the topic will include the design of a small research and monitoring vessels, which can operate in shallow waters, with high manoeuvrability and precise geographical positioning. Developing such a vessel will contribute both to monitor the marine environment and offer new opportunities for shipbuilders.

Finally we also have an interest in topic 4 of the call, which will seek to optimise the networks of Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean and Black Sea and assess the compatibility of that design with essential maritime activities such as maritime transport.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the distinguished audience today, a broad range of marine scientific disciplines and maritime industries are represented. Marine scientists and maritime engineers come from two different worlds; they have different perspectives on seas and oceans. The first ones are essentially interested in the marine environment, human pressures exerted on it, interactions between oceans and climate. The second ones develop technologies to make use of the sea as a transport medium and of its resources.

What brings us all together is the sea as an environment and as a medium with its specific challenges. As a medium, seas and oceans raise technological challenges related to the mechanical, physical, chemical and biological impact exerted on anything that floats or goes under the sea surface. As an environment, seas and oceans also pose specific challenges related to the peculiar way in which marine ecosystems grow and move in such a fluid, heavily affected by climate change and human activities.

As we move towards the open oceans to make use of its space and resources in a sustainable way, we need to gather cross-cutting knowledge on the sea as an environment and to master key cross-cutting ocean technologies to move and work in the sea as a medium. This is why inter-disciplinary integration is crucial in the preparation of the proposals in response to this call. Your strong presence today is a formidable signal that the marine and maritime research communities

are mobilised and prepared to join forces to address critical seas and oceans challenges. It gives us strong hopes for the sustainable development of ocean resources and activities.

I look forward to our continued cooperation in the future and I wish you a fruitful day.