

Speech Commissioner Janez POTOČNIK

Info day Call "The ocean of tomorrow"

Brussels, 16 September 2009 - 10: 00

Commissioner Borg,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our relationship with the sea is as ancient as life on earth. In fact, we were all born there...billions of years ago when life itself started, there were only single cell organisms floating around at the bottom of the oceans.

Today as human beings we still depend on the sea as an essential part of our wealth and well-being...although we may have grown a few more cells since then.

So just how much do we depend on the seas and the oceans? Consider these facts: the EU's maritime regions account for around 40% of its GDP and the maritime economy accounts for as much as 5% of our economic activity. And this is only the tip of the maritime iceberg. The untapped potential of the sea is even bigger, with still largely unknown biological and mineral resources waiting for discovery. The deep seas, in particular, represent a new frontier for us, almost as technologically challenging as space exploration.

But the value of the sea is not just about how much money can be made from it. Its intangible values – as an ecosystem or even as a place we want to live near cannot be underestimated. This makes it even more important that we face up to the fact that our human activity and the resulting climate change are dramatically affecting the marine environment. To put it bluntly, we are putting the seas and the oceans at risk from uncontrollable changes.

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It is this combination of opportunities and risks that have provided the rationale for the EU strategy for marine and maritime research. In practice, this rationale will use science in two ways: to inform policy makers about how we can build the sustainable development of sea-based activities and to give us the innovations which will help that maritime economy to grow sustainably.

Even deeper at the heart of the strategy, is the need to address the complexity of sea issues through by bringing the various different knowledge 'strands' together. This means working across disciplines, strengthening EU marine research infrastructure and improving the synergies between member states and regions. And of course, none of this would be possible without the help of a structured marine and maritime research community, organised with new governance mechanisms, which we need to build together.

Sustainability and governance...two of the most important watchwords for our future. And at the centre of the principles and objectives of the European Research Area and the Ljubljana Process. And only by building an effective, properly integrated marine and maritime ERA will we be able to tackle the challenges of the sustainable development of the maritime economy.

This marine and maritime joint call is the first part of a commitment made in the EU strategy for marine and maritime research.

You will hear more later today about the details of each of the 3 sub-topics covered by the joint call. As my time is limited, I won't go into the minute detail now, but as I'm sure you know, they all deal with issues which cut across different disciplines and represent a combination of economic opportunities and

risks, in particular to the environment. This is the way Joint Calls 'model' works – and will continue to work in the future.

And the problems related the 'oceans of tomorrow' theme needs this approach because they are broad, complex and spread right across our societies. That's why we need to bring together the best knowledge from the outset, get the best researchers from the different sectors and disciplines to work in an integrated way.

Underlying this is the fundamental need to build our EU marine research infrastructure. It's a need because our research community has to have the capacity to tackle these big challenges. For our part, we will continue to explore all the innovative ways in which marine research infrastructure can be financed. Starting with those identified by the European Strategy Forum for Research Infrastructure.because a marine and maritime ERA needs world class marine research infrastructure.

As the old saying goes, 'time and tide wait for no man' – and we have to push on and continue improving the ways in which Member States and regions work together on marine and maritime research. We need to build the synergies now.

We need fluid strategies that reflect the simple fact that marine ecosystems do not stop at maritime borders. This means that actions taken in one member state have consequences across entire regional seas. This is why our EU Strategy for Marine and Maritime Research has to make those linkages at EU level and at the level of regional seas. At the EU level, we will be replacing the four existing marine ERANETs with one integrated one. We will also have one ERANET in

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the field of maritime research and technologies. So here, there will be more opportunities for building bridges...

At the regional level, the BONUS ERANET in the Baltic Sea, which will be upgraded into an article 169 initiative, will pave the way for similar initiatives in other regional seas. This combination of an EU and regional approach is the right one. And it is justified by the existence of regional sea basins, which share an economic and ecological ecosystem, and which we hope can teach each other and learn from each other.

This brings me to the issue of governance. And to you. Your dynamism and vision are the foundations of our EU Strategy for Marine and Maritime Research. You started the ball rolling in Aberdeen and now we are asking you for something. We want you to pursue your efforts by organising yourselves into an inter-disciplinary marine and maritime research forum. A forum which will advise us on those strategic cross-cutting research priorities; on marine research infrastructure; and which can also ensure that the best scientific knowledge is shared and spread. We will be supporting this forum financially because we strongly believe it will give us the advice we need to build better research policy and stimulate innovation, in particular by transferring knowledge between marine science and maritime research. You are a broad and vibrant research community – as diverse as the seas and oceans! – Which is a good thing, but without a structured partnership we would not make the progress we need on these crucial issues.

Seas and oceans are societal issues, as you know. And, in line with the objectives of the ERA, we are also going to have to consider how we transfer research results into sound policy, for example with regard to issues like environmental status. This is important both at EU level, because there are legal obligations imposed by the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and at global

level because the United Nations have initiated a process for a global environmental assessment of seas and oceans.

Ladies and Gentlemen

You are an experienced audience. You know what research can do and you know what we all want – to make research work, sustainably. But let me take this opportunity to remind you how important the international dimension of research is to our future vision for research: the European Research Area. Our research must be world class. But it can only be so if it emerges from within an international research family which is taking its global responsibilities seriously. This is even truer in the marine and maritime area, because our problems literally flow into each other - we share the Baltic, the Mediterranean and the Black Sea.

This is why your work is so important and why we need to break down traditional boundaries between scientific disciplines. We have to develop the joined-up knowledge which is best suited to our joined-up seas and oceans.

Because if you look at the world from space, just as Armstrong, Aldrin and Collins did almost exactly forty years ago, there is really one global ocean, and we owe it to our future generations to manage it wisely.

We know that this will take time and continued effort, and this is why the partnership between us is so important.

I wish you a fruitful day.

Thank you for your attention.

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