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**"Poland as a key player in the future of European fisheries and maritime affairs"**

Check Against Delivery  
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi  
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

Presidium of the Parliamentary Committees on European Affairs, Infrastructure and Agriculture and Rural Development

**Warsaw, Poland, 22 July 2010**

Dear Honourable Committee Members, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to be here on my first visit to Poland since I became Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries. And I am very glad to speak to you about issues which are truly European in nature.

Let me start with the Common Fisheries Policy. Being in Warsaw I am reminded of what one of your most famous scientists, Maria Sklodowska, once said: "The way of progress is neither swift nor easy". This saying is so fitting for the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy. Indeed this policy needs progress more than anything. And from the reactions of governments I see that it will not be easy. Poland and the Commission however think alike on a number of issues and I am here today to ask for your support in reforming this policy.

We agree that we need a real reform of the CFP. We cannot afford to allow this ambitious project to end with tinkering here and there. A root-and-branch reform is the only solution. We owe this to our fishing sector so that they can be profitable and live off healthy, productive stocks.

I am convinced that we need to act decisively in four areas.

First, we need a simpler and less centralized decision-making set-up. We have to leave only basic principles and long-term goals to the Council and European Parliament. The more technical issues and implementation should however be agreed by the Member States concerned at regional level. At the same time we need to involve the industry much more using its experience and knowledge to get the best results.

Second, we need long-term term fisheries management and we need to reduce discards. This is our only chance of helping our stocks recover. Single-species fisheries can be managed by catch limits, but mixed fisheries need a different approach. Let me here also mention that Poland needs to be commended for its efforts on the recovery of Baltic cod, which I think bodes well for the future.

Third, reducing overcapacity is an aim I know you support. But we must accept that past measures simply have not worked. Also, we simply cannot expect taxpayers to keep paying the bill. Here again I am convinced of the need for active industry participation. In many Member States individual transferable rights used as pure "user" rights at national level have been able to reduce overcapacity almost "naturally" and without using taxpayers' money. But to me the most important argument is actually a different one namely the social issue. What are we going to say to somebody who has worked as a fisherman since he was 16 years old, who has saved money and has asked for a bank loan to buy his boat? What if that fisherman wants to leave the industry? All we can offer him in the future is some early retirement money. And that is too little to live on and too much to die. Therefore if fishermen could sell his quota right to his neighbour from the same or from a neighbouring port, then it would give him an extra compensation.

Turning to the European Fisheries Fund or EFF: The Commission is well aware of the considerable efforts still required to modernise the sector here in Poland. For that reason Poland has received a sizeable allocation under the EFF. This includes 40% of the overall EFF budget for Axis 4. This is an important opportunity for fisheries-dependent areas in Poland, which can indeed make a difference in shaping socio-economic development in those areas. Given the size of the budget allocation for Poland, its success here in Poland is also important for the future financing of our policy as a whole.

It is now up to Poland to actually take advantage of that funding. It is no use to anyone if money remains in Brussels. It is also risky, because if we cannot demonstrate that we actually need these amounts I will have a hard time arguing for money during the negotiations for the next financial perspectives.

Lastly, we need to find the right approach to ensure that small-scale coastal fisheries are given the right framework. This is all about striking the right balance over the long term. It is a tricky job but one on which local and regional development and the social dimension of CFP depend. The social aspects of fisheries are just as important as the economic and environmental aspects. We cannot have a reform which fails to improve working conditions in the sector. Or a reform which does not recognise the increasing role of women, for instance.

The time for talking about the reform is fast running out. The stakeholder conference we will be holding on 16 November, bringing together fishermen and scientists, will be the last chance for talk. Then it will be time for action, as we firm up our proposals going into 2011.

Let me now turn to the recently adopted EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and, more widely, to the Integrated Maritime Policy in that sea basin.

The strong maritime component of the strategy is an important part of the process towards the regional implementation of the IMP in the Baltic. The strategy has made a very good start. Nevertheless, the key factors for success will depend on the commitment and ownership of the lead partners and stakeholders. This will mean linking different maritime actions. It also means ensuring effective coordination both within Member States and with non-EU partners, including Russia.

I applaud Poland's commitment to official reporting on the implementation of the strategy and a first substantial revision of the Action Plan during its EU Presidency in 2011. During that time, I hope for close cooperation and support from Poland for our work on a common approach to maritime spatial planning. A common approach at EU level would help unleash the potential for sustainable growth and employment in the maritime sectors – an aim we can all support. By the time Poland takes the helm next July we will know what progress has been made, what the options are for future action, and what stakeholders think.

Your help will also be much appreciated on our future steps towards the integration of maritime surveillance systems. This is designed to enable national authorities to benefit from information collected for different sectoral purposes. And hence better perform their duties across a range of diverse spheres.

On a broader level I am happy to say that I see very positive and promising developments on integrated maritime policy in Poland. The integrated governance structures and the tools available can provide additional developments for the IMP.

I congratulate you on setting up the Inter-Ministerial Maritime Policy Group, under the direct supervision of the Prime Minister, with a remarkable maritime agenda. The adoption of the Guidelines on Maritime Policy up to 2020 and progress on maritime spatial planning and integration of maritime surveillance systems are just some good examples. We look forward to seeing Poland's maritime strategy develop in the near future.

Maritime professionals are the bedrock of maritime industries in the EU. So I warmly welcome Poland's commitment under the Baltic Strategy to take a lead in the training and qualifications of maritime professionals. I look forward to the kick-off conference in Szczecin with great interest. The IMP supports the idea of "maritime careers", of which seafaring is only one – albeit important – step. Engineers, logistics managers, port managers and tourism operators are some of the other maritime professionals we could mention. Offering this broader perspective is the key to making maritime careers a more attractive and secure option for citizens – especially young people.

All in all, it is fair to say that Poland has been the frontrunner among the new Member States in implementing the integrated approach to maritime affairs. That makes me very optimistic about the future of the IMP here and in Europe as a whole. I am especially looking forward to the Polish Presidency of the EU in the second half of 2011 at a crucial time for fisheries and maritime affairs. The IMP can help with a lot of issues of specific interest to Poland. These include promoting coastal navigation and motorways of the sea, monitoring shipping traffic systems and developing seaport infrastructure. We are therefore confident that we will find many common priorities during the Polish Presidency.

Also looking ahead, I would like to thank Poland for hosting next year's 4th European Maritime Day in Gdansk, a remarkable city which I have been fortunate to visit. It is both the symbol of maritime Poland and the birthplace of democratic renewal both for this country and beyond. I think it is very fitting that such an emblematic city will be hosting this flagship event. No other event in Europe can match European Maritime Day in giving power to maritime actors to strengthen cross-sectoral dialogue, build synergies and encourage sustainable growth in coastal regions and maritime sectors.

The coming months and years promise to be fascinating. Poland is already a key player in determining the future for Europe's fisheries maritime policies and during its Presidency Poland will have a unique chance to help shape that future for the better. I know that you will prove yourselves more than equal to this task. I am very much looking forward to working with you on the priorities in the fisheries and maritime policy spheres. Poland's European credentials are impressive. So I am sure that Europe's fisheries and maritime policies will be in safe hands.

Thank you.