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**The EU and Turkey: working together
to address common challenges
in our seas**

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

Address to the Istanbul Technical University

Istanbul, 8 October 2010

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends,

What an immense pleasure it is to be speaking to you here at the Istanbul Technical University, which has been a seat of learning for more than three centuries and boasts an extremely impressive list of former alumni. Being myself an engineer, I have studied at the Technical University in Athens, during very hard times for Greece, I am really proud standing here, in this University, which has been the alma mater of an array of leading figures from the world of science, engineering, research, business and literature, to name but a few.

Standing here today gives me a very real sense of the important role this institution has played in forming the people who have gone on to shape history in their own different ways. I have taken on mantle of Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries with the hope – not shaping history – but at least of making my own contribution, however modest, to shaping the future of Europe's fisheries and maritime communities for the better.

Of course, while the European Union alone must take responsibility for many of the decisions it takes on maritime affairs and fisheries, it also has much to gain from cooperation in these areas. In fact, cooperation is often a pre-requisite for making progress at all.

That is why the solid bonds of cooperation that the European Union has forged with Turkey are so important to us. I can assure you that the European Commission as a whole, is committed to have a real progress in Turkey's accession process. I warmly congratulate the Turkish people for approving the constitutional reforms in the last month's referendum. This demonstrates the continued commitment of Turkish citizens to enhancing their rights and freedoms. These reforms are a firm step in the right direction, as they address a number of long-standing priorities in Turkey's efforts towards fully complying with the accession criteria.

Our desire to strengthen those bonds still further is why I am here today. It is in this spirit that I have met with members of your government in the past few days – and as a result I am more hopeful than ever that we can work together and make progress toward the alignment of the legislative acquis. We are ready. I also hope that Turkey will ratify the additional Ankara protocol, so the European Union will be in position to open the fisheries chapter of the enlargement negotiations – something I am keen to see happen in the near future.

That said, in the meantime, there is much we can do together to pursue our shared goals of a suitable marine environment and a prosperous fishing industry.

We have to continue working together, because our cooperation in both areas is already very healthy – as I hope I have already made clear to you.

Let me start with fisheries. Let me first give you a short update on the CFP reform process and where we take that process from here: Unsustainability, short termism, detailed decision at the highest political level, lack of compliance. I need not go over again the main failings we have already indentified with the current CFP set-up, for they are well-known. More to the point, I hope that in the near future we will also be able to consign them to history once and for all. The debate on all aspects of the current policy has been more fruitful than we could have dared wish. It is now winding down, with the last of our reform conferences taking place next month. The main approach of the future CFP will have number of axes, including the eco-system approach more market-based management instruments, objectives which strike the right environmental-economic-social balance, a less centralized governance framework and a strengthened role for the EU in the international arena. We hope to have put together a broad reform package by mid-2011, with everything ready for adoption in late 2012. So we hope that Turkey will help us deciding and implementing this reform.

Our joint work in the Mediterranean and Black Sea is already bearing fruit. This is all to the good, because for the European Union close and continuous dialogue with Turkey is an absolute must as we pursue our policy goals of sustainable fisheries and resources. For me, our cooperation in relation to the annual meetings of fisheries organizations such as ICCAT (blue fin tuna) and the GFCM (Mediterranean Fisheries) and in supporting Turkey in bringing its legislation into line with the EU's Common Fisheries Policy are central planks of our work on maritime affairs and fisheries.

As regards blue fin tuna you know that I want to see fully science-based decisions taken there through constructive dialogue. I trust that Turkey shares our recovery aims for this stock and, to that end, will implement its commitments to improve control and compliance and reduce the overcapacity of its fleet.

The Commission also values the cooperation that we have been able to develop at the GFCM.

The Mediterranean is both close to my heart and a source of concern to me – not least where securing sustainable fisheries is concerned. In this regard the EU's Mediterranean regulation is vital for the establishment of sustainable fisheries in this sea basin. The measures we are promoting through the regulation are not about making territory. They are about responding to scientific advice for the good of the Mediterranean's stocks and, by extension, of its fishing and maritime communities. The situation in the Black Sea is similar. There, the involvement of Turkish scientists in the work of our Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) has been proven most welcome and should, I believe, act as a springboard towards broader and formalized scientific cooperation. Looking at matters in a wider context, governance in the Mediterranean and Black Sea and in international fisheries cooperation as a whole should be our aims here.

The main problem which still remains to be solved is the problem of control and compliance of the fisheries sector, to our common rules for Mediterranean and Black Sea. Here we have received a lot of complaints we have received from citizens, NGO's and our inspectors of course. To deblock the situation I've already proposed here in Turkey to the Ministers I have met, to establish a bilateral Turkey-EU project for fisheries control and compliance under the supervision of the European Fisheries Agency which is located in Vigo-Spain.

I have also invited Turkey to participate to our working groups.

Let me come to maritime affairs now.

While we may not have such a strict timetable to keep to in maritime affairs as we do in fisheries, as this is a new EU policy, I have nonetheless come to Istanbul also with a clear and strong message on the path ahead that I see for cooperation on maritime affairs between Turkey and the EU.

Indeed, fully-fledged cooperation between Turkey and the EU in maritime affairs is just as important to us as our joint work on fisheries, for a number of reasons. These include Turkey's status as a candidate country and its strategic location connecting Asia to Europe, and East to West. They also relate to the all-important cooperation we enjoy in no less than two of the five seas surrounding the EU and the promise that Turkey's well-developed maritime sector harbours for further growth and possible synergies with the EU. These are all important reasons in their own right.

But there is more.

This is how I see it: I firmly believe that the Integrated Maritime Policy will be used as a key instrument to bring Turkey closer to the EU.

Let me explain

The integrated Maritime Policy offers a unique opportunity to work across sectors and borders. It permits us to have a holistic approach about all actions in sea: Ship buildings, transport, energy, tourism, fisheries, environmental protection.

In a short space of time maritime policy has managed to change the way we deal with our maritime assets and has placed maritime issues high on Europe's agenda. These achievements should encourage us to keep pushing the boundaries when it comes to taking concerted action for the good of our marine environment, maritime economy and security.

My view is clear: maritime policy offers a proactive and pragmatic approach to maritime affairs in the common interest of all countries sharing a sea basin. The tools at its disposal make it both a reliable means of enhancing economic development, environmental monitoring and safety on Europe's oceans and seas and a potent force to unite communities and peoples.

Let me take just one example. The untapped future potential of cutting-edge marine and maritime technologies, resources and services is huge, yet data are often inexistent or difficult to find. Our recently adopted proposal on Marine Knowledge 2020 seeks to tackle these challenges by broadening our knowledge and making data more accessible and less costly for marine data users.

Turkey has long coastlines along two of Europe's sea basins, so its knowledge of these seas will be an essential component of the European Marine Observation and Data Network that we are creating and will be enriching over the next few years. We very much look forward to Turkish participation in the consortia building this network, whose data will be free for all to use, to the benefit of everybody's economy.

So this is how I see it: better knowledge acts as a driver for innovation, competitiveness and, ultimately, growth and jobs. This "blue growth", as I call it, is high on our agenda, and is our main contribution to the plan the EU has to emerge from the current downturn stronger and better equipped to face future challenges: the Europe 2020 Strategy.

However, there is something more, something I feel very strongly and very passionately about. The Integrated Maritime Policy is not only an opportunity for growth: it is an opportunity for peace. In championing tangible forms of cooperation, the IMP emulates the founding principles of the European Union itself, which is to ensure stability and avoid conflicts over territorial disputes.

The Aegean is one of the most politically sensitive regions in the Mediterranean, where many interlinked political problems risk casting a shadow over well-rooted interpersonal relations.

With this in mind, I believe that we can make of our daily cooperation a means to shorten political distances. It is in this spirit that I hope to see in the next budgetary period 2014-2020 funds allocated to maritime cooperation between Greece and Turkey in the framework of our cross-border regional policy.

I am talking to you here as an EU Commissioner. But also as a Greek citizen it is my deepest wish that Greece and Turkey should make every effort possible to solve their border dispute. I think a lot has been done, but more is needed; and, clearly, there is a lot to be gained.

At that great European, Jean Monnet, once said: "I am neither pessimist nor optimist, I am merely determined". It is this "culture of doing" which sums up the contribution of the Integrated Maritime Policy to our moves to cement our close relationship still further.

And on that note, I will leave you with a thought for the future. You have a proverb, which- if you 'll forgive my pronunciation – says: Bir ellin nesi var, iki elin sesi var.

In rightly stating that you need two hands to make a sound, it is actually saying that we work better when we work together.

Well, I am here to extend hand of friendship cooperation to you-for the good of our maritime and fisheries communities now and in the future. I sincerely hope that my visit to Turkey will be just the starting point for long and fruitful cooperation between us.

Tsok tesekeriderim. Thank you very much.