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Let's act for Europe's maritime and coastal economy

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Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

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Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour to be at your conference on behalf of President Barroso. He was unable to be here today and has asked me to convey to you his sincere greetings. You are aware of his personal commitment to promoting Integrated Maritime Policy. Recently at his first "State of Union" speech to the European Parliament, he pinpointed the maritime sector as a prime source for new growth, employment and social cohesion, as a pillar to Europe 2020.

Personally I would like to add that it is an honour to be here considering Portugal's proud maritime heritage spanning centuries.

The conference of today illustrates perfectly that you have never lost sight of the huge benefits that your long and varied coastline and your sea area can bring to maritime and coastal communities and beyond.

I understand that this morning, his Excellency President Cavaco Silva called on Portugal to consider the sea - and the wealth that can derive from it - as a national priority.

This call is not lost on me. I stand before you today to present some concrete actions that we are taking at EU level to contribute to this goal.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Maritime policy is now facing its most difficult test to date.

It is called on to play a full part in pulling Europe out of the ongoing economic downturn, providing it with the economic and social backbone to help it stand strong in the face of future challenges.

I firmly believe that there is scope for the oceans, seas and coasts to provide new economic activities based on exploration, utilisation, innovation and technological development.

In this case, the Integrated Maritime Policy (IMP) can bring concrete and valuable benefit to the European economy as a whole but also to the maritime sectors in our Members States.

The economic potential is there as well as the political will. Now it is time for action.

Let me begin by what we have done so far.

Building our new integrated approach of maritime affairs we used a cornerstone: Better knowledge of the seas and oceans. This is an absolute need.

Today we definitely do not know enough on marine and maritime issues. We know more about moon surface, than the bottom of the Mediterranean.

Yet, our ignorance leads to uncertainty. Uncertainty leads to rising costs. And rising costs leads to inactivity.

To break this vicious circle and because the EU seas and oceans deserve the most comprehensive understanding, the European Commission last month adopted the "Marine knowledge 2020", an initiative which aims to establish a feature network of accessible, compatible and timely data about the status of our seas and oceans.

Better marine data will help the decision makers to reduce uncertainty.

I know, for example, that Portugal faces the consequences of Climate change in terms of sea level rise and coastal erosion either in the islands or along the Atlantic coastline.

Let's take the example of the reduction of uncertainty with the help of better marine knowledge in the future sea level rise.

A study concerning London, the Netherlands and Venice, three places which have to invest a lot to combat this phenomenon demonstrate that the savings are:

- € 100 Millions if we reduce uncertainty by 25 %
- € 183 Millions if we reduce uncertainty by 50 %
- € 366 Millions with a complete reduction

I think that these figures are worth considering.

But a better knowledge of the marine and maritime issues will not only help the public authorities to spend less or the private sector to invest in a better way. It will also contribute effectively to the protection of the marine environment. Actually a successful implementation of the Commission Marine framework strategy directive or the future outcomes of the Biodiversity summit, - that is ongoing in Nagoya (Japan), - depend greatly on our progresses, in the field of Marine research and science.

I would like to call, in that context, that I announced at the beginning of September together with the Commissioner for Research and Innovation, the launching of a new research programme for seas and oceans of 45 million € for 2011. This program will notably focus on "Marine microbial diversity" and the "Multi use of offshore platforms".

Today here, I have the opportunity to announce officially that yesterday the Commission adopted a new Communication on the "Integrated Maritime Surveillance" which sets out concrete steps to enhance the effectiveness and cost efficiency of monitoring European Seas.

We want to bring together the Member States' - as well as European Union agencies - across all maritime sectors, to allow for the exchange of maritime surveillance data, held by all of the concerned authorities.

This increased cooperation would also help cope more efficiently with real time events at sea, in order to improve our prevention and response capacities.

Every one of us recognize that with a more accurate awareness and knowledge of the seas, the dramatic consequences of an accident such as Deepwater horizon in the Gulf of Mexico would have been if not avoided, at least strongly reduced.

The integration of Maritime Surveillance will give us the right and efficient tool to protect our maritime interests against all types of threats - be they safety and security of shipping, oil spills, and trafficking, smuggling or illegal immigration.

I would like to thank Portugal for its active participation in European Maritime Surveillance and particularly in the pilot project launched by the European Commission to promote the integration of surveillance by national authorities in the Mediterranean and Atlantic approaches "Blue Mass Med" project.

The European Commission granted € 4 Millions to finance this pilot project. It aims to define the architecture of the future European wide Maritime Surveillance Network that will allow the interoperability among all Maritime Surveillance Systems. This can also be connected with the "Blue belt" the EMSA program for the Sea without barriers already launched by the Commission last September.

Let me move now to another topic. We say a lot about blue growth and jobs.

To that end I launched last May a study, which aims to analyse their drivers and the policy measures required to make these scenarios a reality. This means identifying

areas where more basic or applied research efforts are needed prior to commercialisation, or where generic innovation trends and technological developments are needed.

We must continue the sustainable development of industries such as tourism, and marine renewable energies.

In June the Commission set out a new political framework to promote "Europe as the world's No 1 tourist destination" in order to identify how best to promote responsible, high-quality tourism that will deliver sustainable jobs. I shall be following and contributing to this initiative very closely, as it is of great economic significance for us all – and not least to Portugal.

Marine renewable energy systems also have the potential to fuel growth. The winds, waves, currents and tides off Europe's shores represent a vast, clean energy resource that we have yet to tap into properly. Offshore wind energy is developing fast, and with wave and tidal energy, we could go a long way towards meeting our energy and climate goals.

With a renewable energy target of 31% for 2020, Portugal is a key market for the development of marine renewable energy. If successfully exploited, these new power sources could trigger investments, contribute to better interconnection between grids and create new jobs in coastal areas.

You see that our building policy has already started to deliver in a considerable number of ways. But it needs uninterrupted financial underpinning to be effective and operational during the remaining years of the current Financial Perspective up to 2013.

For that reason, last month, I proposed and the Commission adopted a proposal for financial resources to take us up to 2013. If the European parliament and the Council agree, € 50 Millions will be available to support our actions and make our policy durable.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The maritime sectors I've just mentioned a few minutes ago, energy, shipping, tourism, fisheries... are engaged today under our eyes in an increasingly tough competition for marine space. I do believe that maritime sectors should benefit from a better management of this space. Maritime economies need a tool that enables them to grow sustainably.

This is why I plan to come forward next year with a proposal for action on Maritime Spatial Planning in order to promote rational and sustainable use of the sea, balance different interests including the environmental aspects and improve the quality of decisions.

This tool could lead to significant economic effect. We know that maritime spatial planning could accelerate investment in two maritime industries which have a vital interest in the reduction of conflicts of interests at sea: wind farm and aquaculture.

Accelerating investment in these two activities with Maritime Spatial Planning by 1, 2 or 3 years is likely to generate between € 60 Million and over € 600 Million in 2020.

At the same time, Maritime Spatial Planning can highly reduce the costs of running the economic system, the so-called "transaction costs". A recent Commissions study demonstrated that, depending on the level of conflicts of interest one has to

face, a reduction of 1% in transaction costs led to positive economic effects ranging from € 170 Million to €1.3 Billion.

These figures are impressive. They are based on assumptions and should be interpreted with care, but they offer promising perspectives.

The IMP will continue to respect the specific conditions of every European sea basin and adapt policy measures accordingly. After the publication of maritime strategies for Arctic, for the Baltic Sea and for the Mediterranean, we are presently hard at work on a Communication on the Atlantic in close dialogue with coastal Member States and regions. This new sea basin strategy will be ready in the first half of 2011.

Work on the strategy has been that much easier, thanks to Portugal's work with France, Spain, Ireland, and the UK to develop a common contribution by Member States. This ambitious strategy for the Atlantic aims to maximise sustainable growth of its maritime economies and coastal regions. And beyond Europe, the strategy will have to recognise the Atlantic's specific qualities: namely that it is home to European outermost regions, the door towards the Americas and Africa.

The Atlantic has a long coastline and separates the continent from its islands. Hence our continued efforts on short-sea shipping and on the Motorways of the Sea should be maintained.

In the past years, two significant Marco Polo projects connecting Portugal with the Paris region and with Italy, received funding under the EU's Marco Polo Programme. Both projects avoided more than 1,2 billion ton-kilometers of goods to be transported by road over a period of 3 years and this contributed to environmental benefits of more than 31 million euro. Furthermore, two maritime services linking Portugal with Italy and Northern Europe respectively have found their origin as Motorways of the Sea pilot projects.

We are also following with great interest the success story of the cruise industry in Europe. In this context, I took note that Lisbon has joined the "Atlantic Alliance", a network of Europe's prime cruise destinations.

So, one has to admit that a lot has been done and a lot is ongoing. To all those who argue that we have a heavy and too ambitious agenda I would answer with a phrase from Fernando Pessoa:

"Tudo vale a pena quando a alma não é pequena" ("Everything is worth it, when the soul is not small")

Thank you.