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Walls or windmills

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

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Dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

I was reading an article recently that described how the business of film rental has undergone several transformations in America in the past few years.

You may remember how, at first, rental shops carried video tapes; which they soon had to throw out in favour of DVDs. Then people in the US started ordering DVDs online and having them delivered through the mail, so they hardly visited shops anymore. Only those businesses which learnt to adapt and offered the mail service survived.

The article concluded: "*Sometimes you have to destroy your business in order to save it.*"

Am I saying that we need to destroy the fisheries sector? Of course not. But I am saying that, like with any other business, we need to adapt to the environment we make our living from, namely to the marine resources.

What should we do then, in the face of the depletion of our marine resources ?

Fish more and more? Drop market prices? Reduce salaries? Deteriorate working conditions?

No, ladies and gentlemen.

The only possible answer was given last March by President Barroso with the EU 2020 strategy. He said then: "*The crisis is a wake-up call... 'business as usual' would consign us to a gradual decline.*"

I couldn't agree more. I am convinced that bringing the fisheries sector to the next level is no longer a political choice for the EU: it is a must. We certainly cannot afford "business as usual".

"Business as usual" would mean perpetuating the structural overcapacity of our fleet – and keep overfishing.

"Business as usual" would mean fighting over individual catch quotas year after year, in a desperate attempt to protect short-term interests.

"Business as usual" would mean maintaining a "top-down" approach which does not empower the industry and does not promote a culture of compliance.

Instead, we need radical change.

We need change simply because we want to keep fishing.

But then to do so, we need to make sustainability our primary goal; we need to base our management decisions strictly on science; we need to adopt an ecosystem approach that is geographically specified, adaptive and capable of balancing diverse social objectives.

In other words, we need to ditch the old belief that the environment and the economy are forever in conflict, each pulling in opposing directions.

To people who say it's a question of jobs versus the environment, I say, no, it's not either-or. On the contrary: for our sector the environment is the economy!

I want a greener, simpler and more decentralised CFP. Therefore in the reform we will try to move away from micro management. We want a set up that focuses on outcomes and setting targets, while offering a choice of instruments for implementation to Member States. We need a system in which the fishing industry and other stakeholders are properly involved and assume necessary responsibility. This is the only way to improve compliance.

The new policy needs to be one that leaves no room for discards. It needs to be one that better protects sensitive areas like spawning grounds and coral reefs. The new

policy needs to be one that takes care of the small scale vessels as they often contribute to a vital extent to the social fabric and economic well being of our coastal communities. And because more than 50% of the fish we eat comes from imports the new policy needs to be one that promotes sustainable fishing also beyond EU waters, via regional fisheries organisations and bilateral agreements. The external dimension of our policy will be a clear part of our reform agenda.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I believe that the only healthy way to bring about the change we need is through innovation and smart growth – precisely as advocated by the EU 2020 strategy.

Don't get me wrong: when I mention innovation I do not necessarily think of academic researchers writing new formulas or of white-clad scientists in remote labs. Sure, we need them too.

But what I mean is that we can find new, innovative methods to manage marine resources or to fish – for example with different vessels, gears, engines etc.; we can improve the added value of our products; or else we can devise regulations that make the sector more flexible and resilient; and so on.

I am looking forward to the Commission's part of the job, actually. Next year I hope to come up with proposals that will channel our common policy towards a leaner, modern and flexible system. A system that will make it fit for the challenges of the 21st century.

However I find that you, the industry and the people working in the sector can also do a lot. You can, in your daily practice, think outside the box and find new, smart and green ways to conduct business.

We are here today to see a few practical examples of this. The people here today - whom I thank for coming - are not the usual stakeholders that we normally hear from.

Today we give the floor to different professionals from all over Europe who work on the ground and are in contact with the fisheries sector: consultants, fish producers, salesmen or groups of concerned citizens.

These people have one thing in common: they have all devised processes, solutions or initiatives that clearly mark a step forward toward greener and smarter fishing practices.

By changing their mind set and embracing a new culture, they have found concrete, original solutions and have done their bit to get out of the impasse and build a different future for fisheries.

In fact, I think that right now these are people who are doing more than anyone else for such a future. These are people for whom innovation is not just an empty word, but a real, living thing creating new opportunities.

It will come as no surprise to hear that in all likelihood, people like them and projects like theirs are going to make the best candidates for financial support in the next few years. I believe that future EU funding should – and will – pay special attention to projects with green credentials fostering innovation and smart growth.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Forgive me for borrowing a somewhat trite old saying: when the wind of change is blowing, some build walls, others build windmills.

I am looking forward to the presentations today. These people are our windmills.

Thank you.