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Zero tolerance on illegal fishing

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

6th International Forum on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing

London, 13 January 2011

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you very much for inviting me here today. It is a good opportunity for me to celebrate the first birthday of the EU regulation to fight Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported fishing. This legal instrument has come into force on 1 January 2010, so it is a real New Year's baby. In my address I will explain how this young regulation works and what it has already achieved so far.

First some words about illegal fishing: Ladies and gentlemen, illegal fishing can only be described as one thing: Illegal fishing is a crime.

It is not only a crime against the environment. It harms us on many levels: it undermines our conservation efforts; it disrupts markets with unfair competition; it chokes the circle of compliance that we so keenly try to establish; it damages law-abiding fishermen, who will thus resent and lose faith in the system. And of course it destroys fish stocks.

So, illegal fisheries have very negative consequences not only to environment or to public interest. In a long term perspective it affects heavily the whole fisheries sector, even those who are having a current profit from this exercise.

Before our IUU regulation, illegal fishing was one of the major threats to fish stocks, jeopardising the very foundation of any fisheries policy. Let me give you an idea of these devastating activities: IUU fishing was, prior to 2010, the second largest producer of fishery products in the world, worth approximately 10 billion Euros. This figure represents 19% of world-wide catches.

I have to be honest with you, the EU has been no saint. We indirectly supported IUU fishing by importing illegally caught fish. Although it is difficult to pinpoint exact import numbers, it has been estimated that the EU in previous years imported 1,1 billion Euros of illegal fish every year. That represented almost 16% of the EU's imports of fish.

The EU, as a key player in fisheries, could simply no longer sit back and watch this development continue. This is why we decided to take an active role in fighting illegal fishing by adopting our IUU regulation. This regulation is the blueprint for our zero tolerance policy against illegal fishing. I dare say that we have curbed this trend in 2010 and the results are yet to be improved in 2011 and onwards.

The logic of this regulation is a simple one: We prevent illegal fishing by taking away the possibility to make a profit from it. We make the marketing of illegally caught products extremely difficult, if not impossible.

Improving the cooperation between flag, coastal, processing and marketing States, we ensure that all imported fish to the EU is traceable. We ensure the traceability of every fishery product with a catch certificate. So, every fishery product entering the EU, must be accompanied by such a certificate. The catch certificate is given by the flag state of the vessel. It is a guarantee for us that the fish was caught in line with international rules on conservation. This system helps us to ensure full traceability "from net to plate". As a result, no products derived from IUU fishing should ever appear on the EU market or on markets supplied by the EU.

The Regulation requires all flag States to take responsibility. So what does that mean? It means flag States have to properly control their vessels and sanction them for breaking the rules. Countries, which don't do this and thereby refuse to cooperate in the fight against IUU fishing, will be listed as so-called non-cooperating countries and no longer be able to trade fish with the EU. Furthermore vessels which are not sanctioned for their illegal activities by the flag States will end up on the EU black list of IUU vessels. Moreover if an EU national, let's say a Greek, is caught in IUU activities under a foreign flag, then Greece has to prosecute this person. To make the inspection circle complete there is also the port state control

rule. This rule obliges the authorities of the landing port to check that fish has been caught in line with international rules.

This Regulation has brought about a quantum leap in added value for all of us because it is non-discriminatory and applies to all countries equally. There is no room for deviation. All our trading partners are treated on an equal footing. Flag states and operators who have earlier benefitted from illegal activities will now find it very hard, if not impossible, to trade their products into the EU. This directly benefits the majority of honest fishermen.

As you can imagine this regulation was quite a turnaround from the way we used to trade fish before 2010. Therefore we have taken good care to thoroughly prepare the implementation of the IUU Regulation in close cooperation with all stakeholders, be they EU Member States or third countries.

The first year of implementation of the Regulation has been crucial. Off the record, I can mention that we have been warned by a number of operators who were concerned that trade flows might be disrupted and that third-country flag States would not be able to cope with the requirements. Today, a year later, we can safely say those fears were exaggerated. Of course, life is now much more difficult for operators trading in illegal fishery products. But for the vast majority of honest operators the implementation has gone smoothly. Moreover several developing countries praised our regulation, as it allows them to introduce new national legislation to better control and monitor their own fisheries industry.

So what does the world look like today after we introduced our IUU regulation? I am pleased to inform you that in general Member States authorities have taken their role seriously. Before accepting consignments, they now carry out thorough verifications. The outcome of these verifications in 2010 was the following: Member States have refused imports in 14 cases. In addition, 228 inspections of third country vessels were reported in 2010 by Spain, Denmark, Portugal and the UK. An additional 4850 inspection were carried out under the Joint Deployment Plan. As a result 240 infringements were detected in 2010.

This proves that our fight against illegal fishing is bringing about concrete results. I can tell you that, already in the first year of implementation, operators are shifting their sourcing to companies, where they are certain that they strictly comply with the rules. Due to our extensive efforts supporting third countries in implementing this Regulation, 90 of our trading partners have implemented the catch certification scheme.

But I also need to point out that some of our former trade partners are no longer accepted as such. Some third countries, usually countries with flags of convenience, simply chose not to notify the Commission; as a result we have banned imports from these countries. Others have been asked to submit notifications which the Commission considers are incomplete, as they do not show that the country controls its fishing vessels, and their activities.

Why? You may wonder.

Well, for us accepting a notification is not just a matter of whether a third country has heavy sea inspection programs or a highly organised administration. We can only accept a notification if the country is willing to observe internationally adopted conservation measures and if it shows that it cooperates with other countries to combat illegal activities efficiently; this means for example that third countries have to take appropriate measures against their own vessels and citizens involved in such activities, and it also means that they have to amend and enforce their own laws.

This, after all, is the whole point of the IUU Regulation: achieving zero-tolerance for IUU activities within and outside EU waters, including for EU nationals operating in any waters, so that the EU can shut its doors to the trade of IUU fishery products.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

With our zero tolerance policy we have sent fishermen, stakeholders and the international community a strong message that the time of responsible fishing has begun.

With our zero tolerance policy we prove that we are serious about protecting seas and oceans around the world.

I am convinced that we have taken the right steps so far and I know that we are heading in the right direction.

At this point, I can see the way forward following two main paths: The first is about international cooperation.

I don't have to remind you that illegal fishing is a global problem, affecting virtually all countries on all continents. It is not uncommon for an illegal operation to be carried out in the waters of different countries, under the flag of yet another state and by a crew made up of several nationalities.

No matter how much progress we make domestically, if our neighbour keeps plundering the seas, then all our legal and moral obligations and all our conservation efforts will be for nothing.

The next step should be, in my opinion, a world-wide catch certification system; I am determined to pursue this idea through the adequate regional fisheries organisations. I am convinced that such a world-wide programme would bring about a fair trade in fisheries products; it would foster an international commitment to combat IUU fishing and will ultimately better deliver on a sustainable world fisheries.

The second way forward refers to our home. To have a better control and regulation we need a simpler, greener and more regionalised policy. This is about the reform of our Common Fisheries Policy. I will make sure that this reform will bring simplification. It will mean less bureaucracy and more regionalisation with a real responsibility for Member States, because less decisions will be taken in Brussels. In the future more decisions will be taken by the Member States of a specific seabasin. For example the North Sea Member States can agree together on an approach for managing stocks in the North Sea.

We will also make the policy simpler by combining various financial instruments within a single fund. We can secure easier and better compliance to a simpler legal architecture. This single fund will contribute in a broader context to the aims of the Europe 2020 strategy. I can tell you from now that I won't be proposing more of the same. The new fund will be there to help deliver the policy we want.

The Market policy reform will also see simplification boosted by means such as: Fewer legal acts and more responsibilities for the fishing industry itself. The outcome should be an industry who can better plan and take better advantage of all the fish they caught. Who is better placed vis a vis the retailers in order to achieve better prices for their products. In this respect, I do very much welcome and endorse the recent awareness raising campaigns on discards (by –catch) by famous British and international chefs. We do need a lot of public support if we want to change and improve the European Fisheries Policy in this regard. We cannot afford to throw away fish, it is not sustainable. The issue of discards will be central in the upcoming reform of the common fisheries policy later this year. We need the public at large to

endorse sustainability and through their concrete actions change the behaviour of industry. We owe the chefs a lot to make this happen.

This effort now is broadening. Yesterday, coming to London from Brussels I was informed that London has been challenged to become the first ever Sustainable Fish City. What a challenge! The National Trust, four London Universities, the Metropolitan Police, Transport for London, the Greater London Authority, the London 2012 Olympic Games amongst others have promised to serve sustainable fish. There is a clear message here and I have received it. We need a new European Fisheries Policy and we can have it!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our meeting place today derives its name from Chatham, an old town in northern Kent. Chatham was first recorded in 880. Like our fish stocks that have been attacked by IUU fishing, Chatham was also under attack several times over the centuries. First there were the Romans, then the Normans came and then there was the Dutch raid. After every attack the rulers decided to build more and more forts around Chatham to protect it. But we can't protect our fish the same way. Fish swims across borders. There is no saying whom it belongs to.

Fish is a shared resource - and this means we have a shared responsibility to safeguard it and pass it on to future generations. As members of a global community sharing this responsibility, we must find every opportunity to work together towards a global zero tolerance policy on illegal fishing.

This forum is one such opportunity and I wish it every success.

Thank you