Baltic Sea Conference

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Speech by Karmenu Vella - Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries at the Baltic Sea Conference – Kiel, Germany, 26 March 2015

Dear Minister,
Dear Ms Rodust,
Colleagues and guests,

Introduction

This is my first visit to Germany in my capacity as Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries. And it is a real pleasure for me to be here.

I am even more pleased to be in Schleswig Holstein, which can be described as the birthplace of Europe’s maritime policy.

Back in 2004, this Land was one of the first to develop its own integrated maritime policy. That experience was then used to push for maritime policy development at European level.

I come from Malta, the small island in the middle of the Mediterranean. Whilst Germany is the largest member state of the EU, Malta is the smallest. But together, we boast two famous pioneers in the context of oceans policy.

As a Maltese I fondly recall the memory of the Maltese diplomat Arvid Pardo, the ‘father’ of the law of the sea, who in 1967, during a UN Conference, called for international regulations to ensure peace at sea, to prevent further marine pollution, to protect ocean resources, and to agree that the seabed constitutes part of the heritage of mankind.

It was Germany’s Elisabeth Mann-Borgese, who in 1970 followed and initiated and organised the first conference on the Law of the Sea on Malta, with the title “Pacem in Mariibus” – “Peace in the Oceans”.

All this led to UNCLOS III Convention in 1973 which set out the provisions for our seas and oceans as we know them today.

It is indeed the same global responsibility we have for our oceans and our seas that brings me here today – the need to make sure that their precious resources can be maintained into the future.

For this, we need to do two things:
First, we need to put our own European house in order – and here let me just say that we are making very good progress on this. I will come back on this later.

Second, we need to give the international community the right tools to work towards a sustainable blue growth, established on a strong international oceans governance.

And here too, progress is being made, with Europe often in the lead.

But in order to be successful on a global level, we have to act on regional and local levels. As the saying goes, “think global – act local”.

Which brings me to the Baltic sea and the leadership that you have provided.

**The Baltic as role model**

The Baltic Sea’s maritime economy is strikingly dynamic. In sectors such as offshore wind, cruise tourism and aquaculture, your region has seen annual growth rates of over 10% in recent years.

In the five largest sectors of the Baltic maritime economy, employment stands at a total of 360 000. Gross Value Added tops 16.5 billion euro. Quite an achievement by any standard.

But the biggest accomplishment is the sustainable way this success has been achieved. It is how your economic drive has been matched by an environmental ambition. The managers of this sea basin have always been acutely conscious of the need to take good care of the marine heritage.

This sense of care has often led to particularly stringent rules on emissions and other harmful man-made impacts; and, importantly, it has also proven to be a strong driver for spectacular innovation.

I’m thinking of the plans for zero-emission ferries, or of the initiatives to make whole islands self-sustaining in energy using renewable resources.

But I won’t encroach on the topics of the coming sessions. I will say however that the Baltic has taken on the challenge of managing its sea area sustainably, and has done so brilliantly.

On Maritime Spatial Planning the Baltic Sea basin is among the most progressive in the European Union; the maritime clusters that are active, for example, in Northern Germany, Sweden, Denmark and Finland are making great strides in taking research out of the lab and into the real world.

The Baltic is showing Europe and the world what we can achieve in the context of marine and maritime sustainability if we are ambitious enough.

And success breeds more success. A study conducted by WWF and Boston Consulting indicates that efforts to restore the Baltic Sea to good environmental health can help create another half a million jobs in the region by 2030, and 32 billion euros in annual Gross Value added.

**The masterplan**

The secret of this success is sustainable innovation. The Baltic region is a hotbed of technological development and progressive thinking. Your track record allows you to channel more research directly towards a more competitive and prosperous industry.

Today’s event is about sharing this wealth of experience and knowledge that have made the Baltic’s success. It is about taking the first steps towards a strategic vision for maritime technologies in the Baltic Sea area.
We need to start linking up this extraordinary expertise across the board, and combine the technology developed in Malmö with that developed in, say, Turku.

We need to combine your individual results and solutions for better energy use, cleaner water for aquaculture, or cost reduction and efficiency gains for wind farms.

But we need to be even more ambitious.

How can we build an inventory of actions that can underpin a broader strategy for innovative Blue Growth in the Baltic?

How can we make the maritime component of the Baltic Sea strategy its most successful deliverable?

I believe we have some of the most eminent experts in the room today. We wanted to bring you together and see how best we can facilitate sharing and developing this innovation. And here you will definitely take the lead.

I too, would like to contribute to the success of this debate and this event, and I would like to do so by outlining my thoughts on Ocean Governance.

**Ocean governance**

Ocean governance will be one of the main priorities of the new Commission.

Over the next five years, we have to lay down the objectives and aim for a more sustainable blue economy and blue growth, through better ocean governance - not only in Europe, but globally.

I referred to the responsibility of managing ocean resources in a sustainable way in order to ensure healthier oceans and a more prosperous society.

Over the past few years we have already managed a number of initiatives that converge towards better ocean governance.

- We have a body of legislation to protect the marine environment that is unequalled in the world.
- We have reformed our Common Fisheries Policy to put our fisheries on a sustainable footing for the long-term.
- We have made massive efforts to develop renewable energy at sea: wind, tidal, and wave.
- We are the only ones in the world instigating cross-border cooperation for maritime spatial planning in sea basins.
- We have sea basin strategies for the Atlantic, Adriatic-Ionian, and the Baltic.
- We have launched a strategy for Blue Growth in the European Union that looks at aquaculture, tourism, energy, seabed mining and blue biotech.

So we have a very good European foundation. But our work cannot stop here. Global problems cannot be solved by European solutions. Global problems need global solutions.

- The use and exploitation of seas and oceans is expanding across the globe – very often in an unsustainable manner.
- Overfishing and illegal fishing remain a reality across the planet's oceans.
- The risk of uncontrolled expansion of activities such as mining or fossil exploitation in sensitive international areas is rapidly increasing.
- The global threat imposed by marine litter is getting out of hand.
- The lack of knowledge about our oceans and our seas is not acceptable in an age when we are
turning our attention towards our oceans as a potential solution for future challenges such as a growing demand for food, for energy, and for resources.

- Developing countries are failing to manage their marine resources and cannot succeed to stimulate enough growth in their own blue economies.

And the list of problems could go on.

But the biggest problem is that current European and international rules, processes and institutions, are often ineffective to respond to existing and emerging global ocean challenges, in particular on the high seas.

The European Union and its Member States are recognised leaders in this international context. We have the muscle to influence oceans policy through international negotiations on key legal instruments and political dialogue. Partnerships with like-minded countries around the globe can help expand the reach of our own sustainable practices.

It is our responsibility to take this task seriously, and to start addressing these issues at a global level. And I would like to encourage everyone to work towards this objective.

In the EU our own high standards can make our economic operators particularly competitive in a global scenario of sustainable Blue Growth. European operators are world leaders in marine equipment, specialised shipbuilding, deep-sea exploration, and coastal protection works. But they have to be assured of a level playing field for their offshore activities across the globe.

My services and I are exploring how Europe can best take forward this role as a global player.

The groundwork and preparation has started, and we will consult and listen before deciding on the next steps. I am very keen to learn what actions you would like us to take at the EU level.

In this context I particularly look forward to discussing these issues with State Secretary Beckmeyer who is in charge of Germany's maritime economy, and who will be joining us later today, and who will be speaking to you tomorrow morning.

For now, this is the message I’d like you to take home - Europe has begun its journey towards a competitive, innovative and a sustainable blue growth, together with better ocean governance. In this respect, it is time that we consolidate our leading international position.

The Baltic Region has been a trailblazer in this regard. Your innovation can be replicated both on a European as well as on a global level.

We want to “export” this success – to make sure that we continue to be innovative and competitive not only at home, but also internationally and globally. It is not only about “thinking global - acting local” but in your case “acting local - thinking global”.

I wish you a very successful conference.