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The Green Paper on a European Maritime Policy – A Starting Point for a new European Policy

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

Maritime Policy Conference of the Baltic Sea Area

Kiel, 21 September 2006

I am particularly pleased to be here among you today. This is not my first visit to Kiel and to the Land of Schleswig-Holstein in my capacity as Commissioner for Maritime Affairs. However, as ever, it is my pleasure to have an opportunity to discuss the Commission's recently published Green Paper on a Maritime Policy for Europe with you, particularly in this setting, for a discussion that will focus to a large extent on the Baltic.

Your willingness to host this conference reflects the strong link that you have with the maritime environment and the importance that your Land attaches to the relationship you have with the seas. I have found this to be a recurrent theme in my many contacts with your Land – the most recent example coming yesterday at the award ceremony for the Elisabeth Mann-Borgese prize. There, I was delighted to honour the two recipients of this prize, Professor Dr. Suess and Professor Dr. Töpfer, for their outstanding contributions to the fields of marine research and marine conservation. May *their* unrelenting efforts serve to reinforce *our* own commitment to the wealth and health of the oceans and seas.

As Commissioner responsible for Fisheries and Maritime Affairs, I have been responsible for the preparation of a Green Paper on a future Maritime Policy for the Union for the past year or so. This paper, or consultation document, constitutes a clear recognition by the European Union that we are all responsible for the maritime environment and that for various reasons we must deal with it in a more integrated fashion.

Indeed, among the many who deal with seas and oceans across the globe, there is a growing understanding that more effort needs to be made to guide, and keep within sustainable limits, the exploitation of previously untapped marine and maritime resources.

Schleswig-Holstein has been a frontrunner in many respects when it comes to matters related to the oceans and seas. These have ranged from the appointment of a Maritime Co-ordinator, via the development of one of Europe's first Maritime Clusters, to the development and maintenance of active political contacts with other Baltic regions, aimed at strengthening co-operation in the interest of a cleaner, healthier and economically more vibrant Baltic Sea.

This leads me to acknowledge one of the key aspirations of the Green Paper – that of ensuring an integrated approach to maritime affairs aimed at not only linking issues and sectors, but also players. It is our intention to see local, regional, national and European authorities linked together both across borders at their own levels but also across levels, ensuring the maximum flow of information and exchange of views possible.

What we aim for, in our attempt to develop a modern and effective approach to maritime affairs, is to bring together stakeholders from different areas of activity to work together - meaning more horizontal integration – and to ensure that those occupying different positions of responsibility also work together - a vertical integration of ocean affairs.

My travels and meetings with different interest groups have shown me that the regions have an infinitely large role to play here. My experience has shown me that it is the regions that have most direct experience of, contact with and extensive knowledge of the seas that surround them. They are the ones which suffer direct consequences of decisions that affect the seas, be these decided locally or elsewhere. Regions are also the first to feel the consequences of actions that are our collective responsibility – climate change and coastal erosion to name but two.

The regional factor has been an important element to us for a while now, and was most certainly visible throughout the pre-consultation discussions that we have carried out on the Green Paper. Our direct contacts with Schleswig-Holstein and other regions, including ultraperipheral and outermost regions; meetings with the Committee of the Regions; good cooperation with the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR); and a variety of other contacts have revealed, from the outset, that a more integrated maritime policy needs to include the regions it affects.

Contributions from the regions have also taught us a great deal about the very particular issues affecting coastal regions. The Baltic Sea area is a typical example, and some of the concerns of this region can serve as examples of questions that need to be tackled elsewhere. For example, environmental degradation with its attendant consequences for the ecosystem, is felt far more significantly here than in many other regions. The recurrent incidence of algal blooms in the Baltic is a demonstration of the extent to which eutrophication and land-based pollution can affect this Sea, and can be used to alert us to situations that may arise elsewhere.

We find in the Baltic a large number of examples of joint efforts to develop surveillance and monitoring systems to track the increasing number of tankers that ply their way through the Baltic. Such joint efforts are exactly in line with the kind of ideas we want to develop in the context of our Green Paper. I would be interested to know just how much potential there is to develop such synergies elsewhere – and what exactly is the right type and amount of co-operation.

The Green Paper speaks about the specifics of ocean monitoring and surveillance, and the importance of the collection and availability of data for such monitoring. We also take a closer look at governance and, in particular, the coastguard functions that governments exert on the seas, and how these functions, which include surveillance and monitoring, can be linked to achieve an overall better result.

The Green Paper, as you may well know, has a strong environmental pillar: namely the Marine Strategy. Adopted by the Commission at the end of last year, this strategy sets out the basis for marine environment protection in the form of eco-system based planning. I think that all of us would agree that one of the key elements for a sound approach to our seas and oceans, and the coasts, is solid and reliable planning – and this must include eco-system based planning and the inclusion of the environment in all our equations.

The Baltic is also exemplary in other respects. Insofar as regional co-operation is concerned, the Baltic is one of the best examples of regional co-operation and dialogue I have come across, and even includes co-operation with our partner in the region, Russia.

International co-operation and dialogue are important elements in the context of a coherent European Maritime Policy. The co-operation which takes place at the local level with Russia on, for example, maritime surveillance and monitoring in the Gulf of Finland can, and should, be linked in to other sectors of maritime activity and used as an example of improved and strengthened international co-operation, without which the global issues affecting the oceans cannot be dealt with appropriately.

As you can see, there are a whole range of reasons why the Baltic Sea region, as some have suggested, can be seen as a case study for a series of issues that we consider to be important elements for a future European Maritime Policy.

This said, I would like also to touch upon the economics of the sea. I realise that this is of vital importance to any Land, particularly one that has invested in it as much as Schleswig-Holstein.

As I have had occasion to state previously, one of the key objectives of our Green Paper for a European Maritime Policy is to contribute to the economic strength of the maritime sectors and to further their competitiveness. In Schleswig-Holstein alone this would apply to: 1,400 businesses, 45,000 jobs and a turnover of 5.5 billion euros. Maintaining this industrial base and its competitiveness is as crucial for you, as it is for Germany as a whole and beyond that, the rest of Europe.

The European Commission strongly supports the efforts being made by Schleswig-Holstein with regard to the development and expansion of maritime clusters, or the strengthening of links between research and industry, for example through the Konsortium Deutsche Meeresforschung led by Professor Herzig, one of Schleswig-Holstein's leading maritime figures.

Your efforts tie in beautifully with yet another area that has been identified as key in the Green Paper, namely marine science and research. The importance we attach to this is recognised in the EU's overall strategic objectives for 2005-2009 which call for us Europeans to strive to remain at the cutting edge of knowledge and technology. I feel strongly that more investment in science, research and innovation is needed in order to develop and strengthen Europe's position in the increasingly competitive global "knowledge economy", and possibly nowhere more than in our maritime industries where we already play a leading role.

Indeed, science and research form one of the leitmotifs guiding our reflection on a European approach to the oceans and seas. In addition to developing the technology that will keep us at the top of the competitiveness league, science and research are also the key to better understanding the oceans' environment and system, in turn allowing us to preserve and protect them over the long term. In this context we must improve the status of the resource upon which our maritime activities are based, and for this, ecosystem-based management, built on sound scientific knowledge, is necessary.

Apart from more and better science, we also need to develop universally applicable rules and platforms in the field of research that will transform data into readily useable information. Independently of the level at which we work, be it global, community, national, regional or local, we need interaction between stakeholders, advisors from the research community, administrators and policy makers in order to develop common visions and tasks, and to find the best manner for implementation of the same.

This will feed in to the policy-making process that the Green Paper also looks at and which is clearly so important if a maritime policy at a European level is to add any value. Policy-makers need to have the requisite information at hand to ensure that policies developed are timely, effective, manageable and above all, relevant.

I would like to emphasise this last point in particular, given the very different nature of the oceans and seas around Europe. The Baltic Sea with its specific features clearly cannot be taken to be identical to the Mediterranean or the North Sea. Each area therefore needs to have its own peculiarities and distinguishing features taken into account. The proposed maritime policy for Europe will not be a 'one size fits all' type of policy, but one with various themes that can, and will, be tailor-made to individual regions according to their realities.

Having given you what I hope is a taste of some of the more prominent areas of consideration within the Green Paper, allow me to now close my remarks with a plea.

It is a request for us all to join forces, to take a shot at creating the synergies that will lead to a more prosperous future in the interests of our oceans and seas, and ultimately in the interests of the many Europeans who live by, enjoy and make a living from them.

Please do contribute to the consultation exercise which was launched in the Spring. Tell what you think, how you feel, what you believe has been left out and what may perhaps not be discussed in sufficient detail. Give us your ideas, reactions, proposals and questions. And do this via snail mail, e-mail, conference conclusions or workshop papers, whatever suits you best.

Together with you, and with your contributions, we will be able to propose a truly European policy for the seas that, above all, finds its roots in the oceans and seas first ports of call, Europe's maritime regions.

Thank you for your attention.