

European Maritime Policy Conference organised by the Dutch Maritime Network and the Mare Forum

Brussels, 17 November 2005

Thank you for your invitation to participate at this conference. I am very happy to be here today not least because you have chosen a most topical theme for this gathering. When announcing our intention to put forward a Green Paper on a future EU Maritime Policy, we hoped to stimulate debate at all levels of governance and amongst a broad range of stakeholders. This conference today shows that, even before the Green Paper is published, the debate is already very much alive.

I am impressed by the wealth of experience, the examples and the fresh ideas that have been brought together in our discussions today. I am equally impressed by you, the audience, who represent such a diverse array of stakeholders. Your presence and your contributions show that you have already done a large measure of thinking on the task ahead of forging a maritime policy for the European Union. I am also impressed by the number of position papers relating to our plans which were brought together at this conference. All of this is most encouraging for our work and I would therefore like to thank both you as participants, and of course the organisers, for making this exchange of views possible.

I would like to start with a very simple question which is: Why are we here today? I will then follow with an overview of our work to date and what it is that we would like you to contribute to this process which is still at an early, albeit important, stage.

We all share the ambition to safeguard the benefits we draw from the wealth of the oceans and seas. To realise our common aspirations, we need to jointly define our vision for Europe's maritime future. Europe's oceans and seas will only remain the rich source of economic benefits they are today if they are well managed. An all-embracing maritime policy will allow us to better assess the full effects of policy measures in one particular area on other policy areas and in so doing, on the full ambit of maritime affairs.

Our work to elaborate the Green Paper is well underway. This is, not in the least, thanks to the input and support we are getting from the many interested organisations like the ones you represent. So far, we have concentrated on exploring the grounds which the Green Paper should cover. To underpin our thinking, we have been following the methodology that I shall now outline.

First of all, we have built on existing achievements. As you know, within the Commission, a number of services are already dealing with sectoral policy aspects related to maritime affairs. The work that has been done to date in each of these has served as vital input into our own process of building a holistic picture of the sector. The EU maritime policy that we are planning does not aim to replace any of the ongoing Community policies. It rather strives to bring them together in such a way that the final result amounts to more than the sum of the two individual parts. We also want to ensure that there is synergy throughout.

Secondly, we have concentrated on building the necessary structures to see this project through till the end. A Steering Group of seven Commissioners that pilot this process under my chairmanship, has in fact, thus far, met twice. A third meeting is scheduled for next week. These Commissioners, all of whom have some responsibilities pertaining to the maritime sector within their respective portfolios, have met the challenge head on. The Maritime Policy Task Force that reports to this Steering Group is also now fully operational. This Task Force brings together all those services relevant to the maritime sector, in a multidisciplinary and multisectoral way, to screen outstanding issues and to facilitate dialogue between the various interests. A series of Working Groups have also been set up to sift through the material we have accumulated and ultimately to identify the most promising, new ideas.

Thirdly, in order to maintain as complete a picture as possible, we have also set up a series of meetings with stakeholders, among these Member State representatives. On several occasions we have also had the opportunity to hold discussions with representatives from Europe's coastal regions. Such meetings allow us to gain a deeper understanding of ongoing activities at a national level, to learn from people's experiences and to gain access to the rich sources of information that lie within national administrations. Through them, we also get some idea as to the sector's expectations.

The Task Force has also made visits to Canada, Australia, and more recently the US, as these countries have already engaged in implementing integrated ocean policies. One important message that has been brought back from those visits is that building a coherent and integrated approach to the maritime sector does not happen overnight.

It is pertinent to note that during the last six months when we have been busy collecting ideas, comparing best practice around the world and building a basic understanding of how the different facets of maritime policy fit together, we have learnt that many elements of a future integrated policy already exist at EU level or within the administrations of some Member States. As the President pointed out this morning, we have no desire to duplicate measures that are already in place.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to now share with you some of our first ideas for this future maritime policy. Allow me, in particular, to focus on one of the key challenges that we have identified which is to harness the competitiveness of Europe's sea-related sectors, while at the same time ensuring a healthy and sustainable ocean environment.

In line with our Lisbon goals to promote more economic growth and jobs in Europe, we, each within our own sphere of activity, need to explore where the potential for growth and job creation lies. In the context of the maritime sector, to make sure no opportunity is missed, our focus has therefore been the broadest possible.

Europe has strong maritime traditions, which are reflected in the economic strength of our present day maritime economy. We should seek ways to secure this for the future. The EU merchant fleet is by far the world leader both in terms of tonnage controlled and by flag. Four of the five biggest container shipping firms hail from Europe. European shipyards are leaders in building innovative, efficient and

ecological vessels, such as cruise and passenger ships, small merchant ships or specialised tonnage. In addition, we have a robust marine equipment industry - supplier to our own industries as well as to others - selling its products all over the world.

There are some 1,200 odd ports in Europe, including some of the world largest sea ports and fishing ports. These ports provide for a whole range of activities related to seaborne transport. Shipping and shipbuilding furthermore benefit from high quality ancillary services, including insurance, finance or brokerage. Our classification societies also operate worldwide.

Europe's attractiveness as a tourist destination is also undisputed: the sector produces about 5% of the EU's GDP. Although we do not have precise figures on the share of sea-related and coastal tourism, we all know that Europe's shores are among the world's most popular tourist destinations. Sea-related tourism is expanding beyond traditional beach holidays, with growth being experienced both for cruise holidays and for yachting.

Offshore energy is another important sector for Europe. In 2004, the production of oil and gas in Europe amounted to some 40% of its demand for oil and some 60% of its need for gas. About 80% of this took place in the North Sea. Three of the leading companies in offshore equipment also are European.

When it comes to renewable energy, Europe also tends to be at the cutting edge of developments. The dramatic increase recently in fuel prices has brought home to us all the fact that fossil fuels are not inexhaustible. Europe is therefore taking a pioneering role in seeking to derive energy from other ocean powers such as wind, waves or tides. Wind energy is no longer a future technology. In 2004, 30% of the energy consumption of Schleswig-Holstein was already derived from wind energy. Wave, ocean and tidal energy are still in an early stage of commercial exploitation, but seem to hold good prospects for the future. The share of renewables in electricity production seems likely to rise rapidly in Europe in the coming years – and all this without adding a single molecule of carbon dioxide to our atmosphere.

I could go on and on, as the list is long. But the point I am seeking to make is that the European maritime economy is already strong, competitive and lucrative.

That being said, competitive pressure from emerging countries, most notably in Asia, keeps mounting. To maintain its leadership, Europe therefore needs to have competitive and technologically advanced companies – companies that are able to respond to the variety of needs of maritime actors.

I should like to dwell on this for a brief while and, in so doing, look at some of the challenges we face as policy-makers.

Industry is a key element to achieving success in any given field. In our market-driven economies, it is often industry that provides the driving force. Yet, we are aware too of the role governments should also play in ensuring an enabling, regulatory environment and in supporting infrastructural developments, education, research, innovation and other such like factors.

Numerous links between different maritime sectors already exist. We should make use of this and factor it in to our future policy planning. In this context, the recently created European Network of Maritime Clusters demonstrates that not only do we have well-established maritime clusters in a number of European countries, but also that the links between these are being strengthened. Closer co-operation and working towards a common understanding of the maritime sectors may also be a first step towards achieving better data on the maritime cluster at European level. Such a comprehensive and complete set of data, which is sadly still missing today, would greatly improve our policy-making.

The global nature of the maritime industry is another aspect that must be kept in the policy-maker's mind. This dimension often fuels questions about competitive challenges or market access in quite a distinctive light. To remain a player on the world market, the European maritime cluster needs to enhance its assets – one of which, clearly is knowledge. I think that you will however all agree when I say that it is not enough simply to keep abreast of our competitors. We need continuous investment into research and development.

In our proposal for the 7th Research Framework Programme, marine science and technology have been identified as a priority cross-cutting scientific area. The recent European Council was also unanimous in supporting a considerable expansion of our research budget. In addition to carrying out research, we also need to find ways to ensure that the necessary networks are in place for the results of this research to be made available for further commercial exploitation. Technological platforms - such as the waterborne platform within the transport sector - that bring key stakeholders to develop strategic research agendas, can play a very significant role in this respect.

Our ability to handle this knowledge is also determined by the availability of skilled staff. The number of Europeans gaining experience on board ships seems to be declining from year to year. Yet, this is the pool of potential candidates for future jobs in many of the land based maritime sectors. We cannot change the unique attributes of a career at sea. However, we can improve the attractiveness of the maritime professions, for example, by facilitating mobility in land-based jobs and improving working conditions. We need to reflect upon this further and I would therefore invite you to share your views on the role of the industry in enhancing the current availability of skills.

We also need to look at having an adequate infrastructure. Besides funding made available by Member States, the EU's Structural Funds play a major role. The ERDF provided some two billion euros for port development in the period 2000-2006. The Maritime Safety Umbrella Operation bringing together several INTERREG projects, coordinates projects around maritime safety, covering for instance risk management, planning systems, databases or models. The Commission is also currently working on the next generation of Structural Funds, hoping that an agreement on the Financial Perspectives will be reached by the end of this year.

On the other side of the coin, we need to ensure that besides creating enabling factors we avoid putting up obstacles. To develop and grow, companies need a reliable and predictable regulatory framework. Unnecessary regulations should also be avoided. Where industry is able to provide satisfactory solutions to certain problems, in the form of codes of conduct, voluntary standards or the use of certificates, such self-regulation should be the preferred option. The Commission is

itself undergoing such a drive, seeking to simplify its legislation and avoid the duplication of regulations and directives. This should reap substantial rewards in the near future.

We also need to address how to balance what we need from the oceans and seas in terms of economic growth and what must be left untouched in order to sustain an environmentally sound and healthy marine environment. All maritime industries depend on the richness that the oceans and seas provide. Their future is inextricably linked to the future health of the marine ecosystem.

Our oceans and seas provide precious resources which we squander at our own peril. If marine debris and toxic chemicals continue to accumulate, if we continue to deplete one fish stock after another, if we destroy the riches of biodiversity in the deeps and if we allow anarchy to reign on the high seas in the name of freedom of the seas, we will have turned our back on sustainable development.

Within this context the Commission has adopted a new Thematic Strategy for the Marine Environment aiming to achieve a better environmental status for our oceans and seas within 15 years. This strategy should be seen as the environmental pillar of the future maritime policy and as such is an important step towards more integrated governance.

The strategy will enable us to produce knowledge on the capacity of the marine ecosystems, which will in turn help us in defining the social and economic capacity of the oceans and seas. This will allow us not only to get a more profound understanding of the oceans and seas, but also to identify the necessary responses in time, in order to ensure their protection.

An increasing number of companies are engaging in responsible behaviour, going beyond compulsory rules or even industry standards, seeking responses to reduce the risk of incidents and using pro-active attitudes to find solutions to environmental and social challenges. The notion of quality shipping is spreading. We can only fully support such initiatives.

Yet, despite measures to mitigate the human impact on the marine environment, we should also look to the effects of climate change. These may not all be negative. Indeed, the melting of ice in the Arctic region may open up northern sea routes. In fact, next year the first containership with ice-breaking capacity will begin a regular service between Murmansk and the Yenisei river on the North Russian Arctic coast.

Global warming may also lead to rising sea levels and more violent storms. We have all been witnesses to the effects of the intense hurricanes in the Gulf of Mexico, the South East Asian tsunami and other such devastating storms. Innovative European knowledge can be applied in finding solutions to these and other problems such as coastal erosion and flooding. The Dutch, for instance, have long protected the considerable part of their country located below sea level and can provide useful models in this respect.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I do not expect anyone to disagree with our aims for achieving more growth and jobs in the maritime sector while ensuring the health of the oceans today and in the future. Yet because the challenges are many, to make that happen we need to find the right tools. We need to establish a new mode of governance for a policy that is at once both wide-reaching and all-inclusive.

A European maritime policy should therefore coherently bring together, and not only be, a collection of vertical sectoral policies. It should look at the oceans and seas based on a sound knowledge of how they work and how the sustainability of their environment and ecosystems may be preserved. It should aim to provide answers as to how decision-making and the conciliation of competing interests in marine and coastal areas can result in a climate more conducive to financial investments and to the development of sustainable economic activities.

It will have to address planning issues; issues related to commercial activities ranging from fishing, transport, ports or cabling; and leisure and tourism issues. It will have to address issues of energy, both renewable and otherwise. It must also concern itself with safety and security issues, the prevention of illegal actions and the interaction of coastal areas with both land and sea-based activities.

The international dimension of ocean management will also need to be addressed. Europe must make the necessary efforts to strengthen its voice on this front within international fora, in global institutions and with third countries. We have a collective interest in ensuring that international rules are implemented by all and efficiently policed. International organisations such as the IMO or ILO should be given, in this sense, better means to ensure that international law and rules are effectively applied and enforced by all.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

The next step is to finalise the preparatory work necessary to present the Green Paper on maritime policy. This is due to be completed in the first half of next year.

Your views on the future directions of our policy are essential if this Green Paper is to serve as a useful basis for the way forward. I am confident that if we all put our heads together, we can forge, out of all the different strands that must necessarily be pulled together, a maritime policy for the Union that is at once representative, integrated and dynamic. I invite you therefore to continue with your deliberations such as those you had today. And I look forward to exchanging views with you over the coming weeks and months.

Thank you.