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Albert Einstein once defined madness as someone doing the same thing over and over again, but each time expecting a different result.

Like a gambler, throwing money into a fruit machine every night

Dreaming that tonight he'll start a winning streak that will change his life for ever.

Choosing not to acknowledge that the machine always wins in the end, and he always goes home with empty pockets

If this is madness, then the antidote to that madness must be realism, sense and good judgement.

Not just continuing with old practices just because you've always done them....

... but knowing when and how to react to changing circumstances and challenges - like facing up to global competition, meeting the ever-rising expectations of customers, and finding a solution to maritime employment problems.

The question is this: If Einstein was around today would he recognise a European maritime sector that was making sane, rational decisions about its future, learning the lessons of the past?

I think not. I think he'd see a sector failing to grasp the opportunities being presented in a changing global market.

The Green Paper due to be published next year is a wonderful opportunity for us to design a new maritime policy for Europe - a dynamic, sustainable, relevant policy, with the right level of intervention at national and regional levels...

.... a policy that responds to hard facts, not headlines. That makes good financial sense, and boosts the whole European economy. That embraces social, economic and environmental issues.

The alternative - carrying on as before in a sterile regulatory cycle, and failing to tackle the problems facing the sector - would, in my view, be disastrous.

We have to ask ourselves: what do our citizens expect from us?

I think most will agree that they want to see a commitment to safety and to the environment. A socially-responsible industry, which is also efficient and competitive.

To achieve this, the European maritime sector needs to reposition itself towards the top of the global market.

Pessimists say we can't compete on costs. If that's true, then we have to compete on quality and reputation, going upmarket and adding value.

We need to harness European expertise on maritime R&D, science and technology to improve our competitive edge. We need to integrate seafaring with shoreside expertise. And become more dedicated to customer service in all parts of the maritime sector.

We need to rethink how the industry promotes itself - not just to its customer base, but to the business community at large and to the citizens of Europe.

And we need to make shipping even more environmentally responsible - not least in ensuring that the seas around Europe are exploited in a sustainable manner.

In addition to long established marine activities like fishing and oil & gas exploration, there is increasing competition for sea space, as technology allows more innovative uses of the marine environment.

For example, the development of offshore renewable energy sources is vital to meeting Europe's future energy needs. Shipping vessels are getting bigger and faster, and there are changes in vessel traffic patterns, adding to congestion on some shipping routes. We need some mechanism to address these potential conflicts of interest.

Some member states, like the UK, have already begun to explore the potential for marine spatial planning on a national level - but perhaps we need to do more to encourage the sharing of best practice between different European countries.

With growing congestion and evolving traffic patterns, there's increasing pressure to improve safety. For example, the maritime industry does not yet have a sophisticated, integrated, standardised navigational system. The bridge of a typical merchant ship is cluttered with all sorts of different navigation technologies - but they're neither standardised nor complementary.

Elsewhere we see aircraft and road transport benefiting from state-of-the-art technology - yet the shipping industry still lacks consistent direction on navigation systems.

So it is our aim to present a paper on e-navigation principles to the next IMO Maritime Safety Committee meeting. It's only a start - but it's also symbolic of a wider need to invest in a better, more professional future for the entire European shipping industry.

Moving upmarket also means we need to work tirelessly to marginalise those companies that drag down everyone's reputation.

For example, we need to reform Port State Control inspection practice, targeting more efficiently those who transgress the laws - and supporting those who comply.

It's also vital we develop a policy to attract more high-quality employees to a maritime career.

In just one generation, we could be facing a situation where we have no EU seafarers. In two generations, no maritime skills for shore-side or regulatory jobs and that is absolutely not acceptable.

But the only way to improve employment opportunities and attract the sort of high calibre employees we want is to improve standards afloat and onshore.

Next February, in the ILO, we need to secure an enforceable Convention on working conditions. That will help challenge the old fashioned view that a maritime career is for the less-educated.

The vision is clear: we must be at the quality end of the market, following principles of sustainable development, and encouraging responsible employment.

And while European shipping must continue to play a major role in global markets, we must also develop a more professional regional policy, backed by more effective maritime clusters in Europe

Better training. Better standards. And better pay. Some mariners in Europe today are not even earning minimum wage levels. It's time to root out such practices, and clean up our act.

The key is to get the right level of intervention. To cut back on all the unnecessary legislation and red tape that already exists. And to allow the sector to move upmarket, offering better customer service, and outlawing bad practices.

But not so much intervention that it stifles commercial initiative or restricts national discretion. Here, again, it's all about having the right judgement.

These, then, must become the priority issues that drive the Green Paper, and drive our new maritime policy.

They're all about recognising our place in the market, setting out a vision for quality, and then putting them into action.

We cannot allow things to go on as they have for the past 20 years. That will leave us with no indigenous maritime sector within a couple of generations.

Although this would happen first among the older founding EU members, let there be no doubt that everyone in Europe would eventually be affected. No-one should think they're immune.

If we carried on regardless, then we would be guilty of failing our economy, which depends to such a large degree on the maritime activities which sustain it.

It's up to all of us - legislators, shipowners, unions, operators, employers, industry support organisations and maritime bodies - to make sure that doesn't happen.

The sea demands our respect, and, if treated with respect, it will continue to be an enormously powerful resource.

It's a strategy that must stretch into the long-term future - five, ten, twenty years. But in the short term we must make sure the momentum built up in recent months is sustained beyond the UK presidency.

And so we're very grateful to our colleagues from Austria for their agreement to continue this effort with us, so we can make the handover seamless.

The UK commits to work with succeeding Presidencies on a new maritime policy, through the launch of the Green Paper at the end of the Austrian presidency to its eventual delivery.

The Maritime Green Paper will chart a new course.

For EU ships and EU workers, playing a leading role on the world stage. Integrated with an EU shoreside industry, drawing on all the skills and know-how Europe can offer.

A diverse, broad sector that knows its place in the market, with all its constituent parts working towards shared social, economic and environmental goals.

It's a strategy of change and innovation. Of appropriate reaction. Of sound judgement.

A strategy that will secure the future success of the European maritime sector.

And a strategy that Einstein would recognise instantly as one based on common sense and sanity.