EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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President of the European Commission

Speech by President Barroso: "A strong maritime pillar for the Europe 2020 strategy"

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President Christofias,

Ministers,

Commissioner Damanaki,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I wish to congratulate first of all President Christofias, for giving thrust and emphasis to the EU's Maritime Policy during his Presidency of the Council, and for organising this important Conference.

I also would like to thank the Cypriot authorities and especially President Christofias for having given me the opportunity to participate to the closing ceremony of this meeting. I could not refuse: the EU Maritime Strategy is a subject very close to my heart. And I cannot imagine a better place than here in Limassol, in Cyprus, to organise such a conference and sign the Declaration. We all know how important the sea is here, how it has shaped the history of the Country and how it influences today the lives of those who live by it.

The adoption of a Maritime Agenda for Growth and Jobs could not come at a better time. This is a defining period for the EU. We face a difficult economic situation; and we must answer the legitimate concerns of our citizens about their future.

The European Commission has long made clear that there are no short term fixes and that the route to economic recovery lies in the correct balance of measures both to ensure stable public finances and promote growth.

In terms of growth and job creation part of the answer is certainly through the blue economy. This sector is booming, and at times of crisis and pressure, this is rare good news.

We are relying more and more on maritime transport for our external trade; and the overall employment in the European maritime economic activities is expected to go from 5.4 to 7 million by 2020. The cruise sector alone may grow by 60 percent! But there is growth in new innovative sectors as well as the traditional sector of shipping. To give one example, by 2020, offshore wind energy is expected to grow by 30 percent. Experts foresee a tenfold growth of tidal and wave energy.

These are staggering figures, and opportunities, that Europe cannot afford to miss.

President,

Ladies and gentlemen,

There is no doubt that our seas and oceans can help Europe's economic recovery in a decisive way.

In 2007, to boost Europe's maritime economy, I launched the Integrated Maritime Policy. In fact, already in 2004 I thought it would make sense to have one Commissioner fully dedicated to Maritime Policy and not only to Fisheries, so that we could build on the experience of countries in setting a maritime strategy and frame a European Policy in this field. I am very proud of the early leadership which the Commission showed in this increasingly important sector. I am also heartened to see that the ownership of the maritime policy by Member States is such, that we are now moving on to its second phase: Blue Growth.

The Declaration we are adopting is not simply a statement of the status quo, it goes much further than this with a focus not just on what is important today but a clear emphasis on what we should do to create the jobs of tomorrow.

This outlook toward the future is very important. We need to embrace the maritime potential of Europe, and we need to do it with confidence and with a dynamic agenda. The European Union has a unique maritime experience, leadership and resources. Its coastline is more than four times that of the United States and twice that of Russia. Around half the patents for offshore wind have been generated here, and so have a third of those for algae aquaculture and ocean renewable energy.

Over 40 percent of the world's scientific publications on marine environment, ocean renewable energy and blue biotechnology are issued in Europe.

But as in every sector international competition is getting fiercer by the day. The next few years will be crucial to maintain Europe's competitive edge and turn our innovation leadership into sustainable jobs for Europeans. If we are to compete with the emerging giants we too have to ensure that we operate on a scale which makes best use of the advantages which we possess.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is in this challenging environment that last month, in the Blue Growth Communication, adopted by the Commission at the initiative of Commissioner Maria Damanaki, the Commission made policy recommendations for the sectors with the highest growth potential. We will follow up with a series of initiatives which will drive the maritime policy agenda forward in the coming years.

Renewable energy from the sea can contribute to our goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20 percent and produce 20 percent of our energy from renewables by 2020. At the same time, developing ocean renewable energy opens up opportunities for the shipbuilding industry to diversify into off-shore platforms or wind turbines and for coastal communities to regenerate ports, peripheral areas and outermost regions of the European Union.

This is the kind of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth we want to have in Europe!

The Blue agenda has many other aspects; it is not just about economy. Sectors such as health and research are directly concerned. Blue Biotech offers huge possibilities and we are already seeing some of the fruits in the medicine sector for instance, with new anti-cancer drugs and anti-virals of marine origin.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Europe's seas are still largely unexplored and as we push back the boundaries of our knowledge so the economic potential of our seas expands. But of course bottlenecks and barriers exist and we must do all we can to overcome these both directly through our blue agenda but also through our broader policies.

To give one example: access to finance is one such barrier; and a formidable one for maritime SMEs. As you know, activities in the development stage are mainly carried out by small companies and suppliers, which are most affected by the reduced availability of loans. Facilitating investment in SMEs is one of the key priorities of the European Semester. This is where we should be pooling our efforts.

Another problem for SMEs is attracting skilled staff. In the current economic climate, this is unacceptable. As the Limassol Declaration rightly points out, we need to improve the prospects for maritime careers, by providing adequate training and promoting labour mobility.

We should draw from the ideas and best practices across our member states. We must also find ways to attract skilled people to peripheral regions. Above all, we must be able to prepare young people for the jobs of tomorrow, in both existing and emerging maritime sectors.

At the same time, we need to develop a knowledge base that is able to stimulate growth, protect the marine environment and optimise the allocation of marine space. Right now Council and Parliament are discussing, under the steering of the Cyprus Presidency, the Commission's proposal for the Multiannual Financial Framework for 2014-2020. In this context, Horizon 2020, the new Research and Development programme, has been designed keeping in mind Blue Growth and with a specific focus on supporting marketable innovation.

Speaking of finance, let me stress here that we cannot separate the debate on growth from the debate on the EU budget. A future-oriented EU budget is our most important tool to target investment and channel it on growth and jobs. Given the immense potential of the maritime economy, the support for maritime sectors and coastal regions should be fully anchored into the new Multi-annual Financial Framework. And the Commission is embedding sea-basin strategies into the Common Strategic Framework, so as to maximise the cooperation between Member States and the impact of the funds. Nor should we forget that the Connecting Europe facility will have a positive impact on the blue economy, through the strengthening of Energy transport and digital networks.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Declaration we are adopting today is a strong basis on which to develop the blue economy in Europe. By doing so we are giving a strong maritime pillar to the Europe 2020 strategy.

We can build on the achievements of our Integrated Maritime Policy, which in the space of five years has improved resource efficiency, cut costly duplication and made better use of public money - and there could be no better result at times of economic crisis.

I have full confidence in our capacity to work together and grow together. Let us continue with the same spirit of cooperation and synergy that has led to this Declaration.

Europe has an unequalled maritime tradition; we must build on this as we look towards our economic future. The maritime agenda is a trump card, and its success will be a critical step towards economic recovery. We have a duty to pursue it, for the prosperity not just of maritime Europe but of Europe as a whole.

I thank you for your attention.