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Aiming at the Sustainable Use of our Oceans and Seas

International Ocean Institute

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Dear Students,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to participate in this Seminar organised by the International Ocean Institute and the University of Malta. On the one hand, it allows me to present to you the work underway to develop a Maritime Policy for the European Union, and on the other hand, possibly more importantly, it affords me better insight into your views on the foray into relatively uncharted waters that is currently being undertaken by the EU.

When the Green Paper on a future Maritime Policy for the Union was adopted last June, a one-year consultation period was simultaneously launched. This extended time for us to consult with you is a relatively new approach for the Commission – one that confirms the importance we attach to listening to those with a direct stake in, and knowledge of, the maritime sector before formulating any policy. This relatively new way of conducting our affairs is symbolic of a Europe 'in listening mode', a Europe that wants to take heed of what its citizens say in order to ensure that the best policy decisions are taken in their name.

Here within the International Ocean Institute and the University of Malta, there is enormous expertise that can be channelled towards the project at hand. I will therefore spend a few moments outlining what it is that the Green Paper on a Maritime Policy for the Union aims to achieve and the reasons why. I then look forward to hearing more about *your* ideas and what *you* think this policy should be.

I augur that this event will serve as an example to other academic institutions to follow suit with respect to organising fora such as this in which the proposed Maritime Policy may be discussed. I also augur that others will follow the example of the IOI who have already provided us with a most welcome contribution. The IOI is a remarkable Institute which has, throughout its existence, been at the forefront of calling for the sustainable development of the oceans and seas. Founded by Elisabeth Mann Borgese, it continues to benefit from her vision and her devotion to the cause of the oceans.

In the European Union, we share the aims of the IOI. We too are seeking to attract more attention to our oceans and seas. And like you, we too feel that the sustainability of our oceans and seas must be a pre-condition to any further exploitation of this fragile and finite resource, particularly if we expect to reap any real or long-lasting benefits. We count, therefore, on you to inspire our work towards better oceans governance.

One of the opening lines of the Green Paper states that:

"... our citizens are not always well-informed of the importance of the oceans and seas in their lives. They know how crucial water is, but may not make the link with most of its being recycled from the oceans as rain or snow. They worry about climate change, but may not always see the key role of the oceans in modulating it."

It is lacunae in our understanding of the oceans and seas as an integral part of the events that shape life on our planet, typified by the extract above, that we hope to address through the Green Paper. One question I often put to myself is: are people sufficiently aware of the value of our oceans and seas? And analogous to that: are we, the international community, doing enough to call people's attention to the delicate situation of the ocean's ecosystems in order to preserve it?

I fear the answer to these questions may not always be positive.

Thanks to the efforts made by President Barroso, at the very outset of this mandate, we in the European Commission are recognising the fact that our oceans and seas need more attention, more discussion and through that, more action. This is why we are having this debate on a new policy on maritime affairs that is both all-encompassing and holistic in its approach.

We believe that for far too long the oceans and seas have been treated as an entity separate to the rest of our world. We have tended not to fully understand the links that exist between ocean systems and life on land, the seas and our atmosphere. Furthermore, we have also tended to disregard those links that have become apparent, for reasons of differences that have arisen between different activities. Essentially, we have looked at maritime issues in a sectoral manner failing to see the very real connections, many of which could be complementary, between the uses we make of the oceans and seas, such as drilling for oil, fishing, shipping or recreational pursuits.

We are "terrestrial animals" and this has tended to make us more inward looking, concerned with our space on land and how competing land uses can be managed more coherently.

The oceans and seas are clearly different: they are not the property of any one state or entity beyond their immediate waters and they do not have borders or frontiers. In a society where the concept of ownership is so pervasive and has led to the clear delineation of rights and obligations, the difficulties of defining ownership in the case of the seas and oceans, have made us rather less vigilant about regulating their use.

One may even go so far as to say that we have tended to overlook them altogether, and in so doing, have also overlooked their challenges and constraints. We have also tended to take a short-term, purely economic view of things, forgetting the intrinsic and often non-quantifiable value of the oceans and through this, their continued potential to yield both non-tangible *and* economic rewards.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We should have no illusions. If only we could succeed in bringing attention to the long-term benefits of the oceans and seas, not solely as a life support system for the planet, but also as the source of much wealth, we will be able to seriously address their sustainability.

But, I am an optimistic person.

I believe that overall awareness of the oceans and seas is now coming about, particularly as the general public become better informed. Environmental organisations are also gaining in prominence and as a result of these two forces the debate too is growing in importance. By harnessing the forces already at play, I feel confident that we will be able to address maritime affairs in a broader and more integrated manner in the near future.

I am also confident that the more we develop our own work on a future integrated Maritime Policy for the Union, the more we will understand just how a cross-cutting approach to our oceans and seas will assist us in addressing some of Europe's most decisive challenges.

The Green Paper looks at some of the reasons why a new maritime policy is needed.

Firstly, it sees that globalisation is a growing phenomenon that has to be faced, with all its positives and its negatives. International trade is on the increase leading to economic interactions between different regions of the world to an extent that has never before been witnessed. Europe is thus depending ever more on its seaports and their systems of multimodal logistics, on its powerful shipping industry, on its shipyards and on the rapidly rising demand for sea travel as opposed to already congested land travel. Coupled with the need to keep these sectors competitive in the face of lower prices abroad and the need to safeguard employment, the Commission has recognised the need, within the context of the Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs, to strengthen and cultivate a thriving maritime economy.

A maritime policy that is based on knowledge and research is also critical, in light of these and other challenges. In the case of climate change, for example, the oceans are key to understanding more of what is happening to our planet. How are the oceans and seas changing in relation to their temperature, their salinity, their acidification and their currents? How do all of these impact the atmosphere? Coastal regions will inevitably be the first to be affected by sea rising levels, and the effects will not stop there. We need to be better informed about what to expect and therefore must be in position to access more and better marine research, without the overlap and duplication of efforts that we experience today. In other words, by integrating marine science and research, we can at least understand the forces at play and then seek the right actions to correct imbalances.

A new maritime policy is also important if we are to act decisively and preserve, without delay, the resource base upon which all maritime economic activities are built. This means that we have to decouple the development of ocean uses and maritime activities from marine environmental degradation, stemming the latter to reap benefits from the former. In the Commission we are acutely concerned with this. We have recently put forward a Marine Thematic Strategy to this end and have made it clear in the Green Paper that this strategy is one of the pillars upon which any maritime policy for the Union must rest.

A new maritime policy is relevant too in the context of the well-known energy challenge that Europe is currently facing. This is an issue at the top of our agenda as was demonstrated by the Summit held in Lahti, Finland last month. In order to improve the security of energy supply, we require access to more and different sources of energy. We therefore *cannot* avoid continuing our exploitation of offshore oil and gas given that these fuels provide a considerable amount of the energy we consume in Europe. We also need to look at the diversification of energy entry routes into Europe, a fact that will, without doubt, rely more heavily on the safe maritime transportation of these energies through LNG (liquefied natural gas) and other terminals. Maritime transport – given that it is a less polluting alternative than many other modes of transport – is key in this process. The development of short sea shipping has already demonstrated the potential necessary to improve energy efficiency.

It is also abundantly clear to all today that Europe needs to find alternative sources of energy, particularly renewable energy. This leads to expanding offshore wind energy and working for the future exploitation of wave energy, not to mention completely new technologies that our oceans themselves may be in a position to yield if properly developed.

Demographic trends in Europe and by this, I refer particularly to an ageing European population, also have a bearing on the

new maritime policy. Several European holiday-makers choose to spend more of their leisure time by the sea. This appears to be leading towards an increasing rate of senior European citizens who are now choosing to move from cities to coastal areas for their retirement. Such trends create opportunities for the maritime regions of Europe, but as with most things, with opportunities also come challenges. Such movements to coastal areas require planning and form part of the growing need for integrated coastal zone management.

The current fragmentation of decision-making makes it difficult to reconcile competing uses and to define priorities in the use of the oceans and seas, resulting, more often than not, in the adoption of conflicting measures. Moreover, fragmentation among the different maritime policy areas makes it difficult to comprehend the potential impact of one set of activities upon others. Hence, for instance, the fact that almost 80% of ocean pollution results from land-based human activities, means that not only can ocean problems *not* be viewed in isolation from one another, but they also cannot continue to be viewed in isolation from what happens on land or in the atmosphere.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

These are a few snapshots of some of the factors that are placing pressure on our oceans and seas. Within them, it is not difficult to find convincing reasons for us to realise the importance of appropriate ocean governance, and as a result of that, a renewed commitment to the health of our oceans and seas.

Through a maritime policy that looks at these various pressures - not in isolation but as a complex interplay of forces - we can hope to move towards a clearer idea of where the integration of efforts, or where better coordination, is required. It will facilitate moving towards closer cooperation between the different levels of decision-making: at a national, regional and European level. It will bring about better co-ordination between the varied actors in the maritime sphere and finally, it will hopefully bring about a new way of thinking - one whereby all human actions having an impact on the oceans and seas are considered together - as individual pieces of the same whole.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to conclude by underlining that this is the first time in the history of the European Union that the seas and the oceans *as a whole* are the subject of our political focus.

We have before us, therefore, a unique opportunity to bring a new and fresh way of doing things; a new and fresh way to our activities in the maritime sphere.

It is a chance for us to work together constructively, to bring together individual measures, to reinforce their complementary angles and to forge new synergies. Inevitably, it is also a unique opportunity to iron out differences and to find innovative solutions that can accommodate what may have previously been activities that came into conflict with each other.

Finally, and more immediately, with the ongoing consultation process on a Green Paper for a European Maritime Policy underway, this is an opportunity for citizens and for stakeholders to truly come forward and state their case, to express their views and to highlight possible inconsistencies.

As I have said to others before you, and will happily say again, do take up this invitation to make your views heard. It really is instrumental in ensuring that we have European policies that truly serve Europeans.

Thank you.