

**SPEECH - LVII COSAC  
SESSION IV: EXPANDING THE BLUE ECONOMY -  
TOWARDS A MORE SUSTAINABLE EU INTEGRATED  
MARITIME POLICY  
29 MAY 2017**

Dear delegates, Ladies and gentlemen,

My sincere thanks to the Maltese Presidency for inviting me back to Malta to discuss the blue economy for the second time in two months.

Not because I'm always happy to be back in my home country – although of course I am. But because I think it's important to discuss the blue economy not just with ministers, but with you as well.

***[Political context]***

We have an exceptionally full agenda on blue growth this year. With last month's Ministerial Conference. With the European Maritime Day 10 days ago. And with the upcoming 'Our Ocean Conference', which the European Union will be hosting here in Malta in October.

And it's not just the European Commission talking about blue growth.

For example, I can only commend the work by Christophe Clergeau from the Committee of the Regions, whose report on Maritime Policy and Blue Growth was adopted on 12 May.

In the European Parliament, the Seas, Rivers, Islands and Coastal Areas Intergroup (SEARICA) adopted its own Maritime Declaration on 26 April. It's also pushing for a fully-blown Maritime Committee in the European Parliament.

But the success of our common blue growth project will not – or at least not only – hinge on 'Brussels'. It also depends on *you* – your engagement and your political backing.

And that is why I am here today.

## ***[5 years of EU Blue Growth Strategy]***

We all know that the blue economy can be a driver for welfare and prosperity. This message was at the heart of the Blue Growth Strategy that the European Commission adopted in 2012.

At a time when Europe was still reeling from the financial crisis, we decided to focus on an area of the economy that we knew could boost growth and create good jobs.

And today, things are starting to look up. Unemployment is the lowest since 2009. Growth is picking up.

Now is the time to make sure we ride this wave of economic recovery.

Over the past five years the EU has developed a substantial track record on blue growth.

- We have invested heavily in research and innovation – more than 800 million euros over the past three years.
- We have created a new European **Maritime** and Fisheries Fund – the EMFF, ring-fencing around 275 million euros for maritime policy projects.
- We have put in place new macro-regional strategies and sea basin initiatives with a focus on blue growth.
- We have set up stakeholder-led groups like the Blue Economy Business and Science Forum. This allows businesses, scientists, civil society and public authorities to discuss ideas for blue growth *together*.

And we have come to recognise that strong blue growth will depend on keeping our marine ecosystems healthy. We cannot erode our marine resources, the very assets of our blue economy.

Instead, we need to do blue growth the European way. A way that is environmentally sustainable, that guarantees good living and working conditions and high social standards.

That way, the blue economy can become a real European success story.

### ***[EU achievements]***

And we have plenty to be proud of.

Europe is the global leader in developing **ocean energy technologies**. We host 60% of all wave energy developers in the world. 90% of offshore wind energy capacity is installed in our waters.

The value of **aquaculture** production in the EU is up by more than 40% compared to a decade ago. And this is high-quality *sustainable* aquaculture, produced in line with the world's strongest environmental, health, and safety standards.

**Coastal tourism** is booming. In Italy, 32 of 34 port structures created between 2000 and 2007 were for tourism. Europe is the world's second largest cruise ship destination. And cruise tourism is growing fast: port-of-call passenger visits rose by 22% between 2009 and 2014.

Meanwhile, **marine biotech** research is bringing innovative products to the market: cosmetics, food supplements, antibiotics. Biofuel from algae is increasingly seen as the next, environmentally-friendly generation of biofuels.

### ***[Looking ahead]***

The European Commission is pushing to keep up the momentum.

Last month in Malta, Ministers discussed **three blue economy papers** we adopted in the past few weeks.

These papers lay the foundation for what could be the focus in the months and years to come.

And let me highlight three areas in particular where more needs to be done.

**The first is access to finance.** High-potential ventures like ocean energy projects are still finding it difficult – too difficult – to access funding. So one of our priorities has to be to make money available to bring bright ideas to the market, support cutting-edge technology, and maintain European global leadership.

**My second point is skills and qualifications.** As new blue economy sectors emerge and the traditional ones evolve, we need to make sure that people continue to have the right skills. And we need to convince young people to choose a career in ocean-related fields. The Blue Careers Initiative we launched last year and our blueprint for skills cooperation go in that direction.

**Thirdly: regional cooperation.** Because working together is often cheaper, more efficient and more effective.

Take the BLUEMED Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda. By clubbing together, Mediterranean countries have secured 46 million euros of EU funding for marine research for 2016 and 2017.

Looking beyond research, we've put in place sea-basin-wide strategies in the Atlantic, the Baltic and the Adriatic-Ionian seas, and now in the western Mediterranean as well.

Meanwhile, in the North Sea, countries have agreed to better coordinate renewable energy projects. I am convinced that this is the way forward.

***[The blue economy as a shared project]***

But, ladies and gentlemen, creating a successful blue economy is not just up to countries with a long maritime history.

As you know very well, maritime supply chains reach deep into the heart of Europe.

There is a valuable role being played by **inland** European Member States, by their innovative industries and their know-how.

Austria, for example, has about 7 000 jobs linked to the production of marine-related machines. Drilling rigs and loading cranes that are built in the Czech Republic are delivered to ships in Dutch yards. In Slovakia, the Komarno yard employs 1700 people to build multi-purpose river and sea-going vessels.

So a lot of the positive aspects of the blue growth, and the maritime economy are actually far from Europe's coasts.

However it is not just the positive maritime contributions that can originate inland.

I am speaking of course of the issue of marine litter – which to a large extent means plastic pollution.

Let's not forget that about 80% of marine litter originates on land. This waste finds its way into the sea from all parts of Europe, and across all parts of the globe.

Design and production processes can help us reduce this problem. It can do so by making it easier to recycle material. Each and every one of us can do our bit to make the sustainable blue economy a success.

And of course, this also goes for countries beyond Europe.

That is why in November, the Commission and the High Representative launched a **Joint Communication on international ocean governance**. We proposed 50 actions to better manage the world's oceans, reduce human pressures, and invest in ocean research and data sharing.

But to do this, we need your help. To foster a more horizontal and inclusive approach to maritime issues back home. And to turn citizens, business leaders and policymakers into informed ocean advocates.

***[Concluding remarks]***

Ladies and gentlemen,

The debate on further boosting Europe's blue economy has been launched.

I am personally very proud of our successes so far – and I am grateful for all your hard work and support in making them happen.

I'm looking forward to continuing that work under the incoming Estonian Presidency.

So please continue to use your voice and speak out for sustainable ocean-based growth. Let's all shape the blue economy, together.

Thank you.