

**Speech by Commissioner Joe Borg at the
International Consultation Conference
*From Education to Employment –
How to Create a Successful Image of Seafaring in Europe*
Sopot, 21 – 22 February 2007**

Dear Minister for the Maritime Economy,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to say how delighted I am to be with you today in Sopot. Sopot serves as a window onto the Baltic Sea - almost one quarter of which lies within Poland's catchment area – and it has been a significant player in Poland's maritime tradition.

I am also pleased to be presenting our Maritime Policy Green Paper here on the Baltic coast given its emphasis on co-ordination and co-operation in maritime governance. This is a happy co-incidence, as the Baltic represents one of the clearest examples in Europe of the interrelation of maritime affairs, and the benefits to be had from working closely together. The most important task of the Southern Baltic Sea Parliamentary Forum and the Conference of the Baltic Sea Area is to make sure that this close co-operation is a reality. They can also serve as a model of co-ordination and collaboration for other maritime regions sharing similar characteristics. A foretaste of the role they can play has already been ably demonstrated by both the Forum and the Conference through their active contribution to the consultation process underway to build a common vision for Europe's oceans and seas.

Together with them, I would also like to thank Mr. Rafal WIECHECKI (Vee-cet-ski), the Polish Ministry of Maritime Economy for organising this

conference and in so doing, for enabling stakeholders from all over Poland to have their say.

June of last year saw the launch of the Green Paper entitled "Towards a Future Maritime Policy for the Union: A European Vision for the Oceans and Seas". We are now more than half-way through the consultation period, and I am pleased to say that the Green Paper is generating wide interest and debate. Although it is still somewhat too early to draw any conclusions from the consultation process, it is clear that a number of issues are already attracting particular attention.

Today I would like to share some thoughts with you on the issues of education and employment; and the importance of maritime spatial planning.

However, before delving into these themes more deeply, I would like to briefly refer to the poor availability of data in the domain of maritime affairs. It has been clear to me since the beginning of our efforts to develop a maritime policy for the EU, that there is a lack of comprehensive data available. This is especially so with regard to maritime employment. We consequently commissioned a study on employment trends throughout the EU in all sectors related to the sea, which was completed four months ago.

The study concluded:

- that maritime and sea-related sectors are critical to the economic prosperity of the EU, providing employment for about 5 million people;
- that the availability of highly qualified personnel is at the very heart of economic growth in the maritime sector; and
- that there are many reasons to develop a new approach to training in the maritime sector, to ensure that curricula are up-to-date and to create a "maritime career path" that would ensure worker mobility.

These findings, plus the full report, are available on line.

The study also concluded that there are already examples of "best practice" in the EU that could serve as guidelines for the sector. It laments the fact, however, that member states, in general, lack systematic and on-going data collection.

Some interesting facts have emerged from the study. For example, if we look at the traditional maritime sectors, that is not including coastal tourism, France is seen to be the largest employer with 12.5% of Europe's maritime workforce, followed by the UK and Italy. Poland is in sixth position, employing 8.1% of Europe's maritime workers.

In certain sectors, Poland is somewhat more active. Hence in the "marine equipment" sector, which includes shipbuilding, Poland is the second-largest employer in Europe. Poland also has a significant presence in the recreational boating sector. Growth in this sector, over recent years, has been estimated at between 5% and 6% annually. Finally, in the maritime transport sector, Poland has the highest number of seafarers in the EU-25, amounting to approximately 35,000 persons.

Poland clearly has a major stake in developments in the maritime sector. It also, therefore, has an interest in confronting, and overcoming, some of the difficulties faced by the sector. And one of these is clearly employment.

Due to a number of reasons, primary amongst which is the poor image portrayed by the maritime sector, the number of people willing to pursue a 'life at sea' have dwindled considerably. A maritime career has too often been associated with discomfort, hardship and danger. In today's society where more and more

importance is attached to leisure, security and convenience such prospects are hardly enticing.

To improve the image of the sector, we therefore clearly need to address these concerns. We need to be able to attract the best and brightest to the maritime sector in the hope that in so doing, we will have better results, better performance and ultimately a more positive image of the sector. Allow me to now look at some of these in more detail.

Firstly, we need to urgently address issues related to safety. News coverage of disasters at sea involving oil tankers and fishing, or other, vessels have a strong tendency to stick in people's minds. The EU response has been both rapid and solid by promoting further safety at sea through regulation, including the so-called "Erika I and II" safety packages. In November last year, the Commission, through the initiative and work of my colleague, Vice President Barrot, proposed a further package of seven measures – the so-called third maritime safety package. We hope this legislation will be adopted by the Council and the European Parliament as soon as possible. There can be no doubt that these measures have already, and will further contribute to safer seas in European waters.

Maritime safety, however, is not only about making rules. It is also about respecting and enforcing them. As reports have shown, poor enforcement of rules, such as those on watch-keeping, can cause accidents at sea with, sometimes, dire consequences. And this is where the quality of seafarer's education and training plays a role.

Secondly, there are also social and legal barriers which render the sector less attractive. These do not just concern the conditions of employment offered by

shipping companies in terms of pay, leave and other such considerations, but also whether, for example, certain exemptions that are present in EC labour and social legislation are justified. Some of these exemptions deal with decisions which directly affect employees. We need to reassess, in close cooperation with our social partners, whether such exemptions like, for instance, in the Directive on collective redundancies or the Directive on transfer of undertakings, are still justified.

Thirdly, rising competition from the Far East and other corners of the globe, has also added pressure to European markets as we continue to pursue open market policies. Many argue that, by keeping our markets open, we have started a process of reducing wages and working conditions to the lowest common denominator – namely that of developing countries. At the same time, our safety and other standards continue to rise, thereby adding more costs and thus causing more pressure to reduce wages and the quality of working conditions. Thankfully, within the parameters of the 2006 ILO Consolidated Maritime Labour Convention, we now have a mechanism for avoiding a race to the bottom.

In addition, we should exploit the window of opportunity, whereby incomes can grow through the encouragement of quality shipping and respect for the environment. Let us not forget that the general public is increasingly voicing its concerns about the environment and safety, both being issues that maritime players are under increasing pressure to address. Our businesses need to listen to this new voice and channel resources to meet these exacting standards in order to be seen as real partners in the long-term protection and conservation of the marine environment. At a time when short-sea shipping is seen as an alternative to the road transport of freight, it becomes ever more necessary to focus on

environmental and safety considerations in order to make a strong case for such a modal shift.

Last but not least, it is clear that achieving quality in the maritime sector and thus improving its recruitment prospects, is also about improvements in education and training - a fact which I have already alluded to. We are looking at the possibility of developing a new certificate of maritime excellence for European Maritime Academies. This would go beyond the requirements of the *Standards of Training Certification and Watching* with a view to equip European graduates with additional skills.

There is also a need for educational institutions to work more closely with businesses. Maritime companies can help universities both by private funding and by ensuring that the education and training offered, focuses on their needs. Public financing should naturally complement this. By forging a link between public and private funding, corporate social responsibility can be encouraged. This should also stimulate increased co-operation and cross-border interaction through the formation of maritime clusters in different EU Member States. Both these ideas are reflected in the Maritime Policy Green Paper and I hope they can serve as inspiration for the work that lies ahead.

Poland has already taken a number of steps in this regard as it already offers a fine example of quality training. Its two maritime universities have helped the country's presence in the shipping sector to triple in the past ten years in terms of manpower. This goes against the trend in other countries, where in the past twenty years various university and vocational training courses have been closed down.

Furthermore, the development of a maritime qualification that can increase job mobility should be another aim. This would take the form of a qualification that ensures employability beyond the first stage of a maritime career. A precondition for this, however, necessitates the mapping out of an individual's potential career path. A study on career path mapping in maritime industries was in fact conducted in 2005 in ten Member States, including Poland. The advantage of having such a career path is twofold. For young people, it is the prospect of a life-long career and for the industry as a whole, it is a means to attract and retain highly qualified people over a longer time span.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Although the issues of education and employment are the main focus of my intervention today, I would also like to address the issue of maritime spatial planning. European coastal regions, including their coastal waters, are becoming more and more attractive, with activities in those areas expanding at a rapid pace. This inevitably brings with it pressures both in relation to space and to the environment, particularly in terms of competition between different users.

Shipping services, off-shore wind farms, aquaculture, underwater energy pipelines, sea-bed mining, fisheries, maritime tourism and coastal tourism all place demands on our coastal waters. In addition to these activities, the needs of local communities also have to be respected.

Spatial planning could provide the answer. By co-ordinating maritime activities and ensuring that rational thinking is applied to competing uses of the seas, maritime spatial planning can help ensure the economically and environmentally sustainable development of coastal regions. Some Member States have developed pilot projects for implementing such planning, notably Germany, the

UK, Ireland and the Netherlands. I am particularly pleased to see the efforts also made on this issue also by States in the Baltic region. The rest of Europe can learn a lot from the progress achieved so far.

Having said this, what exactly do we mean when we speak about spatial planning? What benefits can such planning bring?

It will allow us to look at coastal waters in the same sort of way that we have always looked at our land spaces, in the same way in which we deal with urban or rural planning: setting up lists of uses, prioritising, promoting and harmonising different uses. We feel that it is time to do the same in relation to our coastal waters.

Maritime spatial planning, as a decision-making tool, is important because it will generate a process whereby the representatives of the different uses, of the vested interests at stake and the various sectoral decision-makers will all participate. In this way it will naturally and gradually promote the advance of an integrated approach to maritime affairs. It will cultivate the need for coordination and will require cooperation, thereby contributing to turn into reality the modern, more integrated maritime policy that the European Commission envisages.

The issue of preventing negative impacts in the marine environment through spatial planning is relevant for Europe, but it is even more crucial for the Baltic Sea. The Baltic is virtually land-locked and is thus subject to significant levels of pollutants from the intense pressure of human activity. It is undoubtedly a matter of concern that deteriorating water quality in the Baltic Sea may lead to considerable economic losses. This would in turn lead to a negative impact on

the entire European maritime sector. Maritime spatial planning is therefore particularly relevant for the Baltic

Ladies and gentlemen,

As we can see the issues I have discussed are inevitably interlinked. We are talking of a diverse and broad maritime sector which has different players, needs and regional realities. There is however one over-riding concern that is common to all, and this brings me back to the title of this conference, that which looks at 'how to create a successful image of seafaring in Europe'. Image, as any public relations executive will tell you, is crucial. In this case, the image of the maritime sector is crucial to the future of Europe's maritime interests. Improving it should clearly be one of our top priorities.

But, it will take many components to achieve a new image, or indeed a new vision, for Europe's seafaring sector. In my opinion, this image has to be one focused on quality and excellence. And to do this we will need to bring together clear and representative data that will allow us to make informed policy choices be they to do with the seafarers that give a face to our maritime sector or the planning tools that we use to optimise its operation.

As the consultation process matures, I am witnessing more and more of these inter-relationships being studied by professionals in the field. A number of the questions we asked in the Green Paper are finding answers. And now a clear vision of where we see ourselves headed is beginning to emerge. All these aspects are important elements that will help us in our task to accomplish an effective European maritime policy.

(2500 words)