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# Management and Conservation of Fisheries Resources in the Mediterranean Sea

Speech delivered by Dr Joe Borg  
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Responsible for Fisheries and Maritime Affairs

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all allow me to thank Minister Espinosa for hosting this important meeting. I am particularly grateful that a discussion on fisheries is included, for the first time ever, in the agenda of a CIHEAM ministerial meeting. Fisheries management and indeed maritime policy, in a broader sense, are important for the Mediterranean. They are crucial to any policy which aims to conserve our natural resources in the Mediterranean and to develop them in a sustainable manner.

I am confident that nobody doubts the fact that there is a clear need to reinforce and promote co-ordination in order to reach the end goal of achieving sustainable fisheries in the Mediterranean. We are all too aware of the fact that our fish resources face increasing pressure, both from fisheries and from external factors such as pollution and climate change.

These are challenges that we must face together - all coastal States bordering the Mediterranean - be they part of the European Union or otherwise. There is also a role to be played by specialised multilateral organisations such as GFCM and ICCAT who seek to manage Mediterranean fisheries sustainably.

While it is clear that we are all working towards the same goal, this task is often complicated by the fact that our region is typified by a number of rather unique characteristics. There is vast diversity in the species caught, the fishing gears and practices used are also numerous and large parts of the Med's fishing industry is based on small, often family-run, businesses which differ significantly from the businesses in operation elsewhere.

Alongside this, there is mounting pressure on Mediterranean fish stocks. Mediterranean fishermen are increasingly making use of more efficient fishing gear and larger vessels able to operate over a much wider area than was previously possible. Adequately controlling this heightened activity is becoming more and more difficult.

For the part of the European Union, the objectives of the EU's Common Fisheries Policy apply to the Mediterranean inasmuch as they apply to other fishing areas. In essence, it is our aim, and indeed, I believe, our responsibility, to ensure that fishery resources are exploited under sustainable environmental, economic and social conditions. The responsibility I am talking about is however not restricted to one particular group of countries without being applicable to others. It is a *collective* responsibility – one that all of us involved in the management of the Mediterranean must embrace.

Having said that, the next obvious question becomes: but how can we achieve this over-arching goal of sustainable fisheries?

I will seek to answer this by looking at the three levels of governance existing in the Mediterranean –each of which is of critical importance, which are:

- One, the multilateral framework in the form of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM),
- Two, the broad implementation of EU fisheries legislation, and
- Three, the regulatory framework of each individual Mediterranean state.

First of all, I am convinced that multilateral co-operation in the Med can best be served by revitalising the GFCM as soon as possible. The GFCM must become an effective regional fisheries organisation in the truest sense of the word.

It must be able to provide the scientific basis for adopting common fisheries management measures. It must aim at achieving the best levels of exploitation of marine resources. And it must simultaneously ensure a harmonisation of fisheries rules.

In addition to the improved selectivity of fishing gears, it is essential to use rules with respect to fishing effort as a management tool –particularly, in a multi-species and multi-gear fisheries. GFCM has started moving in that direction –a fact which I warmly welcome. The GFCM Recommendations and Resolutions on the development of a management programme for fishing effort, and on the compilation of data adopted in 2006 and 2007, are useful first steps towards the comprehensive and adequate effort control system we so urgently need.

Secondly, insofar as the European Union is concerned: we have created a new legal framework for fisheries management in the Mediterranean which entered into force a little more than a year ago. This new legal instrument –the Mediterranean Regulation– provides the EU and its Member States with a basic set of tools to enable them to enhance the sustainability of their fisheries activities.

It allows for a more strategic approach to fisheries management by providing the basis for long-term planning and a host of other things. For example, it allows for better selectivity by trawl nets both by improving the rigging of the trawler and by changing the shape and dimension of mesh size. It controls fishing effort by limiting the maximum dimension of fishing gears and it embeds environmental concerns into the CFP by ensuring the protection of coastal areas through limited access for active gears. Moreover, it protects sensitive habitats from mobile fishing gears and sets a basis for establishing marine protected areas.

However none of these measures will really bear fruit unless we tackle the key challenge faced by the Mediterranean, as it is in many other seas, which is the existing excess in fishing capacity. We simply have too many vessels chasing too few fish.

Mediterranean countries –and not just those forming part of the EU– need to make considerable efforts to reduce their fishing capacity if their fishing effort is to match those of the resources present. They also need to complement such a drive with the measures included in the Mediterranean Regulation. It is my firm belief that it is only in *this* way that a viable future for Mediterranean fisheries –and in turn the livelihood that fishermen derive from them– will be achieved.

I am glad to be able to acknowledge that we have achieved some progress in this area, albeit only a small part of what is needed. Yet it is my fervent hope that this progress will be extended further embracing, along its way, other coastal States.

Under the European Neighbourhood Policy, for example, there is scope for new impetus to be brought to our bilateral co-operation. As this has by and large centred on trade issues, it is important for our joint efforts to be broadened and to include, amongst other things, improved conservation. We have a long way to go in reducing our fishing capacity to levels that can be sustained by the resources in the seas. I am, however, not deterred. This is a process that most certainly is possible and one that I am confident we can achieve if we work *together*.

Allow me to point out at this juncture, that it is of course vital that any reduction in one coastal State is not offset by an increase of capacity on the part of other coastal States, either through ship building programmes or the transfers of existing vessels from other locations into the Mediterranean. This must be a joint effort, a co-ordinated effort whereby fishing pressure is reduced to sustainable levels *throughout* the Med, and not by one state on the one hand, while another undoes this on the other hand by allowing more vessels to move in.

This brings me to my third point which is that what I am saying must apply as much to EU member states as it does to other states around the Mediterranean basin. Actions instigated at a multilateral level must be translated into action on the ground. We must also go even further and develop and implement our own national initiatives and regulatory frameworks to improve conservation.

It is only ourselves, the coastal states of the Mediterranean Sea, who can work out what will work best and where. *We* are the ones who know the specific characteristics of Mediterranean fisheries and therefore *we* must be the drivers to improve the state of the stocks and thus promote sustainable

fisheries at a national level as well as at bilateral and regional ones.  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have one final appeal on this front. And this is to use scientific research as the backbone of any action we undertake. It is only by making informed policy choices –decisions that are based on solid, observable fact– that the measures adopted by policy-makers will receive the support and consensus that is needed if they are really and truly to succeed.

I would encourage all Mediterranean countries to ensure that their national scientists participate more fully and actively in the work of GFCM and ICCAT. The Commission is particularly interested in enhancing scientific research in the Med, particularly in respect of fisheries, and would welcome the GFCM's scientific committee playing a larger role. I would therefore like to find the opportunity to discuss this further in order to find the appropriate means by which to make it happen.

Our scientists' participation must not rely on support from FAO regional projects alone. These projects play an important role in facilitating and co-ordinating scientific activities at sub-regional level, but their resources are limited. Without the active and renewed support of all coastal States to fisheries science and scientists, the multilateral framework will not be able to continue delivering timely and scientifically based advice on fisheries management.

Dear Minister, against the background of increasing demand for fish products combined with declining stocks, aquaculture assume ever growing importance. The Commission has this year launched a process to strengthen its strategy in this field with a view to putting in place a sustainable and competitive framework for European aquaculture. Extending cooperations within the Mediterranean provide us with a unique opportunity to exchange knowledge and information on how best to deal with the dual challenges of environmental and sanitary consideration and increasing production.

It is worthy of note that the European Union's 7th Framework Programme for Research, which runs from the period 2007 to 2013, also covers fisheries and aquaculture research. In general, the funds made available in this framework are open to research institutes of non-EU Mediterranean countries. This is a facility that could and should be made use of and I would encourage you to seize this, and other, similar, opportunities to engage in making your contribution to enhancing our scientific and empirical knowledge of the fisheries resources in the Med.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Mediterranean Sea provides us not only with an opportunity to co-operate in the area of fisheries and aquaculture but also within the wider maritime context.

Taking up the growing call for better co-ordination in maritime affairs, last October the Commission proposed an "Integrated Maritime Policy for the European Union", together with an Action Plan. This package comprises our blueprint towards achieving the Union's twin objectives of promoting growth and jobs in the maritime field. It also simultaneously seeks to ensure the health and sustainability of the marine ecosystems. It aims to look at the various sectors connected to the sea in an integrated manner affording us, therefore, a better understanding of this crucial resource in order to use it more wisely.

The Mediterranean also has its part to play. Any maritime policy for Europe will only be as good as the sum of its constituent parts. In the same way that stakeholders from across Europe have helped us build our framework ideas for the maritime policy blueprint, making it therefore truly a response to the direct needs of those involved, I trust that our Mediterranean partners will do the same for the Mediterranean.

Recognising the special characteristics of the Mediterranean and the necessity of developing a holistic approach to the entire basin, the Commission is planning to develop a maritime strategy for the Mediterranean within the next eighteen months. This strategy is likely to focus on several areas of co-operation between the EU and non-EU Mediterranean States, such as:

- the sustainable economic development of maritime regions;
- cooperation on safety and surveillance;
- maritime governance of the Mediterranean;
- marine and maritime research; and
- maritime heritage and cultural dialogue.

Pilot projects on maritime surveillance and spatial planning will be carried out in the Mediterranean in the course of this year. And a conference on the integrated maritime policy and the Mediterranean, a first of its kind, will be organised jointly by the Commission and the Slovenian EU Presidency this June. The Conference will involve all Mediterranean countries and will hopefully pave the way for a regular exchange on maritime co-operation in the entire Mediterranean basin.

In addition, we must use already existing mechanisms such as the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership to engage in and address maritime issues on a multilateral basis by sharing views, defining goals and agreeing measures together. The European Neighbourhood Policy also presents us with an opportunity for the pursuit of dialogue and cooperation within the Mediterranean to achieve the goals of a responsive and responsible maritime policy.

I hope that during 2008 and beyond we can use the tools we have at our disposal and pave the way for regular exchanges on maritime co-operation in the entire Mediterranean basin.

Your contribution to this process will be instrumental in ensuring its success.

Thank you.