

Speech

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Statement

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Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

Conference: 25 Years Alfred-Wegener Institute for Polar and Sea Research

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Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to convey the best wishes of the European Commission, and in particular those of the Member of the Commission responsible for research, my colleague Janez Potocnik, to all members of the Alfred Wegener Institute for Polar and Sea Research on this occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Institute.

Science and research is the basis for policy making in most areas. In the common fisheries policy there is a legal obligation that the decision-making process shall be "based on sound scientific advice". Thus, every year, we turn to scientists, in

particular those based at the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea, for scientific advice on the state of the stocks and their advice on what the total annual catch in the different fisheries should be. Without scientific advice our common policy could not work.

As policy makers, we are clearly dependent on the input of science. Insofar as my own responsibilities within the Commission lie, not only is science used as the basis for policy-making in the Common Fisheries Policy, but it will also be an important pillar in the development of an all-embracing and holistic European maritime policy which is currently under discussion.

For this reason, the Commission has agreed on the necessity of opening up additional avenues for research related to the oceans and the seas and maritime technology under the future 7th European Framework Programme on Research and Technology. Therefore, in the Commission's Communication entitled "Building the European Research Area of Knowledge for Growth", marine science and technology has been identified as a priority scientific area.

In the legislative proposal for the 7th Framework programme, it is also stated that "special attention will be paid to the horizontal integration of priority scientific areas which cut across themes such as marine sciences and technologies".

This emphasis on marine research, which is a precondition for a sound all-embracing maritime policy, must be seen in the overall context of the Commission proposal to increase substantially the research budget for the 7th Framework programme, starting in 2007. Even though agreement between Member States has not yet been reached on these financial perspectives for the next budgetary period, I hope, and would almost assume, that in any future agreement the funds dedicated to research and development will be substantially higher than at present.

As you are no doubt aware, it is now up to Member States and the European Parliament to decide on the financial perspectives and the 7th Framework programme. I am sure that the European marine research community will carefully follow these discussions.

I welcome in this context the intention of the German Marine Research Consortium to enrich the political process with a presentation and conference on future perspectives for Marine Scientific Research in Europe at the European Parliament on 17 October of this year. I have already confirmed my participation at this event.

The European Union's interest in the scientific work of the Alfred Wegener Institute for Polar and Sea Research is longstanding. The EU, over many years, has co-funded research projects at this prestigious institute. These include the HERMES project which is a multidisciplinary research programme of international interest investigating Europe's deep marine ecosystems and their environment, to which the EU has contributed 15 million euros. The European Union has contributed 10 million euros to the EUR-OCEANS research initiative seeking to provide a structure for European research on marine pelagic ecosystems and establishing Europe as a scientific leader in the field,

The EU has also provided approximately 8 million euros for projects in the 5th and 6th Research Framework Programmes for marine research conducted by the Alfred Wegener Institute. The Institute is a leading contributor to the ERA-NET

EUROPOLAR, which is an important example of the integration of European RTD and demonstrates European leadership in polar research at a global level. The Commission is confident that these contributions have been well spent, given the high quality of the institute's work and the worldwide reputation it has earned for itself.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Commission is now preparing a Green Paper on an all embracing Maritime Policy, which is to be published in the first semester of 2006. This Green Paper will be the basis for a broad consultation of interested parties, a number of whom have already submitted their contributions.

The Green Paper seeks to address the economic, environmental, social as well as governance challenges relating to the oceans and the seas, in a holistic manner. The objective is to set out options for a maritime policy that maximises the benefits Europe draws from ocean and sea related activities, in particular relating to the Lisbon strategy of employment and economic growth.

An important theme of the Green Paper will be the protection of the marine environment, both in relation to EU waters and internationally, as an essential component for the sustainable use of the oceans and seas. The proposals of the Commission, to be adopted in autumn, on a "Thematic Strategy on the Protection and Conservation of the Marine Environment" will constitute the major building block of that theme.

The Commission has intensified its dialogue with relevant bodies within the United Nations and other international organisations, as well as with third countries, such as Canada, Australia and the United States, in order to identify best practices relating to integrated ocean policies. These contacts are also instrumental in discovering new possibilities to strengthen international cooperation in this area.

At the same time, the Commission is conscious of the fact that Europe's relation with the oceans and seas has a number of very particular characteristic features which give Europe a mark of its own in comparison with other countries having significant Ocean interests. One example is the strength of the European fleet and its global importance as a backbone for international trade. Another example is the major variation of hydrological, biological, geological, political and legal realities in the marine regions surrounding Europe, which must be taken into account in the formulation of a future maritime policy.

The Green Paper will also address options to make maritime professions more attractive and to strengthen education and training for these professions, given that, in certain sectors of maritime activities, the demand for qualified personnel cannot be satisfied.

Leadership in research and development relating to both the natural conditions of the oceans and seas as well as technologies to be used in relation to them, is crucial to strengthen the knowledge base of Europe and its competitiveness. Building on existing policies of the Union, the Green Paper will explore options for the future.

In this context, we warmly welcome input from stakeholders, such as the Alfred-Wegener Institute, on what can be expected from the Union when developing this all-encompassing maritime policy.

Allow me to leave you with some of the questions that we are exploring at this stage, and which may further fuel your thoughts and possible contributions to the Green Paper:

- How can data and observation systems on the seas and oceans be improved in order to better serve the needs of science and policy making?
- Is there sufficient European cooperation, transparency and comparability in relation to the data produced and how it is exploited?
- Do we need to improve access to data on the seas and oceans held by private parties? And if so, how?

Another issue which I believe merits our attention, and which has been high on the agenda of last week's G8 meeting, is climate change. This is clearly indivisible from any consideration of the oceans and seas. In its Communication of February 2005, the Commission set out its position and analysis on the impact of climate change, including its impact on the sea, and the resulting risks of floods and extreme weather conditions. Other predicted changes include the decline in sea ice which will contribute to differing levels of temperature and salinity.

An increase in coastal erosion is also predicted which may weaken coastal areas and put pressure on coastal communities and industries to relocate. Thawing permafrost will affect all levels of polar infrastructure. And such thawing could lead to the destabilisation of buildings, roads and pipelines.

Alongside the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, insurance and re-insurance industries are increasingly studying the potential cost resulting from such events. As policy makers, we have to look both at how to avoid and reduce climate change, but also at how to be better prepared for and to mitigate its impacts. The Alfred-Wegener Institute is well placed to continue to contribute high quality analysis in this field for Europe.

In the context of the Green Paper, we are also interested in understanding what global warming could mean in terms of opening up new sea routes and access to resources, in particular energy resources, in areas previously covered by ice. Again, this is a subject of excellence of this institute.

Finally, allow me to conclude by referring to a sector with great future potential, namely marine biotechnology and bio-prospecting. This is an area which is evolving rapidly, and where the turnover of the commercialised results of such research is today valued up to a 100 billion dollars. This area also poses new questions relating to the rules that are applicable, both in Europe and globally, in particular in the context of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. For this reason, discussions are currently underway within the United Nations Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and Law of the Sea (UNICPOLOS) to develop these ideas further.

Maximizing the benefits we can draw from oceans and seas in a sustainable manner and reducing the risks associated with the oceans and seas, whatever their nature, are themes which the Green Paper on an overarching EU Maritime Policy will endeavour to develop. The Commission would therefore welcome any contribution from researchers in this regard, including any submissions that the Alfred-Wegener Institute may be in a position to make.

I therefore wish you every success with your work at this prestigious Institute in general.

Thank you.