

Conclusions of day 1 – MSUO Maritime Safety Projects Fair

Antwerp – 05/06/2007

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Ladies and gentlemen,

I have the ungrateful job of closing first day of this MSUO conference. I will keep it short, we don't want the alderman of the port of Antwerp waiting for us. The presentations of today gave us a good importance of maritime safety and its different facets. We noticed the item is high on the agenda in all European institutions.

First of all, Mr. Dirk Sterckx showed us that maritime safety has been high on the political agenda in the European Parliament since the Erika disaster, eight years ago. And it still is! The recent adoption by the European Parliament of the first report on the third maritime package, is another step towards safer seas in Europe. The most important issues of this third maritime package are the introduction of AIS for fishing vessels larger than 24m, the establishment of an independent competent authority for accommodation of ships in distress and the compensation fund for places of refuge. Let's hope for a smooth adoption of this package by the Council as well, so it can enter into force by mid 2008, as was hoped by Mr. Sterckx.

The European Commission also gives major attention to maritime safety. To say it bluntly, Mr. Hallberg provided us today with the topics and Ms. Varga-Lencses with the tools and the funds.

I was pleased to find out DG TREN pays a lot of attention to maritime transport and maritime safety, despite the limited human resources. I remember the European call for a better and more efficient co-operation on maritime safety issues by the Member States. Safe Sea Net was presented as one of the best practises. And I want to remind you of Mr. Hallberg's call for cooperation on maritime safety on all administrative levels (European, national, regional and local). In this way we can increase efficiency and avoid overlap.

Ms. Varga-Lencses explained about the tools for development of maritime safety projects. The cross-border (A) and transnational (B) programmes are most the suitable for executing maritime safety projects. The first calls under the new programmes will be published in fall, let's use this opportunity to develop new projects.

We have seen best practises today from four different regions in Europe: the Baltic Sea Region, the Northern Periphery, North West Europe and the Atlantic Space. And my colleague Mr. Vuylsteke added some Flemish best practises.

All of them showed best practises from a regional perspective. And let's be straightforward about this, maritime safety does not only involve federal governments, but also regional and local authorities. It's good to have the local perspective in these issues as well, as was shown by the Baltic Master project. This really gives an added value in tackling maritime safety issues.

Maritime safety also covers a lot of aspects: preparedness and response, pollution prevention, places of refuge, traffic monitoring, marine spatial planning, environmental issues, ...

Maritime safety is a very wide and multidisciplinary issue. We heard about the safety @ sea initiatives on AIS, fishing vessels and passenger vessels today. But also about environmental issues like the emergency response to all kinds of pollution and mapping of marine habitats, as was described in the presentation on EROCIPS and MESH respectively. And I hope to hear even more about these issues tomorrow in the workshops.

Richard Hill gave us an overview of the achievements of MSUO, as a promoter of horizontal co-operation over the borders of the respective Interreg programme areas. I think I can say in fairness that MSUO did a good job being a facilitator for maritime safety. MSUO has brought people together to discuss, to do networking, to develop projects together, ... and MSUO has even elaborated some useful documents that might be taken over by international organisations. Flanders appreciates the work done by MSUO.

Richard Hill also presented some ideas for new projects. The most challenging ideas were in my opinion the link between climate change and maritime safety, the link between SSS and maritime safety and marine spatial planning.

I'm looking forward to the project development sessions tomorrow. Let us hope some more useful ideas and potential projects come out of our discussions.

Looking ahead to the new Interreg IV programme period, we from Flanders hope MSUO will be able to continue playing its role as bridge-builder for maritime safety issues between Interreg programme areas.

Thank you for your attention.