



BIOMARINE – THE DAVOS OF THE SEAS?

Europe's integrated maritime policy: Lessons to learn and problems to overcome

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- Moderator:** **Jean Dominique Giuliani**, President of the Schuman Foundation, France/Belgium
- Panellists:** **Joe Borg**, European Union Commissioner Responsible for Fisheries and Maritime Affairs
Xavier de La Gorce, Secretary General for the Seas of France
João Mira Gomes, State Secretary for Defense and Maritime Affairs of Portugal
Elisabeth Walaas, State Secretary for Foreign Affairs for Norway
Anna Wypych-Namiołko, Deputy Minister of Infrastructure, Poland

For Joe Borg, European Union Commissioner Responsible for Fisheries and Maritime Affairs, Europe's Integrated Maritime Strategy had "undoubtedly generated a Europe-wide debate," as evidenced by the holding of BioMarine 2008. Conferences like BioMarine are very encouraging, he believed. He felt this heralded a new era compared to the situation a few years ago when "conferences on maritime affairs were, as a rule, sectoral events."

Such debates helped inform policy. "The Integrated Maritime Strategy has been a genuine bottom-up approach. We used to limit ourselves to sectoral and sometimes contradictory maritime policies. This conference shows we have come a long way," he said. Building such integrated strategies helped reinforce what he described as "the geopolitical and political weight of maritime Europe."

Looking ahead, he outlined a number of initiatives the European Commission will be taking, including issuing a "communication" on maritime surveillance, and a developing strategy on the Arctic. What Borg described as the "blue revolution" would also extend to marine research. He also reiterated Europe's commitment to developing renewable energies such as off-shore wind farms.

The challenge for BioMarine and all those who were concerned with Europe's maritime future, he said, was to build on this momentum and gain support for consolidating the maritime agenda at the meeting of European Council at the end of the year.

Bringing a perspective from the Baltic region, Anna Wypych-Namiołko, Poland's Deputy Minister of Infrastructure, described how her country had benefitted from collaboration on maritime matters with other European partners such as France. She highlighted a number of priority areas for the Polish government which come as part of the wider European strategy: improving access from the hinterland to seaports and harbours and efforts to make the maritime professions more attractive. "Even in Poland we have a deficit of qualified marine personnel," she said.



The EU collaborates closely on maritime issues with a number of neighbouring countries, including Norway, which is a member of the European Economic Area. Elisabeth Walaas, the Norwegian State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, said of the integrated strategy: "We are committed to working very closely with the EU and the Commission to develop this policy."

She stressed that each sea region is unique, and policies needed to cater for this. A case in point was the Arctic. Norway concurred with the other five major Arctic nations – Denmark, Russia, Canada and the US – in that the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and other international agreements did provide adequate legal frameworks from which governments could work to resolve disputes and develop sound, sustainable management policies.

Changes in the Arctic environment presented many opportunities, such as the opening up of new polar transport routes, but also many challenges: "According to my experts, the first container ships will start crossing the Arctic in summer 2009 or 2010, after which the volume of traffic is likely to increase rapidly," she said. "What if a large number of container ships get stuck in the ice?" she asked. Issues such as security and search-and-rescue had to be addressed, and Norway was working on developing an international capability for monitoring the Arctic region in real-time by 2015.

João Mira Gomes, State Secretary for Defense and Maritime Affairs of Portugal, praised BioMarine, which he said "could be like the Davos of the sea," drawing a comparison with Switzerland's influential annual World Economic Forum.

Portugal and France, he said, had collaborated strongly throughout the course of their EU presidencies on issues of maritime strategy. Gomes outlined his government's main priorities, which also included work to develop surveillance capabilities. The establishment of a national centre in Portugal would feed into a European network. This would have notable benefits in terms of countering terrorism, environmental damage, human trafficking and the smuggling of drugs and arms.

Xavier de La Gorce, French Secretary General for the Seas, agreed with Gomes: "Everyone is aware that we have to improve our surveillance system," he said. He also spoke of great efforts to improve maritime governance by individual European member states: "There cannot be an integrated maritime policy without strong governance," he observed, stressing the importance of continuity in these efforts through the forthcoming Czech and Swedish presidencies.

BioMarine President and Founder Pierre Erwes thanked the speakers and extended a welcome to the next conference to be held in Vancouver in 2009. French navigator and adventurer Maud Fontenoy concluded: "I felt our common passion this week," she concluded. "We will learn how to safeguard the oceans. Fair wind to BioMarine."
