

Mr. Cadec, Distinguished Members,

I am honoured to be with you to present the Slovak Presidency Fishery Work Programme. More importantly I see our meeting as an excellent opportunity to listen to your views.

This Committee is a central element in the EU fisheries legislative machinery.

The various reforms recently undertaken in the field of fisheries prove that the co-legislators can deliver very ambitious legislation.

As Presidency we are determined to continue to foster the inter-institutional relationship as we firmly believe that this is crucial to drive the EU sector towards higher sustainability levels. In recent months we have seen concrete improvements and it is now fundamental to fully exploit this momentum.

I also thank this Committee for the very constructive attitude adopted on recent files especially the Deep Sea file and the Cod Plan Amendment.

The implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy reform has reached a very important stage and Parliament and Council are now dealing with crucial legislative proposals. The work we have ahead of us has the potential to transform the Union's ambitious goals into practice.

Attaining healthy fish stocks, to support a thriving EU sector, is our goal. In doing so, we need to balance social, ecological and economic considerations, whilst respecting the obligations of the Common Fisheries Policy.

If we had to take stock of where the EU fisheries is at now, there are some recent developments to be proud of, and on which we are now obliged to build upon.

For instance, we've registered improvements in the fight against IUU, both within and outside the Union. The Union is now recognised as a global leader.

On this, I warmly thank this Committee and its Members for keeping such an important topic high on the agenda. As Presidency, I am encouraged by this. I firmly believe that effective enforcement is one of the main ingredients to useful conservation efforts. Moreover, this is also fundamental to safeguard the interests of law-abiding fishermen.

I am also fully aware of the importance of managing fisheries through multiannual management plans. The Baltic Plan is the first to be adopted in a series of new generation plans. Through multiannual plans we create a very precise framework in which decisions will be based on scientific advice and on regionally specific technical solutions, whilst we guide the European fisheries towards attaining the targets of the Common Fisheries Policy.

The potential of regionalisation is being harnessed in new ways. Respective Advisory Councils and dedicated regional groups are translating the general provisions of the Common Fisheries Policy into tailor made solutions that can maximise the CFP's potential in specific regions and improve stakeholder support.

We should all reasonably agree that the EU has registered some concrete improvements. However, there are still substantial challenges ahead.

The CFP requires that by 2015 where possible, and by 2020 at the latest, all fish stocks should be exploited at a level that will lead them to produce the maximum sustainable yield (MSY). Although this would allow fishermen to take the highest possible catches without affecting the future productivity of the

stocks, there are still a large number of stocks that are not yet fished in line with the MSY objective.

Certain elements of the EU fisheries legislative framework are still way too complex and do not seem to provide the dynamic solutions that are required to attain today's modern policy goals.

As I have already stated, we are now at a crucial turning point. The legislative work that is currently on the table can provide the required impulse where it really matters. We are dealing with files that are fishery specific and that directly impact the fishery on the ground.

The Slovak Presidency has ambitious plans. Our main focus is to lead orderly and efficient discussions on a number of crucial files. We have been monitoring developments closely and are determined to work hard within Council, and hand in hand with the EP and the Commission.

First on the list is the Data Collection Framework. This is a crucial file. The revision of the Data Collection Framework in line with the requirements of the reformed CFP is important for the successful implementation of the policy. We aim to conclude the intensive work carried out by previous Presidencies, with a view of finalising an agreement with the European Parliament as early as possible. We are looking forward to advance quickly with Mr. Marco Affronte and his team.

Another important file that is currently on the table is the one on the sustainable management of external fishing fleets. The current management framework for the external fleets, although functioning, has shown a number of shortcomings and inconsistencies. It is now important to address these. We have followed your discussions on this file in this Committee, in particular the

work of Linnéa ENGSTRÖM and we share your assessment that we need to find a balanced text to address legal clarity and reduced administrative burdens. The Council General Approach is still fresh from last month's discussion and we are now ready to work constructively with the European Parliament. I have already instructed my services to engage with you in a spirit of full cooperation.

The Technical Measures Regulation is another priority file. Earlier I mentioned the importance of regionalisation and the CFP target to produce maximum sustainable yield. In this regard, this is a crucial file that can allow regions to give life to the Common Fisheries Policy in the best possible manner. This Regulation should address the need for leaner administrative systems whilst also providing encouragement for the industry to contribute to the sustainable management of resources. As Presidency we will work hard within Council with the aim of getting as close as possible to a Council position on the file and also with the European Parliament and Mr. Gabriel Mato and his team.

Another high profile file that will feature on our agenda is the North Sea Plan which should be presented by the Commission this summer. From our end we are ready to start working on this file as soon as it is made available. On this, we expect dynamic and elaborate discussions.

Earlier in my speech I remarked that there are still a large number of stocks that are not yet fished in line with the MSY objective. In this regard multiannual plans, such as the one on the North Sea are extremely relevant. Thankfully, scientific knowledge on North Sea stocks is developed, and the plan will be fundamental in contributing to the achievement of Maximum Sustainable Yield and to move towards a multi-species management

perspective.

A generous number of external files will also feature on our agenda including the coastal states meetings preparations. Our work in this area will be guided by the Common Fisheries Policy and its sustainability principles. It is needless to say that towards the second half of the Presidency we will also be tremendously busy with the TAC and Quota negotiations. We will target a balanced agreement that will hopefully result in even more stocks being fished at MSY levels.

We have a tall order in front of us - an extensive list of important files that will have a bearing on the sustainability of our oceans. We will work as hard as possible so as through healthy fish stocks, the EU sector will thrive through increased income and jobs.

*Having said this, regrettably, none of the important marine fisheries we will be dealing with are of any direct interest to the Slovak fishery. Not yet, at least. Maybe next time round, if we do a very good job in the next six months, we might also be given some fishing rights.*

On a more serious note, we also intend to maximise our position as a landlocked country. We firmly believe that the potential of being an honest broker in the best possible manner could bring about excellent results.

It is with this spirit that we are embarking on our ambitious work programme as we strive to give a concrete contribution in this field.

We intend to do so in full cooperation with the European Parliament and we genuinely look forward to work constructively to drive the EU sector towards higher sustainability levels.