



Presentation of the priorities
of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU

in the area of fisheries policy

before the Committee on Fisheries of the European Parliament

Rumen Porodzanov, Minister for Agriculture, Food and Forestry

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MR.PRESIDENT,

DEPUTY PRESIDENTS,

COMMITTEE MEMBERS,

GUESTS,

It is an honour for me to present to you the priorities of the first Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU.

For six months, Bulgaria will be the main driver of the Union's agenda, combining the functions of an honest mediator, political leader, representative and coordinator. We are prepared for this, we realize it will not be easy, but we know what we want to achieve and we can do it. Our objective is to respond to the real needs of European citizens, to turn the challenges into opportunities.

The Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union is a historic moment, a privilege, but also a great responsibility. Our main objectives relate to encouraging partnerships at all levels, based on an integrated approach and co-operation. The Bulgarian Presidency will endeavour, in a positive and constructive spirit, to deliver real forward-looking results, following the principles of transparency and accountability, and to hold a Presidency which is open to citizens. Europe and European citizens need STABILITY, SECURITY AND SOLIDARITY. In this regard, based on AGREEMENT, COMPETITIVENESS AND COHESION, the Bulgarian Presidency will strive for a stronger and more stable European Union, to establish a strong digital united Europe. We will also search for a balance between the specific priorities of the Member States and the strategic priorities of the European Union to achieve real, visible results in active dialogue with citizens and in response to their expectations for better security, employment, sustainable economic growth and a stronger presence of the EU on the world stage. The Bulgarian Presidency will work on youth and security issues as horizontal priorities in view of the complex nature of the challenges facing young people and the modern security environment. The European perspective and connectivity of the Western Balkans is a specific priority of the Bulgarian Presidency. As an EU Member State with a Euro-Atlantic orientation, Bulgaria will focus its efforts on the strategic priorities of the European Union, maintaining good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation.

I would like to emphasise the significance of constructive cooperation with the European Parliament in its capacity of co-legislator and representative of over 500 million EU citizens.

It is undisputable that the European Parliament, in the form of the Fisheries Commission, is an essential factor in the process of adopting any legislative initiative in this sector of the EU economy. Together with the Council, they bear the primary responsibility for defining workable and feasible management solutions to ensure sustainable management and conservation of living marine resources, as well as the interests of European fisheries.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all of you, to the previous Presidencies and the European Commission for building the framework for this mutual cooperation based on respect of each other's position and mutual respect and trust.

I would like to recall that in 2013, after long and difficult negotiations, the Council and the Parliament reached an agreement and adopted the current reformed EU Common Fisheries Policy. While adhering to the objectives and observing the principles laid down in it, we can say that progress has been made on the sustainability of fisheries and aquaculture in environmental, economic and social terms and, at the same time, on the provision of healthy food for European citizens. The European fishing industry is dynamic and supports the standard of living of fishing communities. The adoption of the reformed policy is only one of the many examples of successful cooperation between the two institutions.

I am also glad to mention the improvement in some of the economic indicators of the EU fishing fleet. The results of recent analyses show an increase for most regions compared to previous years. This improvement in economic performance, together with the increase in the number of stocks that are exploited to maximum sustainable yield levels, is proof of the successful implementation of the EU fisheries policy.

Of course, there are many challenges ahead of us that we still have to handle. We are still far from achieving the final objectives and we need to take every opportunity to improve our management approach.

We need to continue with our joint efforts aimed at achieving the overall objective of sustainable fish stocks and a competitive sector that contributes to the stability of coastal regions and preserves traditions over time.

In this regard, one of our main priorities in our work with the Fisheries Commission of the European Parliament and with Mr Gabriel Mato and his team will be to make real progress in the

negotiations on the **Proposal for a Regulation on the conservation of fish stocks and marine ecosystems through technical measures**. This is an extremely important dossier, especially since we are currently at a crucial moment in the implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy, and the adoption of this regulation will reinforce one of the fundamental principles of the policy, namely that of taking account of regional specificities. This will allow those who are involved and familiar with the practical realities to take part in making the decisions that are of direct concern to them. We will work hard, but we will try not to take hasty decisions when it is not clear how they will be put into practice and what their impact on fisheries will be in general.

As regards the **proposal for a regulation laying down management, conservation and control measures applicable in the Convention Area of the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organization (SPRFMO)**, we are ready to work with Mrs. Linnéa Engström and her team, so that we can complete the negotiations with the EP on this important dossier. At the same time, we expect to start working on some other proposals for transposition of the conservation and management measures adopted in other regional fisheries management organisations into EU law.

Multi-annual management plans are also a fundamental building block of the Common Fisheries Policy. Their aim is to help achieve the objective of moving towards fishing at maximum sustainable yield levels. These plans are intended to contain measures to implement the obligation to land catches, safeguard clauses that regulate the action to be taken in the event of unforeseen situations, and specific technical measures. On the other hand, multi-annual plans will provide the opportunity to take decisions and to take more accurate and detailed account of scientific achievements and recommendations. The effective Baltic Sea plan and the agreed North Sea plan lead us to believe that we have a good foundation for continuing to work hard on the next plans to be presented by the Committee. We are expecting the plans for the western parts of the Mediterranean Sea and for the western waters of the EU in the Atlantic Ocean.

The first amendment to the Baltic Sea Plan, which will be a good test of the adaptability of the new plans and their ability to report in the most efficient way the latest scientific advice on the stocks they cover, has already been introduced. The EC introduced its proposal to amend this plan and we are ready to work in the Council to start negotiations with the European Parliament as soon as possible. The same applies to the next multi-annual plans, which are to be submitted by the EC.

I would also like to note the multiannual plan for small pelagic stocks in the Adriatic Sea. We will follow with interest the upcoming discussions and votes in the Committee on Fisheries. We appreciate the importance of fishing for particular stocks and we are ready to work to make progress on this dossier.

A large part of the agenda for the first six months of 2018 also involves issues related to the external dimension of the EU Common Fisheries Policy. This includes preparing the EU position for meetings of the regional fisheries management organisations. We also have to prepare for the annual meetings of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) fisheries committees. All of them, as well as safeguarding of EU interests in fisheries partnership agreements with third countries, are among the priorities in our work programme.

I would also like to mention the forthcoming amendment to the Control Regulation. This regulation, and the regulations on illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, and on external fishing fleets, are the three main pillars of the Common Fisheries Policy. These regulations have greatly contributed to the improvement of the EU fisheries control system. Serious progress has been made in the fight against illegal fishing and the EU is recognised as a leading international player in this direction. Their effective implementation is not only essential for the conservation of stocks but also for safeguarding the interests and competitiveness of fishermen who strictly adhere to the rules. We expect the EC to come forward with its proposal to amend the Control

Regulation soon. We intend to hold an exchange of views on the proposal during the Council meeting in June, and then at the informal meeting of the Directors-General to continue the discussion by going into more detail.

I would like to express my conviction that the EU needs to continue to implement an ambitious approach to its policies on conservation and sustainable fisheries management, including in regions such as the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. In these waters, the success of our efforts is heavily dependent on cooperation and partnership with third parties involved in the utilisation of the shared stocks.

In this regard, I should like to highlight the fact that in the past year we have witnessed the success of the high-level conference in Malta and the MedFish4Ever declaration signed by the Ministers. The Black Sea region Ministerial Conference in Romania in 2016 was a step in the right direction and, as a result, we have the Bucharest declaration. As a continuation of these successes, during the Bulgarian Presidency, we will fully support the development of a Black Sea Fisheries Plan. With the support of the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, we will organize a high-level conference in Bulgaria in early June 2018. We will seek real engagement from all the Black Sea ministers.

In conclusion, I would like to say that our actions will be focused on the sustainable management of European fisheries in a balanced way to ensure maximum conservation of stocks and, at the same time, the viability of the sector under current conditions.

MR. PRESIDENT,

Allow me to thank you for giving me the opportunity to present our priorities and once again to express our readiness to work together in a spirit of cooperation and partnership. I shall be happy to answer your questions as fully as possible within the time we have. I assure you that



my team and I will be available after the meeting today so that, if necessary, we can continue the discussions and get into the details of the priority themes.