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|  CRPM CPMR | CONFÉRENCE DES RÉGIONS PÉRIPHÉRIQUES MARITIMES D'EUROPE CONFERENCE OF PERIPHERAL MARITIME REGIONS OF EUROPE |
| | 6, rue Saint-Martin, 35700 RENNES - FR Tel. : + 33 (0)2 99 35 40 50 - Fax : + 33 (0)2 99 35 09 19 email : secretariat@crpm.org – web : www.crpm.org |

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**OPENING CONFERENCE OF THE INTERGROUP SEAS, RIVERS, ISLANDS AND
COASTAL AREAS**

DRAFT SPEECH

VICE-PRESIDENT GEORGE ALEXAKIS

(As of 7 May 2015)

Dear President Meissner,
Dear Members of the European Parliament,
Dear Commissioner Vella,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honor and a great pleasure for me as Vice President of CPMR and regional councilor of the Crete Region, to address you during this important event.

It is indeed a great pleasure to cooperate with so many Members of the European Parliament, who are willing to work together on maritime affairs and take an active stand within the European parliament's legislative process to promote maritime policy proposals.

It goes without saying that we are very pleased with the presence of Commissioner Vella who has already become our ally and close friend when it comes to promoting sustainable growth and jobs within the maritime sector and the maritime economy as a whole.

It is a fact that seas and oceans represent a huge potential for jobs, and for the well-being of populations in our territories. In order to reach this goal and face the challenges ahead we need to implement what has already been decided, and to set new ambitions.

The Maritime regions are the natural and indispensable partners in this process. Maritime Regions have already shown their commitment **to invest in the maritime economy**. Operational programmes are being finalised on both EMFF and ERDF funds that are of great interest to coastal regions. Projects drawn will address a variety of issues affecting maritime policy.

This is very important in particular in the current period when in all regions and member-states, Smart Specialisation Strategies have been drawn. To that effect, CPMR is working to build a platform to facilitate discussions at European level with regions that are managing ERDF and EMFF projects. We'll have the pleasure to address further and in detail this issue on the occasion of a future conference to be organised with Commissioner Vella next September.

Financial instruments can be an important complement to such activities for those projects that are *readier* to be funded by private sector operators. Since maritime regions strive to deliver the maritime economy, they can also contribute significantly to the implementation of the Juncker plan.

We all know that maritime regions are the place where ships and structures for marine renewable energies are built. Maritime industries provide a large share of jobs where they are located.

What we actually propose here is a stronger commitment at EU level that would have a significant impact to this regard. What we need is a **European strategy for maritime industrial employment**, which would bring together initiatives on ocean energies, offshore energy or shipbuilding, which are, so far, managed in a single-sector approach.

When it comes to **maritime legislation** maritime regions are the natural partners for the implementation of the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. Managing sea-land interaction and building consensus on the use of maritime and coastal areas will only be possible if the Regions are properly involved in these processes.

Let me now stress a different point related to **Maritime safety**. We all agree that both the EU and the IMO regulations on maritime safety have been improved. However we needed an evolution of these legislations to recognise the ecological damage and further

European support to innovation so that the necessary adaptations to ships and ports can be sought.

Fisheries provide sustainable jobs to many people in our regions, and must be fully included in the blue growth approach. The socio-economic impact of the new CFP is therefore very important and this is something that CPMR will address as we are working on it.

Coming from Crete you would expect me to address one of the largest activity of the maritime economy: **Tourism**, Tourism should feature high on our agendas and any further future steps. We must all work towards maximising any future funding opportunities, and exchange good practices to meet the needs and demands of end users and set political priorities and business opportunities.

Last but not least; boosting the attractiveness of **maritime careers** is a major challenge for young people. CPMR, as the Leader of Vasco da Gama Project, is already working in the field of maritime professions and youth exchanges. Vasco da Gama must find the financial and human resources to continue.

In short I tried to outline that by acting, **SIMPLY ALL TOGETHER** we can take maritime policy even further.

Thank you very much for your attention