

VP Siim Kallas Keynote Speech
EuDA 20th Anniversary Celebration
"The European Dredging Industry: A Maritime Success Story"
7 November 2013

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a pleasure to be here today celebrating the 20th anniversary of the European Dredging Association,

What is European dredging today?

European dredging is a "High-Tech" sector, which invests constantly in research and development and in human resources. You create job opportunities and look after well trained and motivated people and you also generate many jobs on-shore.

European dredging is today a most successful industry: your association represents companies that are world market leaders and that have expanded operations and business by providing quality and added value services.

This is most remarkable because you are confronted with fierce competition, heavy administrative procedures in some cases and, sometimes, with unfair competition and protectionist measures by third countries.

Now, let me be a bit more "technically" precise about what we see as the good work of dredging today.

Unclogging shipping arteries, clearing sediments from waterways and ports is still high on the list of dredgers' activities. This is a fundamental necessity for European ports.

Dredgers are also key partners in oil and gas related offshore projects that are increasingly important in Europe and elsewhere.

Some of the engineering feats of our times have been done by dredgers, like winning millions of cubic metres of sand from incredible depths and then transporting them over hundreds of kilometres to build an enormous artificial island where a new airport is constructed.

European dredgers are investing heavily in modern vessels, using advanced European technology and equipment and proudly flying EU flags all over the world.

With all those credentials, it is fair to say that European dredging in the past 20 years has been a success story and that there are good prospect for succeeding also in the next 20 years.

Let me say a few words about the opportunities and the challenges I see ahead for European dredging.

First, at international level, there is little doubt that there are enormous needs for ports, rivers and coastal developments in Asia, Africa, the Americas or the Indian sub-continent.

Those needs involve both capital and maintenance dredging as well as offshore energy and marine aggregates. More fundamentally, those needs require great environmental care.

Today's European dredging is part of a knowledge- and information-driven world. It is about sustainable development and ecological and economic feasibility.

You have proven your competitive advantage for being successfully present in those markets.

What we have to ensure now is that market access restrictions are removed and that you have a fair chance to compete.

You can count on the European Commission support to promote policies aiming to achieve unhindered access to markets worldwide, based on fair competition principles.

Let's be clear: the EU represents a very open market for dredging companies all over the world. It is high time to ensure reciprocity from our main trade partners, in the common interest of achieving a global level playing field for dredging.

Second, I will say a few words about coming developments for European ports and inland waterways.

2013 is the year when the European Union has agreed the most ambitious transport infrastructure planning ever.

The new Trans-European Transport Network guidelines and the Connecting Europe Facility represent an envelope of 26 billion Euros. It is an important stimulus package and also an opportunity for industries in the transport sector.

One of our very important priorities is waterborne transport, which, after all, is the least expensive and most environmental friendly means of transportation.

We will be making full use of the new TEN-T guidelines and Connecting Europe Facility to fund development of ports and improve their links to rail, road and inland waterways networks.

Inland waterways are particularly important for Europe, with an important waterway network and untapped potential in many regions.

But for inland waterways to be a success, they have to be properly maintained, physical bottlenecks have to be removed and navigation capabilities have to keep in line with vessels developments.

Adapting ports to new types of even larger vessels, linking inland waterways to ports and protecting coastal regions against climate change threats will demand a substantive contribution from the dredging sector.

In some European regions, like the Mediterranean, there are important ports with urgent dredging necessities to service those mega-vessels! All those works will have to be undertaken very soon.

Clearly, you don't risk being inactive in the foreseeable future.

In the past, the Commission has shown its support to the dredging sector by including you in the "tonnage tax" scheme of 2004. This should help you face the fierce international competition on equal terms.

And recently we have decided to maintain these State Aid Guidelines as they are.

I would like to conclude by referring to my proposal for European ports. As you know dredging is among the services to be covered by the future regulation.

The two main objectives of the regulation include accounting transparency for public money and fair market access.

The aim is to promote an environment where ports can compete with each other across borders under equal conditions – and also to reduce today's legal uncertainties.

It is also about having clear definitions, transparency and fewer restrictions, removing barriers for new entrants keen to tender fairly and openly for port services, including among others, dredging.

We need to set the example to the rest of the world by including your industry in the framework for fair market access and transparency. How else can we demand the same from our overseas partners?

Open markets, fair competition and sound allocation of public investment resources are required to ensure the sustainable development of European ports and maritime industries in general.

This is a key challenge for all of us and I count on your support on the EU ports' policy proposal.

Dear Chairman, Secretary General, Members of the European Dredging Association, I would like to finish my speech with a big

HAPPY BIRTHAY TO YOU ON YOUR 20th ANNIVERSARY!

Thank you for your attention.