

## Atlantic Stakeholders Event Brest

Mesdames, messieurs, a cairdre, mes amis....It is usual to start off remarks at these occasions with thanks. Mine today are heartfelt and sincere. Claude Wohrer in her chairing of the Atlantic Strategy Group has brought a new energy, vigour and focus, helping to ensure that the Atlantic Action Plan is given due credence and prominence and, along with the EU Commission and the Support Team that today's event is a success, providing a space for meaningful discussion that can lead to meaningful action and tangible outcomes. I would like to also thank all the participants for their energetic and whole-hearted interaction-which really makes this event.

It is my ambition that we can emulate Claude as Ireland takes up the baton of the Atlantic Strategy Group for 2016.

Ireland is a true Atlantic nation-and so we inherently recognise the importance of and advantages in cooperation and collaboration across the Atlantic on a broad range of issues, from economic recovery to competitiveness to sustainable development to environmental issues.

As one of only four island nations in the European Union, Ireland is strategically placed to understand the natural riches with which we have been endowed. We have developed a national integrated maritime plan, *Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth*, which, as with the AAP, identifies research, knowledge, technology and innovation as key enablers in the achievement of the development of a thriving ocean economy. In this national plan, we recognise that the Atlantic Action Plan is the key tool which will help us tackle common challenges and deliver smart, sustainable and inclusive growth across the Atlantic maritime region.

Delivering on marine opportunities is not an exercise for its own sake. It is a key component for tackling many of our societal challenges and the continuing economic recovery of the EU, an endeavour to which we are all dedicated.

Much has been achieved already as a result of our cooperation, as a result of the Action Plan-such as the implementation of and current momentum behind the transatlantic alliance, the setting up of the Support Team who have been working hard across MS to publicise the Action Plan, bringing together partners, providing support and guidance and highlighting the opportunities that the Plan provides. The wonderful literary genius that is Oscar Wilde described a pessimist as somebody who complains about the noise when opportunity knocks. Events like today, borne of the Action Plan, where we can frankly discuss the challenges facing the Atlantic and look at the openings these provide, consider how together they can be addressed, have me convinced that rather than blocking our ears we are throwing open our doors.

The Atlantic Strategy Group is there, as you know, to provide strategic guidance and institutional support for the Plan-during our year, together with our colleagues from FR, PT, ES and UK, we will work to develop ever closer cooperation to the benefit of all. We've listened to and will be taking on board all that has been discussed and debated today. We continue to welcome your input, your ideas, your suggestions for how the Atlantic Strategy Group can assist, guide and promote the Plan.

Ireland now has the opportunity to host the next Atlantic Stakeholders Event. It will be very great pleasure to welcome you all there. Thank you.