

**Intervenção do Secretário Regional Adjunto da Presidência
para as Relações Externas, Rui Bettencourt,
na conferência inaugural da Cátedra Jean Monnet da Universidade Nova de Lisboa**

Lisboa, 20 de março de 2018

“First of all I would like to greet the Jean Monnet Chair and its Head Teacher, Professor Regina Salvador, remembering some words of this father of Europe, meaning and one of the senses of the European Union, which, sometimes, seems to be forgotten: “We are not forming coalitions of states, we are uniting men”.

So, here we are, uniting European people with the sea.

Looking at our Sea in a more objective way, in all its potential, complexity but also weakness, has led Europe to develop an ambitious policy strategy of great technological, financial and social demand, known as Integrated Maritime Policy, with which we identify, ourselves.

This is a central policy for Europe and central to the Azores and Portugal and it was not by chance that the European Commission launched that initiative in our region in 2007.

In Azores we have an Exclusive Economic Zone with about 1 million km², which means that we are the largest maritime region in Europe, with about 29% of the European Exclusive Economic Zone and more than half of the Portuguese.

For the Azores, due to the strength of Geography and History, Integrated Maritime Policy is a fundamental pillar to support our development. The sea, in its many aspects, is central to our regional policies: Fisheries, transport of people and goods, nautical, tourism, aquaculture, marine scientific research and conservation of the environment and marine resources are aspects that make the sea a fundamental asset in the Azores.

The vast size of our maritime territory, with a great biological, geological and hydrographic complexity, also creates complex challenges for a society of about two fifty thousand inhabitants, far from the great decision-making and economic centers.

However, the Autonomous Region of the Azores has been able to assert itself on an European scale in several areas according this context.

Today, researchers from the University of the Azores integrate many of the large consortia and deep ocean research initiatives.

And their work is recognized by their peers for the quality of the science produced, in themes such as seamounts, hydrothermal systems, cold-water corals and sponges, cetaceans and other great oceanic migrators.

But we want to go beyond in this affirmation of the importance of marine research in the Azores and we intend that our Region must be a central region for the investigation of the oceans. This vision is the basis of our Smart Strategy Specialisation.

And this vision has been deepened, for example, in the choice of the Azores for the establishment of the Atlantic Observatory, whose first meeting took place last Friday in Lisbon, and also at the Atlantic International Research Center - AIR Center , in its valence dedicated to the oceans.

The Azores have also been positively highlighted in the national and international context by the firmness with which they have assumed the conservation of the marine environment and the need to ensure that the development of maritime activities is based on principles of environmental sustainability.

Since the ninety's the Autonomous Region of the Azores has created a legal system aimed at conserving marine biodiversity, which now includes a network of protected marine areas from the surrounding coastal zones of the islands to the confines of the extended continental shelf.

It should also be noted that Portugal, by initiative of the Azores, was the first country to designate a Marine Protected Area outside the Exclusive Economic Zone, the Rainbow hydrothermal field. This initiative had great strategic relevance and was immediately welcomed by international organizations, such as the OSPAR Convention.

In this context, of marine conservation, we remain truly committed to developing our action within the framework of the Natura 2000 Network and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. For a huge and deep area like the Azores Sea, the demands are considerable, but the guarantee of maintaining a good environmental state of our waters is a condition that we do not give up.

I would also like to emphasize the regional fisheries sector, whose management principles are in line with the Common Fisheries Policy, a policy that should be seen, in an articulated way with the European Maritime Policy .

In the Azores, fishing is still the traditional sector economy: The wild fish of the Azorean sea has high quality standards and we want it to be, even more, worldwide recognized, as long as it continues to be captured according to social, economic and environmental sustainability standards.

We have been active in the more rational management of fishing shares, especially in the scientific monitoring of resources, in the implementation of minimum sizes, in habitat protection, in the reinforcement of video surveillance in protected areas, in the criteria for granting licenses and fishing gear, and improving the conditions of our traditional fishing fleet.

Today, the Azores sells high quality fresh fish caught with traditional and environmentally friendly fishing gear.

In more than thirty years of active marine conservation policy, the Azores have been working to leverage the Blue Economy in a sustainable way. And this is a very important purpose for us.

Achieving these goals is a challenge requiring constant innovation and inclusive management, involving the fisheries sector. Increasing the value of fishing is also a strategic priority for us and the restructuring of the sector is a requirement in which we are currently involved.

We intend to consolidate an eco-systemic vision for Fisheries, through a management based on knowledge of resources and activity, which makes environmental conservation compatible, and the development of other activities of the Economy of the Sea, such as tourism, maritime transport and port logistics, aquaculture or even the development of technology, research and environmental education.

The European strategy for Blue Growth aims to attract attention and investments from companies and industries interested in the potential of marine resources.

In the context of the priority areas identified in the Blue Growth strategy, the coastal tourism sector is in full development in Azores; we are enhancing aquaculture and marine biotechnology

and are following the current developments on deep ocean mining (the Azores are identified as a big potential site for this activity).

Maritime transport and port logistics are essential for the functioning of the regional economy, spread over nine islands and, therefore, are understood as a strategic area.

The regional network of ports, passenger terminals and marinas is growing and modernizing, allowing an increase in the quality and safety of services and the intensification of maritime trade, recreational and sporting nautical activities, maritime tourism activities and tourism cruises.

In this last few years, we are also investing in passenger mobility with the purchase of medium-sized ferries that promote the movement of people and vehicles between the nine islands of the Azores. We know that with this bet we are promoting territorial cohesion, but also linking up a fragmented regional market, thus increasing the scale of the regional economy. Also, we aim at the cohesion of the European Union, and we want to be on the Motorways of the Sea.

We also share the idea that human resources are a very important element to leverage the blue economy. In this context we are settling a Sea School of the Azores, an institution oriented to the blue skills and that will be operational in the near future in areas such as sea tourism, valuation of the fish, professional diving, observation of the fisheries and environment or in the naval repair and maintenance.

In the future we also pretend that this school offer more technologic training focused in robotic and exploration and observation technology of the ocean.

We identify ourselves with the Integrated Maritime Policy in its most features and action fields, its basic environmental pillars defined by the Marine Strategy Framework, by the initiatives related with the Blue Growth.

In this context we are aware of the potentialities that the Atlantic Strategy and his action plan could represent to the Azores.

Also, we look to our condition of outermost region as a competitive advantage to approach us of our best European and global standards trough concerted strategies with other regions of Macaronesia for instance which whom we have been developing transnational programs of great significance such as MISTIC'SEAS .

I should also refer the relevance of the European maritime policy to the regional cooperation, especially between Macaronesia and in a wider scope the European outermost regions.

Those maritime regions that concede oceanic dimension to Europe and project them towards the Atlantic and to the world identify the sea as a resource of huge potentiality to his progress and affirmation.

In a scope of a logic of blue growth we want that the economic exploration of the marine resources and the development of the tourism in the Azores continue been made by a sustainable form based in environment conservation policies, heritage and local culture. This is why the Azores has been recognized on an international level as one of the most sustainable destinations of the world and we want to keep it that way. To reinforce this idea this year the Azores was considered one of the 10 destinations more sustainable of the world and the best Atlantic destinations, awarded by the Green Destination.

As a great socioeconomic impact in our Region, we have the strengthening of maritime activities such as sportive and recreation craft, touristic maritime activities, whale watching, diving with sharks and manta ray.

Considering companies related to maritime activities between 2014 and 2017 the Azores registries an increase of 39% existing presently around one hundred and fifty companies operating in the region. It was with the goal of promoting the emergent areas of maritime tourism such as amateur diving that we have been creating a restricted fishing areas in the Azores dedicated to the conservation of the fishing resources.

The geographic position of the Azores, near the mid-Atlantic ridge is an strategic spot to explore the several resources of the deep sea that are mainly unknown in particular genetic resources that have an application in sectors such as cosmetic, health and pharmaceutical sector, food and nutrition, among other.

Senhoras e Senhores, algumas palavras em português para vos deixar aqui a importância do mar neste entusiasmante projeto europeu.

Um mar, como dizia o Diretor Geral, produtivo, competitivo e saudável. Um mar unindo as pessoas, com mais desenvolvimento, construindo um futuro com mais coesão, com mais qualidade de vida para todos os cidadãos europeus.

Deixem-me também dizer-vos, insistir, sublinhar o forte desejo, a apetência, a vocação que têm os Açores para integrar, para estar, para participar neste projeto europeu através do seu mar”.