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### **“The fishing situation in Croatia and its future prospects”**

Good morning to everyone: President, colleagues and friends!

What can I say more if everything has been said already? I will start my speech in a different way. The collaboration between Italy and Croatia has been going on for 40-50 years. Such collaboration has been triggered by Croatia's wish to enter the EU as soon as possible. Personally, I remember times when our collaboration was more effective, especially in terms of practical issues more than scientific or administrative ones. We used to make things happen. I am looking at my friend, Mr Peppe Cingolani, and I remember when together, more than 30 years ago, we created a strong crew for the capture of small blue fish. At the time, we used to provide the whole region, the whole coast with wonderful products. I cannot see why we shouldn't do this again, turning words into facts. In this way, investments would increase, and this would be good especially for the Croatian side of the Adriatic. I am talking about Croatia because the Croatian territory is bigger than the other ones on that side.

It is important to highlight that for us who base our activities on fishing, a square metre of sea has the same value of a square metre of land. The Italian authorities and the Italians in general have already understood this. Now it is our turn to understand it. I tell you this: the Republic of Croatia has 55,000 square kilometres of land and almost as many of sea. With reference to this sensitive area, we need to understand that the sea represents a bridge not a wall. What has happened in the last months and years regarding the proclamation of the ecological area in Croatia should not be misinterpreted. I invite our Italian colleagues too to declare their own ecological area so that together we can protect the Adriatic Sea. I think of Fossa di Pomo or other sensitive areas in terms of reproduction that we have been able to ruin – on the Italian side more so than on the Croatian one.

Now I would like to talk about Croatia before its entry in to the EU. First of all, I would like to tell you that Croatia is a country that even today performs way below its possibilities – that is if we look at the 2005 data. Data for 2006 shows an improvement. We fished 29,000 tons of small blue fish. Of the 50 fish factories that were functioning between the two world wars (29 before the first one and 14 before the second one), only 3 are still operating today.

This means that this sector has very much felt the impact of the disappearance of these factories is, primarily because they were practically the only users of blue fish.

On the other hand, aquaculture is growing here like in the rest of the world. It is growing at an annual rate of 7%. This corresponds exactly to the reduction of caught fish recorded for some species of fish. We have been pioneers of white fish breeding in the Mediterranean Sea. But, as someone has noted, pioneers we were, pioneers we remain. In fact, the quantity of fish bred in Croatia equals 3,500 tons of mackerel and 5,000 tons of tuna whilst Italy has incremented its production 10 times since the 70s and Greece has increased its production to 130,000 tons. This is a lot compared to what we produce.

Our shipping fleet comprises about 3,500 units. For the great majority, they are fishing boats for coastal fishing that sail in inner waters. Medium and big boats fish mainly in the outer area of Fossa di Pomo. Lately, records show that a fleet of about 30 boats was used to capture fish to be used for breeding. I must stress that Croatia is the only country that breeds small tuna fish of about 40-50kg, whilst other countries usually use extra-feeding for tuna fish up to 6 months old so that they can get a 20-30% weight increase in the final product.

Croatia received notification in 2004 for its future entry in Europe and later on, negotiations started. Negotiations regarding chapter 13 on fishery started in 2005. Some of these negotiations have already been completed – multilateral and bilateral screening were concluded during 2006; harmonising Croatian legislation to EU standards has also been concluded. Now we are waiting for the final negotiations. In truth, the main problem remains how the policies of North and West Europe will react to this – a problem that even Italy has to an extent.

Every time that we try to have a confrontation on some critical issues regarding the sea and life in the sea, we are given only minutes to deal with them. When it is about political issues, hours can be spent discussing them.

In conclusion, I have to tell you that we do not share every single view regarding the EU policies, especially regarding rights and standards of behaviour when it comes to working in the sea. It seems in fact, that the Mediterranean countries often get squashed by regulations imposed by North and West Europe, even though these countries have an appalling record of behaviour – see the devastation of the Baltic Sea and the North Sea. Even so, they are trying to teach us how we should treat the Mediterranean Sea; thank god a new law for fishing in the Mediterranean Sea has been enforced and this will certainly contribute to improving the situation.

If my colleague Mr Ianni of the Fishery League (Legapesca) happened to be here, he would be even more critical than me of the programs brought in by Western Europe. When we enter the EU, it will be down to us to protect, as well as we can, our traditions. Our fishing equipment and fishing techniques are well known in Northern Europe.

Such equipment and technique together with many manufacturer activities will disappear if we do not protect them.

I am not sure what to say to conclude my speech. I think that these two regions located on opposite sides of the same sea have collaborated well. Years ago, those who decided to create a united Europe may have meant it as united regions rather than united nations - now we may have become even closer.