

LESS OBSTACLES AND BETTER MARITIME TRANSPORT

The substantial strides forward made for the internal market within the concept of free movement do not seem to have come to pass so much for maritime transport. With a refocus on tackling emissions (to which road and air traffic significantly contribute) maritime transport has gained attention as a good alternative. In recent years the European Union has been discussing the need for an integrated maritime policy. **By Julian Micallef.**



The European Commission has now set out an action plan presenting the main strategic goals for the European maritime transport system up to 2018. It has also identified key areas where EU action is required to strengthen the competitiveness of the sector while enhancing its environmental performance.

The Commission wishes to involve Member States and industry so as to emphasise the attraction of the maritime profession, suggesting a number of Community actions that may be taken, including a framework for the education and training of crews. Work conditions are also targeted for improvement.

The document speaks of quality shipping in terms of environmental considerations, transport safety and security as conducive to competitive advantage. The Commission indicates that by 2018 an integrated information management system should be in place to ensure good maritime surveillance of all sea vessels to and from European ports as well as those in transit through or in close proximity to EU waters. In the context of the energy security concerns, particularly after the repeated interruptions experienced in relation to the gas pipelines from Russia through Ukraine, maritime transport is being regarded as a key instrument in the diversification of routes.

International aspects, especially relations with other countries and flag states are also deemed important. Research and development is also emphasised in a bid to make Europe a world leader in the field.

However, and of particular interest, the action plan seeks ways in which to exploit short-sea shipping and sea transport services for economic and social goals. In the short-term the Commission is calling for

the simplification of customs formalities for vessels sailing solely between EU ports, the establishment of guidelines to speed up documentary checks for animal and plant products carried between EU ports, and the rationalisation of documentation requests coming from different bodies. On the medium-term the measures suggested include simplifying administrative formalities for vessels sailing between EU ports which make a call in a third country or a free zone, the enhancement of electronic data transmission (thus easing administrative procedures), the provision of a single administrative window; and simplifying rules on carriage of dangerous goods by sea (while not decreasing the level of safety and security).

The Commission is also recommending that Member States coordinate their administrative inspections (possibly conduct 'one-shot inspections'), facilitate administrative communication (particularly in the case of language requirements), issue pilot exemption certificates (particularly for those who make regular use of the port and doing away with an element of protectionism) and rationalise port spaces in favour of short-shipping container traffic and so-called RoRo traffic. It is indicated that the short-term actions should be in place by 2010 and those for the medium term by 2013.

Maritime transport is set to be given a boost. To get there calls for further cooperation between Member States, but at any rate we should see sea traffic regain its stature and viability. ©

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