EU shipping CO2 monitoring system brings 'momentum' for international agreement

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Opinion

José Inácio Faria outlines the key features of new EU rules for the monitoring of CO2 emissions in the shipping sector.

According to a new EU regulation, ship operators will be required to monitor, report and verify (MRV) CO2 emissions.

Currently, the transport sector is responsible for around 25 per cent of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, second only to the power sector. Maritime transport accounts for four per cent of the EU's CO2 emissions, and is the only mode of transport that is excluded from European commitments to reduce GHG emissions.

According to the international maritime organisation (IMO) - the United Nations' shipping body - under a 'business as usual' scenario, emissions from shipping are expected to increase by between 50 and 250 per cent by 2050, due to demand for transport and growth projections for global trade. However,
international negotiations have failed to deliver a deal to reverse this trend.

The EU has moved forward cautiously and used a staged approach in its aim to curb CO2 emissions. The MRV proposal would help achieve progress at international level. The system applies to all ships calling at EU ports, regardless of their flag, and requires the reporting of information on CO2 emissions and other relevant data in order to determine the vessel's efficiency.

If an international agreement imposing CO2 reduction targets is ever reached, then a functional monitoring and reporting system for CO2 emissions would be a key stepping stone for the implementation of such goals. We can only assess progress towards the targets if we have a functional measuring system.

It is key that the EU's MRV system is accepted by stakeholders and our international partners. This effort must be made through the IMO.

The regulation is careful to avoid unnecessary administrative burdens. It only applies to ships bigger than 5000 gross tonnes - meaning 55 per cent of those in transit in the EU, but responsible for as much as 90 per cent of CO2 emissions - and it makes use of information already available on board - regarding cargo carried and distance travelled, for example - to fulfil reporting obligations.

Ship operators can also choose between a number of different monitoring methods, and if the IMO adopts its own MRV system, the European regulation allows for the relevant alignment with the international agreement where necessary.

Another important argument in favour of this legislation is economic. The commission will provide ship users with aggregate and transparent data identifying the most fuel-efficient vessels, bringing competitiveness to the sector, with new technologies and operational measures adopted to improve efficiency and lower operational costs.

This in turn will translate into market opportunities that will open up a dynamic and innovative shipping sector.

An important IMO meeting took place this month. The Marshall Islands, which are simultaneously the third biggest global ship registry and a small archipelago threatened by climate change and rising sea levels, has called for a reduction target for maritime carbon emissions.

Considering the pressing need for a global climate agreement later this year in Paris, it is time for the EU to ensure the shipping sector makes a contribution towards CO2 reduction targets.

The world urgently needs an international agreement, and there now seems to be the right momentum. It is time to establish a fully-fledged diplomatic offensive that can deliver a fair deal for our planet.
About the author

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