

European Maritime Day: EU must address issue of flags of convenience

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Opinion Plus

A primary condition for quality European shipping is the prevention of unfair competition, argues Philippe Alfonso.



On 18 and 19 May the European Commission will celebrate European Maritime Day in a bid to raise the visibility of Europe's maritime sector.

Rightfully, the sector plays a crucial role in Europe's economy and society. Covering 75 per cent of the European Union's external trade as well as accounting for 60 per cent of the world's container ships.

Unfortunately, European shipping companies are now no longer creating the jobs they used to for Europe's seafarers. European officers and ratings are being replaced with low cost crew from third countries outside Europe, initiating a downward spiral of social conditions in Europe's maritime sector.

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Without action to address this situation, the Commission may soon be celebrating 'Third country' day rather than European Maritime Day.

2017 has been dedicated by the Commission as the year to enhance waterborne transport. In this context, it is unacceptable that policymakers could forget about the EU's seafarers. Any measures within a possible maritime transport package should aim at unlocking the potential of shipping and waterborne activities in terms of quality jobs and career development.

At the European Transport Workers' Federation, (ETF), we have identified 10 measures aimed at making tomorrow's maritime transport a generator of wealth and employment for EU citizens.

A primary condition for quality shipping in Europe is the prevention of unfair competition. Europe must address the practice of flags of convenience and stimulate EU shipping companies to register under EU national flags.

To avoid a race to the bottom a similar approach to the US Jones Act should be put in place, regulating all intra-EU shipping and establishing requirements for seafarers' social and employment conditions.

At the same time the directive on manning conditions requires a revamp to ensure that employment conditions on-board a ship operating between different EU member states are those of the country applying the most favourable standards.

The EU should also move to close the loopholes in state aid for maritime transport, by conditioning the granting of aid and tax relief to jobs and training for EU domiciled seafarers.

The criminalisation of seafarers is a widespread tendency which seriously damages the sector's ability to recruit.

To enhance the attractiveness of a maritime career, not only do issues such as this need to be countered, but quality-training, education and certification standards must also be kept high on the agenda.

We also call for the improvement of seafarers' general working conditions by including measures to guarantee safety, respect maximum working hours and minimum rest times, make adequate manning scales mandatory and assure the right for social security and state pension entitlements for all seafarers on board EU flagged vessels.

The [ETF manifesto](#) [6] describing the 10 proposals for quality EU shipping follows the Fair Transport concept applied to shipping: seafarers are entitled to a fair deal in the supply chain in terms of secure employment, and better working and living conditions.

Reducing the sector's environmental footprint and challenging the image of a male-dominated sector in which women should have their full part to play also fits into that model.

We are currently running a campaign entitled 'Fair Transport Europe', aimed at promoting the fair transport principle across all transport sectors.

You can express your support by signing the online petition at www.fairtransporteurope.eu. [7]

About the author

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