

European Shipping Week kicks off the EU Maritime Year

Written by Zeinah Mugdadi on 6 March 2017 in EU Monitoring
EU Monitoring

On March 1, the main conference of European Shipping Week 2017, a day-long debate on various topics across the maritime spectrum, took place.



The conference was opened by MEP Karima Delli (Greens/EFA, FR), Maltese Transport Minister Joe Mizzi and Director-General of DG MOVE Henrik Hololei and was closed by a session of questions and answers with Commissioner in charge of Transport Violeta Bulc. Throughout the day, panellists from the shipping industry, seafarers, ship-owners, container shippers, representatives of the cruise industry, opinion shapers, EU officials, company representatives and NGOs engaged in lively debates about the need for further simplification and digitalisation of the sector, stressing the social dimension, improving the attractiveness of the maritime profession and finding a solution to reduce maritime emissions.

Institutional keynotes

Karima Delli, Chair of the TRAN Committee, European Parliament, started off by highlighting the pertinence of creating corridors for distribution of freight and links with maritime ports, railways

and inland waterways. She gave the example of the port of Marseille as part of the main TEN-T corridors. She emphasised the need for the development of innovative solutions which could hopefully lead to simplification of administrative formalities, reduce paperwork and optimise the logistics chain. Regarding **TEN-T**, she recalled the agreement reached in December by the European Parliament and the Council to define core and comprehensive networks based on the EU priorities such as accessibility, telematics, interoperability, as being a big achievement.

In a very competitive global environment, it was highlighted as important that EU Member States take decisions to tackle challenges together. She also stressed the need to grant all EU regions the same opportunities in terms of developing high-level and environmentally-friendly economic activities in cities, logistic platforms and ports. In relation to this, she said that all Member States would benefit in terms of connectivity and accessibility by involving their remote regions. This translates into more economic development and more employment, along with prospects for economic growth. In this respect, it is very important that the main maritime ports are part of the core network and are regarded as the main drivers for economic activity, she added. It is of paramount importance to establish **core comprehensive transport networks** as a matter of priority to be able to link ports with rail and inland waterways, with a view to decongest traffic. She was aware that some ports already undertook active policies to make the situation more sustainable and increased their activity to shift to inland waterways.

Ms Delli then made a series of remarks on the following points:

- **Cooperation agreements** were considered important and promising. It is important to have rail and inland waterways infrastructure integrated in the core TEN-T and put all efforts to complete missing links and remove bottlenecks. She assured the audience that the TRAN Committee was very determined to make sure that the CEF has adequate financial means to support the completion of the network. Currently, the TRAN Committee is in the process to deliver an opinion on the revision of the financial regulation including the provisions linked to CEF. This opinion is focusing among others on the new blending facility which should provide for more flexibility.
- **Optimisation** was an important element. She highlighted the need for not only good transport infrastructure, but also intelligent one and an intelligent logistics chain. She spoke about the need to have simplified management and administrative procedures. Regarding innovative solutions in the EU, cooperation between Member States was needed to ensure real competitiveness in EU. In this regard, she said that a better distribution of incoming goods was needed as it seemed that this was only concentrated in the North, in between three main ports situated next to each other. She considered it appropriate for some ports to share with other ports their know-how. Win-win solutions could be identified, in her opinion, to redistribute freight between the North and the West of Europe. The share of short-sea shipping should also be increased by creating adequate conditions compared to the road sector. The Single Market should effectively be completed for the shipping sector and administrative simplification should be achieved. She expressed her hope that the national Single Maritime Window could become quickly effective. She was aware of the feeling of the industry according to which shipping has to operate under unfair conditions due to the strict environmental limitations such as sulphur, but she said that they cannot operate without a strong protection of the environment. In this regard, she spoke of the need to reduce CO2 emissions, sulphur and particulate matters. However, she agreed that there should be a level-playing field for all modes of transport and external costs should be included in the price of transport.
- Regarding **waterborne passenger transport**, she recalled that in November last year, the European Parliament voted a resolution on the importance of the sector for interconnectivity and competitiveness of the EU. Members highlighted the potential of integrating waterborne passenger transport into a multimodal mobility framework. They underlined crucial issues for the sector such as an alignment of environmental standards to those in the Baltic sea, promotion of the use of LNG,

safety and security. On safety, the TRAN Committee started this Monday the work on the proposal submitted by the Commission on the safety of passenger ships. She supported the proposal which aims to simplify and clarify the legislation while maintaining a high level of safety. She also hoped that they would start institutional negotiations during the Maltese Presidency.

She concluded her speech by assuring that the TRAN Committee was working very hard for the benefit of transport including shipping in Europe.

Joe Mizzi, Minister of Transport and Infrastructure, Malta, was not present at the event, but via a recorded video message, he expressed his wish to see a fruitful discussion of sustainable solutions for shipping. He appreciated the commitment of the industry and understood that the situation sometimes can be challenging with a considerable impact on the operation of vessels. He committed, on behalf of his government, to making sure that the difficulties surrounding the shipping sector remain high on the EU agenda and in international fora. He considered the conference timely and pertinent as it discussed the future of the industry and that of Europe with major ambitions to drive global economy.

He then mentioned the substantial changes the industry was facing such as intense competition, mismatches and short-time supply, increasing trade and the need for cost reduction. He believed that all this could result in technological innovation and said that this coincided with a time of operational and structural transformation in Europe. He acknowledged that the process was very difficult, but was confident that the shipping industry would continue to invest to get international trade going. The task is to recognise the change and to build a more stable, efficient and resilient industry as the challenges to respond to market forces grow. At the same time, against this background, there is also pressure on policy-makers in formulating policy. He recognised the fact that they should be more sensitive to the needs of those active in the industry and should do the utmost for the industry and ensure the flexibility and support that it needs.

Minister Mizzi said that the Maltese Presidency is committed to devote the necessary attention to the subject, its guiding principle being to create a more competitive maritime sector. He said that the very idea of this conference was to bring everyone together and to build bridges to the mutual benefit. He therefore hoped that the European Commission would consider the conclusions of the conference. In conclusion, he said that the industry needs **well-trained professionals**. Increased technology and digitalisation requires appropriate training on new technologies and skills. Also, more visibility of the maritime sector as indispensable component of the EU economy must be created. All stakeholders must work together on better regulation and towards **reducing administrative burdens**, while maintaining the same degree of safety. He was in favour of cooperation with **IMO** as a global regulator of the shipping industry. He mentioned the IMO roadmap on the strategy for the reduction of GHG emissions and hoped that the EU thinking will fit into the IMO plan.

Henrik Hololei, Director-General DG MOVE, European Commission, began his speech by saying that transport was the backbone of the globalised economy. He recalled the positive figures coming out of the freight and shipping industry statistics by which he demonstrated that the EU shipping industry contributed greatly to the economy and employment. Shipping helps to create jobs in the wider economy, even if it is not supported by government support and funds, he added. Despite the success, there are challenges which are difficult to face alone. In this respect, he said that shipping operators, Member States and the EU must work together to overcome them. The industry has gone through successive crises. It is therefore the EU's responsibility to ensure a competitive level playing field worldwide for the EU shipping industry and this, by developing good relationships with its neighbours. He also spoke about the need to provide maximum stability and predictability for the sector and this was the approach when issuing the **Maritime State Aid Guidelines**. He said in this respect that they proved to be beneficial in maintaining competitiveness. He said that no changes

were introduced as no changes were planned.

He then made a series of remarks on the following topics:

- **Efficiency and red tape:** an evident issue in shipping, he said that the aim is to cut red tape and rationalise important formalities. Information must be reported just once and shared between port authorities. He counted on the further digitalisation of the economy and sector.
- **Digitalisation:** the Single Maritime Window was crucial as it would further simplify reporting and cargo formalities and also increase the attractiveness of the sector. This would equally contribute to further integrated the logistics chain. For this reason, the Commission launched the e-manifest initiative to report cargo formalities. This could however not be done without the industry's support. He said that digitalisation would also bring benefits in areas such as safety and unloading time. Maritime services have the potential to reduce transport costs. Having this in mind, he said that regulators must always be a step ahead as it is difficult to predict the future because of the rapid changes. The legal and technical framework should thus be futureproof.
- **Logistics:** he assured the audience of the commitment of the Commission to continue to work to ensure digital integration.
- **Environment:** he believed that there was room for improvement. Given the large volume of the shipping activities, he deemed important to reduce its impact on the environment. He was in favour of innovation in fuels. Since the shipping industry was global, he said that global engagement and solution was the way forward, along with technological neutrality. He mentioned the Green Shipping Guarantee Programme to support green and more competitive shipping and the European Sustainable Shipping Forum to facilitate the activities in the environmental sector. The Commission will propose the revision of the Port Reception Facilities Directive and improve the traffic operation through the EMSA digital systems.
- **ETS and shipping:** he said that negotiations must find a common ground. The vote held in the European Parliament called upon the IMO Member States to reinforce their efforts to reduce the GHG emissions. Regarding the alignment of the EU to the agreement of the IMO on mandatory scheme last year, he said that once the global data collection is finalised, the Commission is obliged to review the EU scheme and assess the robustness of the global scheme. Mr Hololei said that the Commission was committed to ensure progress in this respect and has the willingness to contribute to the fight against climate change.
- **Ports:** he recalled the recent adoption of the Ports Regulation and regarded this as a step forward. This aimed to deal with bottlenecks in ports and their hinterlands. It also helped to bring more clarity and create a level playing field. Regarding the GBER, the work was in progress to identify the kind of port investments which were not needed and focus on problematic issues.
- **Seafarers:** labour force was essential for success, he said. There was an urgent issue to upscale seafarers' skills to meet the current technology developments. He emphasised the need for the profession and to promote its attractiveness and to create employment opportunities for the people in the sector. The Commission was committed to strive to maintain high training standards, competence of crews and working conditions. He then mentioned the cooperation with the social partners and reminded about the transposition of the Maritime Labour Convention into the EU legislation.

Director-General Hololei concluded by saying that there was a strong determination on the side of the Commission to work closely with the industry to address challenges and remain resilient.

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About the author

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