Technical and operational measures for more efficient and cleaner maritime transport

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The Committee on Transport and Tourism adopted the own-initiative report by Karima DELLI (Greens /EFA, FR) on technical and operational measures for more efficient and cleaner maritime transport.

Maritime transport and ports play a key role in the EU economy, with almost 90 % of the EU's external freight trade being seaborne. They are critical for ensuring uninterrupted supply chains, as demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

International maritime transport emits around 940 million tonnes of CO2 annually and is responsible for approximately 2.5 % of global GHG emission. A system for monitoring, reporting and verifying CO2 emissions from maritime transport is currently under revision, aiming at reducing shipping greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in EU waters.

Fair competition

Members deplored the distortion of competition on the European market between fossil fuels, which benefit from more favourable tax treatment, and clean alternative fuels from renewable sources. They called on the Commission to address this situation by proposing to restore fair competition rules, applying the polluter-pays principle to maritime transport and promoting and further incentivising, including through tax exemptions, the use of alternatives to heavy fuels that are considerably reducing the impact on climate and the environment in the maritime sector.

The report acknowledged the impact of the use of heavy fuel oil and stressed the need to effectively address fuel emissions by ships and gradually phase out the use of heavy fuel oil in shipping, not only as a fuel itself but also as a blending substance for marine fuels.

Ports and freight

Members called on the Commission to support, through legislation, the objective of zero pollution (GHG emissions and air pollutants) at berth, and to promote the development and deployment of clean multimodal solutions in ports supported through a corridor approach.

It should also take swift action to regulate EU port access for the most polluting ships based on the Port State Control directive framework, and to incentivise and support the use of on-shore power supply using clean electricity or any other energy-saving technologies that have a considerable effect on diminishing GHG emissions and air pollutants.

On freight, the report called for a clear strategy to promote Roll-On-Roll-Off (RO-RO) shipping for freight, thereby reducing the presence of heavy-duty vehicles from roads. The concept of Motorways of the Sea should be promoted.

Emission control areas and the IMO

Members stressed the urgent health and environmental need to establish a sulphur and nitrogen emission control areas covering all Mediterranean countries. The Commission should provide for the extension of these emission control areas to all EU seas to achieve a uniform reduction in the permitted NOx and SOx emission levels from ships.

Ships and propulsion

Members called on the Commission, shipowners and ship-operators to ensure the implementation of all available operational and technical measures to achieve energy efficiency, in particular speed optimisation, including slow steaming where appropriate, innovation in hydrodynamics optimisation of navigable routes, the introduction of new propulsion methods, such as wind-assist technologies, vessel optimisation and better optimisation within the maritime logistics chain.

They also called on the Commission to:

- integrate alternative propulsion systems, including wind and solar, into the upcoming FuelEU Maritime initiative;

- introduce measures, accompanied with the necessary funding, to enable European shipyards to make additional investments into sustainable, social and digitalised shipbuilding.

EU funding

The report called on the Commission to provide support under its European funding programmes, in particular the Horizon Europe and InvestEU programmes, for research into and deployment of clean technologies and fuels.

The committee regretted the Council decision to reduce the budget allocation for future-oriented programmes, such as the CEF, InvestEU and Horizon Europe and noted that the EU's ambitious decarbonisation agenda needs to be backed by corresponding funding and financing instruments.

Control and implementation

Members called on the Commission to ensure the transparency and availability of information on the environmental impact and energy performance of ships and to assess the establishment of a European label scheme which should aim to effectively reduce emissions and raise the sector's attractiveness.

There is also a need to develop and implement the 'green ship' scheme, which should take into account emission reduction, waste treatment and environmental impact, notably through the sharing of experience and expertise.

The report called for a revision of the Port State Control Directive by the end of 2021 at the latest to allow for more effective and comprehensive control of ships and simplified procedures. It called on the Commission to increase, in coordination with the ILO, capacity-building for third countries on inspections and enforcement.

Lastly, Members stressed that the partnership envisaged in the context of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the EU should ensure an appropriate level playing field in environmental and social areas without causing disruptions to the transport trade links, including efficient customs checks, which should not hamper the competitiveness of the EU fleet and should ensure smooth export and import operations between UK and EU ports.