Towards a new maritime strategy

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OBJECTIVE: the document introduces a new Commission approach to maritime strategy. The aim is to reassess Community maritime policy and set further goals with a view to establishing a common maritime purpose. SUBSTANCE: in its communication, the Commission notes that maritime policy to date has succeeded in opening up markets, particularly in Europe, and giving the consumer a wide choice of shipping services. The application of EC competition rules to all market participants regardless of flag has furthered consumer interests and ensures fair treatment of all liner shipping companies. However, the measures taken by the Community and Member States to increase the competitiveness of EC flags have thus far not been able to reverse the trend towards flagging out and loss of employment in this sector. In this respect, the biggest failure of the EU's maritime policy has been the Council's inability to adopt the Commission proposal seeking to establish a Community shipping register 'EUROS', and indeed the Commission intends to withdraw this proposal, as well as the proposal on a common definition of a Community ship owner. The Commission is therefore proposing to base the EU's new maritime strategy on four pillars: 1. With regard to maritime safety, the Commission is proposing: - to pursue a policy based on convergent application of internationally agreed rules. This policy should be applied to all flags and the binding requirements should also apply to ships flying the flag of non-EEC states when trading to or from EC ports to ensure that these ships do not receive more favourable treatment than EC flagged ships; - to draw up a directive laying down principles for registers in the Member States; - to strengthen the role of port State control ships; - to encourage the establishment of voluntary codes of conduct for maritime transport; - to consider adopting legislation on penalties to be imposed on operators who use substandard vessels; - to consider the possibility of making mandatory coverage of third-party liability a condition of entry into Community ports; - to consider adopting legislation to support any agreement between carriers and trade unions on working conditions on board ferries. 2. In order to main open markets, the Commission proposes to continue ensuring free access and fair competitive conditions throughout the global shipping market (preferably on a multilateral basis), to work for the conclusion of an international agreement on observance of the rules of competition in maritime transport and to review its trade protection instruments in this sector. Further proposals will be examined in detail in future communication on external relations in the maritime sector. 3. In order to ensure competitiveness in the Community shipping sector, the Commission is proposing joint action by the Community and the Member States to foster training programmes to attract young people to the profession and promote RDT activities in the maritime sector, under the future framework programme, with the emphasis on advanced technology for safety systems, environmental protection and human resources. 4. Finally, on the question of state aids, the Commission intends to keep a close eye on aid granted to the maritime sector and will draw up revised guidelines on state aids to shipping, following an approach designed to benefit Community shipowners. The Commission sought to garner the opinions of other European institutions, the Member States and the parties concerned by September 1996, with particular reference to its proposals on employment, registers and competition policy.