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ECSA highlights crucial role of shipping as vector of global trade in its contribution to EU Trade Policy Review

On behalf of the European shipping sector, ECSA is pleased to submit its contributions to the European Commission's Trade Policy Review.

Launched earlier in June, the European Commission is conducting a major review of the EU's trade policy to build a fresh outlook for the years ahead. This will respond to new global challenges and take into account the lessons learned from the coronavirus crisis.

"Shipping transports around 90% of the global trade in goods, making it the backbone of world trade," said Martin Dorsman, ECSA Secretary-General. "The European shipping industry has a keen interest in the EU's trade policy as it can only serve world trade if the right framework is in place. We fully welcome the review and are keen to contribute as much as possible to the process for a stronger, better enforced EU trade and investment policy."

Through ECSA's submission, the EU is encouraged to further support the reform of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and re-establish it as an effective forum to develop new and appropriate trade rules, ensure their implementation and help to settle disputes – but also continue creating opportunities for EU businesses via EU trade agreements.

ECSA therefore strongly encourages the continuation of the EU concluding trade agreements with crucial third parties and, in particular, clauses that safeguard free and non-discriminatory market access to international maritime transport services including offshore services.

Enforcement

Because EU operators rely on the certainty that commitments enshrined in trade agreements will be respected, a recent rise in protectionism targeting maritime transport services is worrying. ECSA is keen to be able to rely more on the EU's expertise and support to fight these trends, and welcomes a more systematic and rapid approach to resolving market access barriers which run contrary to EU trade agreements or international trade principles more broadly.

Trade in response to COVID-19

Despite being substantially affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the shipping sector has kept global markets connected and supplied the world with essential goods and services. This could not have happened if too many barriers had been in place and hampered free trade and open markets. In this context, ECSA underlines how it is important — now more than ever— to avoid taking open market access for granted and urges the EU – and all other international players – not to turn to protectionism, but to continue on a path of an open, rules-based and multilateral trade framework, which was already under challenge prior to the pandemic.

Priority partners must include the UK

With regard to future EU-UK trade relations, ECSA hopes that a partnership agreement can still be concluded before the end of the year. Any agreement should necessarily include maritime transport to the fullest extent possible as the sector is key to ensuring that close EU-UK trade relations can be de facto carried out.

Should no agreement be found, both the EU and the UK must look for pragmatic and flexible solutions to support businesses and the smooth continuation of trade, with as few barriers at the EU and UK sea borders as possible.

With this contribution, ECSA looks forward to actively participating in the European Commission's work on reviewing the EU's trade policy and eagerly awaits the results of this review exercise in the coming months.

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Founded in 1965, ECSA promotes the interests of 20 members associations in the EU, the UK and Norway. Together with EU and national policymakers, ECSA strives for a regulatory environment that fosters the international competitiveness of European shipping.

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