

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear colleagues,

It is a great pleasure to be here today and meet the Greek and European short sea community for the 2019 edition of the short sea shipping days. I would like to thank the organisers for their efforts and this initiative. The short sea shipping days are a unique occasion to tighten the dialogue between practitioners (shippers, operators, ports), academia and public authorities on the upcoming challenges and opportunities of the sector.

Maritime transport is the backbone of international trade. This is of course also true for Europe. Today, 75% of the EU trade is seaborne. A highly efficient and performing shipping sector is therefore essential. It is not only about ships, it also concerns the well-functioning of our ports, that are vital gateways connecting the EU market to its international partners. It is also about how we think and conceive the integration of maritime transport in the overall transport and logistic chain.

Also, if maritime transport is essential for Europe's external trade is not less of a key component of Europe's overall transport system and the internal market. Today, maritime provides a sustainable alternative for the transport of passengers and goods within the Union and it accounts for more than a third of intra-EU trade. In reality, short sea shipping makes up close to 60% of the total maritime transport of goods to and from the main EU ports.

I know that in a country like Greece, with several thousands of islands, the vital importance of a well-functioning, attractive and competitive short sea shipping sector is particularly well understood. But let me quote a last piece of statistics, which I believe is particularly telling in this context. Indeed as short sea shipping is focused on smaller distance journeys, there is no surprise to see that short sea traffic often stays located in the same sea region. But, the figure may also be interpreted as a sign of the role that the sector plays in securing cohesion in different European sea basins.

We fully recognise the critical role that short sea shipping plays in linking different regions of the Union, preserving and attracting new industries and logistic activities, and supporting the greening of transport.

Against this background, the European Commission has dedicated some specific efforts to address the concerns of the European short sea community. The first communication on the topic was adopted in 1995 and since then the issue has regularly figured in an important place in our strategies. The 2009 EU maritime transport strategy itself has a section fully dedicated to short sea shipping. Also, in most cases, European regulations recognize the specificities of the sector with the aim to ensure that the applicable framework is fit for purpose and that it does not create a barrier for the well-functioning of the short-sea operations.

It's fair to say that quite some progress has been achieved on the priorities that we identified in 1995 on the developments of short sea shipping in Europe. I do not wish to

keep these introductory remarks for too long but I would like to highlight some of the most recent milestones that we have reached.

Let me start with the issues simplification and digitalisation of reporting formalities have always been highlighted as one of the key priorities to support the growth of European short sea shipping. With the 2010 Directive on reporting formalities, the national single windows have been established and a great deal of simplification has already taken place. But even then, shipping operators were found to still spend around 1-3 hours per port call on reporting.

We are very pleased of the recent agreement between the EU co-legislators on the proposal to create a European Maritime Single Window environment, to introduce a higher degree of harmonisation in data collection and digital formats, and possibly to re-use data submitted, making it possible to apply the 'reporting once' principle.

We hope that this initiative will contribute to the setting up a true European Maritime Transport Space without barriers, and help improve the efficiency and attractiveness of the maritime transport sector, in particular short sea operators.

Another element contained in the 2009 maritime strategy in relation to short sea shipping was about infrastructure ensuring that an appropriate framework was set up for ports policy, incl. related to the provision of services and investments.

In 2017, we have adopted the Port Services Regulation, which paves the way for increased financial transparency of ports and create clear and fair conditions for access to the port services market throughout the Union. This regulation, which enters into force this year, is an important milestone and it explicitly recognises the particular situation of the short sea segment.

But today's conference is entitled "shortsea: challenges ahead". It is true that we observe the gradual recovery of the sector and see that, according to the latest figures, the traffic volumes recorded in 2017 are comparable to the ones immediately preceding the economic downturn in 2009. However, the current economic and political climate remains somewhat uncertain and may have impact on the sector.

Some of the challenges were already highlighted last year and I have no doubt that we will hear today about concrete issues that need to be effectively addressed. But my encouragement would be also about to reflect on how these trends and challenges can actually be addressed and turned into opportunities.

One possible example concerns the upcoming environmental regulations, in particular with regards to GHG emissions. We know that achieving the long-term climate goals will require efforts in the development of carbon neutral technologies, the deployment of renewable fuels and alternative propulsion. The experience, which we have gained in the past 5-10 years on the question of LNG has shown us that these are long term efforts requiring the

cooperation of all actors. But it also showed us that short sea could be used as a real test case to pioneer a technology.

We recognize that this equires targeted investments on research and innovation. In the current financial period, the Commission has provided annually around €50m of funding for maritime research and innovation under Horizon 2020 and roughly €1bn for the deployment for the CEF-related maritime portfolio.

So there Let me conclude on this positive tone;

Short sea is and will remain an important component of our maritime sector and there is a strong determination from the Commission to build on our past successes and continuing dialogue.

For EU shipping to remain a strong player we must work together and strengthen Europe's global leadership in producing high technology, high efficient low emission waterborne transport. A safe, sustainable and competitive EU shipping industry requires a strong and solid EU maritime transport cluster.