

Distinguished Guests, Dear Colleagues,

It is a great pleasure for me to address you today and to offer you a warm welcome on behalf of the European Short Sea Shipping Network.

We do not very often have the opportunity to have all the representatives of this maritime sector in Europe, together with other important stakeholders under the same roof at the same time. I believe this guarantees the success of today's event.

Athens, the host city, is the place where in 2014, during the Greek Presidency, a declaration was issued reviewing the "mid-term EU maritime transport policies until 2018 and outlook 2020" and I am sure that this event is the best opportunity to take a look back and to talk about future developments in this sector.

At that moment, the need has been clearly stated to increase the importance of Short Sea Shipping in the EU.

We all know that Short Sea Shipping plays a key role in reaching the goal to shift 30% of the cargo from road freight over 300 km in Europe and that is why the topics of the conference related to new challenges such as energy and fuels, technology trends, the education gap and investment strategies fit perfectly to our actual concerns.

The Shortsea Promotion Centres (SPC), established in nearly all coastal EU Member States coordinate their own actions to promote Short Sea Shipping within a European Shortsea Network (ESN).

Having as main objectives the exchange of ideas on key issues and the identification of common problems, needs and bottlenecks arising in the short sea shipping we raise awareness and get into contact with national and European potential users of shortsea transport, shipping companies and other related organisations contributing to enhancing the growth rate of the sector.

I hope that our actions represent a good reason to encourage the industry, the ministries of transports and the European Commission to continue to assist ESN in reaching our common goal.

Even if it is not a new concern, the integration of short sea shipping into full logistics chains is still a challenge for the industry. And since I come from the Black Sea region I am probably one of the most appropriate persons to assert this issue.

Another current topic is related to the future legal framework related to the environment and how this will be well adapted to the specific of short sea shipping.

We are living in a very dynamic era where the new forms of logistics and the new technologies will change the business, as we know it today. There are a number of challenges ahead. We have to be ready to tackle them and our network is ready to keep us together in this challenge.

In order to develop and implement the new technologies we will have the task to increase our access to European funds through different research programmes or financing schemes and to address the changes of future transports.

Most of the ESN members have participated in such projects and have assisted the industry in developing innovative transport solutions.

I am sure this event will give the participants the opportunity to share our common interest in promoting a sustainable and efficient shortsea transport on a highly competitive market.

Thank you very much for your attention.