

# A window of opportunities



I believe that when it comes to increasing efficiency both in terms of energy and operations, do more with less, is one important path to follow. And this certainly counts for the operational side of the maritime transport sector, writes **Isabelle Ryckbost**, secretary general, ESPO.

**AFTER ALL THESE** years, the internal market for maritime transport is not in existence yet. Ships sailing from one port to another, goods being transported by sea from one member state to another are subject to many "reporting formalities". Is there scope for improvement or are these formalities just inherent to maritime transport and should we stop comparing maritime with other modes of transport in that respect? I think that these two questions require a positive answer.

*There will always be reporting formalities.* A ship can only call at a port in a safe and secure way if certain data is being transferred to the shore side. This data relates to the status of the ship, the crew, the cargo. The data changes over time. But besides safety and security for the ship and the port, there are many other reasons for reporting formalities in maritime transport: Phyto-sanitary requirements, migration, customs, etc. These requirements are based on international, European, national and port law. Overall, these requirements are only to a limited extent driven by the port community. In most of the cases it will be other authorities asking for this data.

*There is room for improvement.* As ESPO we believe that a lot of progress can be made in the field of harmonisation and simplification of formalities. Asking for the same data elements in the same way should become the principle. We should also dare to question the need for certain formalities and the modalities for submitting these requirements. Taking into account today's innovative digitalisation solutions, it might be worth looking at the current deadlines for providing formalities well before the next port call, in particular, in short-sea shipping where the time between two port calls is short.

If we really want to go for simplification and harmonisation we have to engage all authorities, reach out at all levels, from local to international. We should

not overestimate the role of port authorities. We should reach out to the users of the information and look at the policy requiring the data. The full exercise cannot be done overnight. But we are convinced that a simplification and harmonisation exercise in some strategic areas of data reporting combined with a further harmonisation of formats can be a breakthrough towards maritime facilitation.

The Commission is currently preparing the ground for a review of the Reporting formalities directive. The creation of a "European Maritime Single Window", a European single interface where shipping lines or their agents can drop all data needed for calling at a port, seems to be the way to go. This single window concept is accompanied by the "reporting only once" principle. Combined, both principles will open the way to fully implement the internal market for maritime transport.

As ESPO, we fully share the aim of facilitating trade, we support the discussion on a single window environment if this interface is reliable and resilient, if it is more than a mere letter box. The "single window" should have the competences and responsibility to unfold the data set delivered by the data provider (ship master or agent) and dispatch the information needed by and to the different authorities. If not, the single window will not be the facilitator but rather the disruptor of maritime trade and will just move the burden from ship to shore.

European ports are very keen to see the administrative burden, which characterises maritime transport still today, reduced. We are very much aware that alleviating this burden would take away one of the few shortcomings of EU maritime transport nowadays. Increasing the share of maritime transport in the transport of goods within Europe and increasing the efficiency of maritime operations and operators would be a big step towards a more sustainable supply chain.

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