

Joint declaration

Together, we are charting a course towards a resilient, competitive, and sustainable future, ensuring that the EU's Waterborne Transport Sector remains a global leader and delivers quality jobs

March 2024

The European Union's (EU) waterborne transport sector is of key importance to the EU's economic prosperity. It plays a key role in ensuring the seamless movement of goods and people, enhancing Europe's resilience especially in the current geopolitical context.

The waterborne transport sector is a dynamic sector, featuring a diverse array of public and private stakeholders. This includes maritime and inland waterways shipowners and operators, shipyards, equipment manufacturers, ports and terminals along with public and private infrastructure and service providers, universities and research institutes and social partners. Each of these actors play a pivotal role contributing their expertise and resources. At the core of the sector is its dedicated workforce, whose contributions are crucial both on board the vessels and on land, underlining the waterborne transport sector's vital role in the EU economy and society.

The sector is **critical for Europe's trade and economy**, handling nearly 90% of international trade, with 81% of the EU's external trade and 40% of its internal trade being carried by maritime shipping, which is the most environmentally friendly mode of transport. Inland waterway transport covers some 6 % of the EU carriage of goods, being able to absorb much higher volumes and thus being a huge driver to cut transport emissions. Our sector is not just crucial for trade; it is a significant employment driver in the EU, providing 4.2 million direct jobs. Moreover, it contributes €500 billion to the EU's yearly Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The sector is actively engaged and making significant investments to ensure it remains a worldwide frontrunner, embracing and facilitating the green and digital transformation. Waterborne transport is characterised by its unique attributes. One of its key features is the diversity of the types of ships and services it offers, coupled with its inherently international character and its economy of scale leading to high energy and cost efficiency. The waterborne transport sector plays a significant role towards reinforcing the EU's **resilience in terms of trade, security, defence, energy supply, sustainability** and thus being an enabler of the transition towards sustainable energy while safeguarding **strategic resilience** and a robust supply chain. Furthermore, ports play a strategic role as enablers of the energy transition, modal shift and the decarbonisation of waterborne transport.

To effectively fulfil these roles, the waterborne transport sector must remain competitive. This requires possessing the required human and industrial capacity to foster innovative solutions. The aim is to become even more sustainable and environmentally friendly, focus on human centric approaches, integrate digital technologies effectively and enhance overall resilience. It is imperative for the sector to uphold this position especially in the face of challenges such as absence of level playing field, regulatory uncertainty and increasing competition from third countries.

In line with the EU Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy, the waterborne transport sector plays a key role in achieving Europe's sustainability objectives regarding the energy transition and the modal shift. The sector is committed to these objectives but needs the right supporting policies and framework conditions to achieve them, in particular future climate proof and resilient infrastructure.

The green and digital transition must be fair and just as it will have a massive impact on waterborne jobs and working conditions. Upskilling and reskilling of the workforce is key to preserving Europe's competitiveness, leadership in innovative maritime technology markets and workers' employability.

A coordinated effort between public and the private sector actors at the European level is urgently required, with **resilience, competitiveness and level playing field** as the corner stones. This collaboration is essential to secure a prosperous future of this strategic sector for Europe.

Therefore, the waterborne transport stakeholders are committed to engaging in a continuous and open dialogue. Progressing on the green and digital ambitions and focus on and support an effective implementation of the measures decided during the last years, including the promotion of social dialogue at all levels, should be a priority.

Regular coordination meetings, including high-level dialogues with the European Commission Services, as well as annual or biannual meetings between the European Commission Services, the waterborne transport stakeholders, social partners and EU Member States should be conducted.

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