



European Shipowners | ECSA Position Paper on Trade

1. Executive Summary/main recommendations

Shipping is a cornerstone of Europe's energy, food and supply chain security and is an asset to the EU's economic prosperity, moving 76% of EU's external trade. At times of geopolitical uncertainties, it is vital for the EU to strike a balance between supporting its strategic sectors and promoting rule-based open trade and access to markets for its businesses and citizens.

European Shipowners | ECSA recommendations:

- Investing in open trade and international trade partnerships should remain a key priority for the competitiveness of Europe.
- Pursue new Free Trade Agreements
- Swiftly ratify and implement Free Trade Agreements with Mercosur, Mexico, Chile and Australia
- Ensure strong maritime provisions
- Enhancing secure trade

Introduction

Shipping is a cornerstone of Europe's energy, food and supply chain security and is an asset to the EU's economic prosperity. While the EU represents around 15% of the global GDP, the European shipping fleet is one of the largest in the world, representing around 35% of the global fleet. European shipping makes the EU an international leader in the global supply chains and as a key enabler of global trade, plays a strategic role in connecting Europe with the rest of the world.

The EU has benefitted substantially from free trade and open access to international markets and to this day remains significantly more reliant on trade than other key economies. According to the World Bank, trade represented 106% of the EU GDP in 2022, compared to the USA (27%) or China (38%).

Growing geopolitical uncertainty, economic tensions, and security concerns are reshaping the way the world works. In this ever-changing landscape shipping has remained resilient, flexible and innovative, carrying 76% of the EU's external trade.

At times when many countries around the world are turning to protectionism and global trade flows are disrupted by the introduction of tariffs, it is vital for the EU to strike a balance between supporting its strategic sectors and promoting rule-based open trade and access to markets for its businesses and citizens.

European Shipowners | ECSA recommendations:

Investing in open trade and international trade partnerships should therefore remain a key priority for the competitiveness of Europe.



Brussels,
March 2026

To ensure that Europe and European shipping can maintain their leading role in the international supply chains, European Shipowners put forward the following recommendations:

- **Pursue new Free Trade Agreements**

The EU should continue to pursue Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with third countries, with the objective of swiftly concluding new FTAs with strategic partners. This is essential to diversify and future-proof Europe's supply chains and strengthen its economic security. European Shipowners call upon the policymakers to swiftly conclude outstanding negotiations on FTAs, such as the EU-Indonesia, EU- Thailand, EU-UAE, EU-Malaysia and EU-Philippines FTAs, to solidify trade relations with key economies in South-East Asia region critical for global shipping lanes. Advancing these negotiations is key to reinforce the EU's position in global trade and ensuring the resilience of its supply chains.

- **Swiftly ratify and implement Free Trade Agreements with Mercosur, Mexico, Chile and Australia**

Once new Free Trade Agreements are concluded, it is imperative to ensure their swift ratification and implementation. The EU-Mercosur agreement, the EU-Mexico FTA and the EU-Chile FTA, and the recently adopted EU-India and EU-Australia FTAs are all awaiting ratification and have a significant potential to enhance trade between Europe and South America and the Pacific. The immediate ratification of FTAs enhances the EU's commitment to strengthening its international trade links and ensuring its economic resilience and competitiveness.

- **Ensure strong maritime provisions**

Ensuring access to international markets is crucial for the competitiveness of European shipping. New free trade agreements should therefore continue to include strong provisions on international maritime services. Additionally, expanding the scope of liberalisation of new services and enhancing access to markets for specific shipping segments, like offshore services, should be promoted.

International maritime services – what should be included under FTAs?

- Unrestricted access to the international maritime markets and trades on a commercial and non-discriminatory basis;
- Abolish and abstain from cargo-sharing agreements or unilateral cargo reservations;
- Grant EU operators reciprocal national market access, at minimum feeder services, and all forms of transshipment and movement of empty containers, as well as the ability to perform multimodal operations;
- The ability for EU operators to establish local representations in third countries.
- EU FTAs should always apply to shipping companies established outside the European Union and controlled by EU nationals, whose vessels are registered in a Member State of the European Union and fly the flag of an EU Member State.



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Furthermore, as shipping seeks to reach net-zero by 2050, access to clean fuels for shipping is a priority in Europe and worldwide. New FTAs should therefore seek to strengthen international partnerships with third countries on clean fuels for shipping, to boost investments in production and infrastructure, and secure access for European shipping.

Strengthening the enforcement of new and existing trade agreements is crucial to provide certainty to European maritime businesses and ensure a level playing field internationally. European Shipowners welcome the efforts made so far to tackle market access barriers and ensure that FTAs are implemented on an equal and reciprocal basis.

- **Enhancing secure trade**

Maintaining safe and secure maritime trade lanes is crucial for the EU's supply chain security. Geopolitical instability, piracy, and other security threats continue to have a significant impact on trade corridors, leading to supply chain disruption for European industry, businesses and citizens. In its role as global maritime security provider, the EU should continue its work to ensure the protection of international shipping lanes. In particular, the EU should continue to prioritise the protection of commercial shipping lanes, notably in the Red Sea, Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Guinea, i.a through EUNAVFOR Operations Atalanta and Aspides and the Coordinated Maritime Presence (CMP).

Finally, compliance with international principles such as UNCLOS, is crucial to safeguarding safe and secure access to international trade lanes.

Conclusion

The European shipping industry is facing significant challenges but also unprecedented opportunities. By adopting a strategic approach that prioritises sustainability, resilience, open trade, and by investing in robust free trade agreements with strong maritime provisions, the EU can reinforce its position as a global leader in maritime trade. Initiatives like the EU packages on economic security that aim to enhance the EU's competitiveness while upholding the openness of trade, investment, and research for the EU's economy, should be enhanced. Coordinated efforts among member states, industry stakeholders, and policymakers are essential to navigate this transformative period and secure a prosperous future for European shipping.

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