Ms Kaja Kallas
High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
Vice-President of the European Commission
European External Action Service
Rue de la Loi 200, 1000, Brussels

Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the EU Member States and Partner Countries

26 November 2026

Open letter on freedom of navigation and the protection of seafarers

Dear High Representative Kallas,

Dear Foreign Affairs Ministers,

European Shipowners | ECSA, BIMCO, the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA), the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS), INTERCARGO, INTERFERRY, INTERTANKO and the World Shipping Council (WSC) welcome and support the EU-led 'Pledge on Maintaining the Integrity of the International Law of the Sea – No Fees/No Tolls', announced on 12 October 2026. We commend the European Union, its Member States and partner countries for their united commitment to protecting freedom of navigation, which underpins global shipping and the carriage of around 90% of world trade.

The pledge sends an important signal of international unity against the use of tolls or fees and restrictions affecting passage through straits used for international navigation. We share its commitment to preserving the legal framework established by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), rejecting coercive unilateral measures and strengthening multilateral cooperation, particularly through the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

For our industry, the safety and protection of seafarers is a precondition of freedom of navigation. Seafarers are the backbone of global trade and must be able to carry out their work safely. They must never become targets of violence. Their safety and welfare must remain at the centre of international efforts to safeguard maritime routes. Seafarers have already suffered injuries and lost their lives while carrying out their essential work. We therefore particularly welcome

the pledge's support for non-escalatory multilateral initiatives. We urge the supporting countries to translate this commitment into sustained cooperation and practical measures to protect merchant ships and their crews, while keeping essential trade moving safely. Such efforts should be accompanied by sustained coordination between States, relevant naval forces and the shipping industry to help translate commitments to freedom of navigation into effective protection of seafarers and shipping at sea.

As our industry has previously underlined in relation to the Strait of Hormuz, compulsory transit charges, including service fees that in practice amount to tolls, would set a deeply worrying precedent. Freedom of navigation is fundamental to the welfare of people worldwide and to the global economy, underpinning the free flow of trade, energy security and the supply of critical materials. We urge governments to uphold these rights consistently and resist attempts to make their exercise conditional on payment.

The consequences of disrupted shipping reach far beyond our industry. Reliable maritime transport supports the security of supply of food, energy and essential goods, and underpins economies worldwide. Protecting the people who deliver these goods is a shared international responsibility.

We therefore encourage additional countries to support the pledge and stand ready to work with its supporters, the IMO and the wider international community to advance its objectives. Together, we must ensure that freedom of navigation is upheld in practice and that seafarers can perform their essential work without fear for their lives.

Yours sincerely,

Sotiris Raptis, Secretary General, **European Shipowners | ECSA**

David Loosley, Secretary General and CEO, **BIMCO**

Bud Darr, President and CEO, **Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA)**

Thomas A. Kazakos, Secretary General, **International Chamber of Shipping (ICS)**

Kostas G. Gkonis, Director and Secretary General, **INTERCARGO**

Mike Corrigan, CEO, **INTERFERRY**

Tim Wilkins, Managing Director, **INTERTANKO**

Joe Kramek, President and CEO, **World Shipping Council (WSC)**