

## EU Begins Planning a New Strategy to Boost its Maritime Sector



Courtesy EU Transport

Published May 19, 2015 8:27 PM by [The Maritime Executive](#)

Last week, shipping ministers from EU member states gathered in Szczecin, Poland to lay out a strategy for boosting the competitiveness of European shipbuilding and shipping in the face of ever-rising competition from Asia.

During the "informal" meeting, the ministers talked through the possibilities for a future EU maritime industrial strategy, taking into account political and market factors. The conference concluded with a joint declaration by member states, which received welcome approval from EU shipbuilders and shipowners.

"The Szczecin Declaration is a pivotal moment for Europe's maritime industries, especially for the maritime manufacturing industry, which has been lacking political support and impactful measures for far too long, despite unfair competition from Asia," said Alberto Maestrini, chairman of shipbuilders' association SEA Europe. "Europe must protect its maritime industrial base and cannot do without commercial shipbuilding if it wants to secure its naval capabilities, cross-fertilization between commercial and naval industry, and sovereignty."

The European Community Shipowners' Associations (ECSA), the voice of EU shipping, emphasized that - unlike comparable efforts in the United States - the Szczecin Declaration is not protectionist. Instead, it centers on investments in innovation and competitiveness, and emphasizes the "level playing field" of global (rather than European) regulations on shipping.

The declaration contains much to like for EU owners, ECSA said, including an endorsement of some of the association's main priorities:

- a call for regulatory action to stimulate production of green fuels, which will be needed for compliance but are currently hard to source
- measures to underwrite the cost of expensive clean fuel using ETS revenues

"We welcome the support for key priorities for the European Shipowners such as the need to de-risk investments in clean fuels and technology and to maintain a fit-for-purpose regulatory and taxation framework," said ECSA Secretary General Sotiris Raptis in a statement.

SEA Europe welcomed the declaration's focus on key problems for European shipbuilding. The association thanked EU ministers for recognizing the strategic security and defense role of EU shipyards; the key role of decarbonization tech in positioning EU maritime manufacturing for leadership; the distortionary effects of non-EU nations' shipbuilding subsidy programs; the full dependence of EU owners on Asian yards for tonnage; and the restrictive effects of EU banking rules on EU ship financing.