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VDR Congratulates European Commission President von der Leyen on Re-election and Calls for Robust Shipping Policies in Europe

Europe Must Remain a Competitive Maritime Hub

The German Shipowners' Association (VDR) warmly congratulates Ursula von der Leyen on her re-election as President of the European Commission and calls for strengthening and expanding the competitiveness of Europe as a leading shipping hub.

In a time when the shipping industry faces significant challenges, the reappointment of Ursula von der Leyen is a crucial step toward securing the future of the European shipping sector. Shipping, as the backbone of international trade and the primary means of supplying the European economy and population, requires stable and strategically forward-looking political support. Ursula von der Leyen has already proven in the past five years that she can set important milestones for a sustainable future in shipping. Now, the focus of European policy makers must be on securing the competitiveness of European fleets, vital sea routes for Europe, and maritime supply chains.

The EU's merchant fleet is one of the largest in the world, representing around 40 percent of the global merchant fleet. Over 75 percent of the EU's total foreign trade is conducted by sea, including pharmaceuticals, food, electronics, clothing, and wind turbines. In Germany alone, about 60 percent of all goods are imported and exported by ships. The EU shipping industry directly employs approximately 640,000 people both on board and ashore. Germany is one of the leading shipping nations, with around 60,000 seafarers working on merchant ships owned or managed by German entities.

"It is crucial to not only preserve but also to secure the future of this industry, which is so important for Europe and especially for Germany. Shipping is the engine of the European economy, a guarantor of supply security for the population, and a significant catalyst for the energy transition. Particularly in these geopolitically challenging times, it is essential to focus future political efforts in Europe on our shipping industry. In the coming years, we need a proactive European shipping policy focused on growth and securing our competitiveness," explains Gaby Bornheim, President of the VDR.

Urgent Tasks for the EU: Secure Sea Routes and a Climate-Neutral Future for Shipping

The increase in geopolitical conflicts and the resulting restrictions on the freedom of sea routes have far-reaching consequences for the supply of Germany and Europe. Therefore, the EU and its member states must be committed to protecting ships and crews. Missions like the EU's "Aspides" in the Red Sea reduce the risk of attacks and make it clear that such assaults on civilian shipping will not be tolerated. Without naval units, the protection of civilian merchant shipping is impossible.



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The Green Deal of the last EU Commission under Ursula von der Leyen poses enormous challenges for shipping with its integration into the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS) and the FuelEU Maritime Regulation. These measures require a harmonized integration into the international climate protection regulations of the International Maritime Organization (IMO). Regional regulation is simply not practical for the globally operating shipping industry.

At the same time, the political focus must be on securing not only climate neutrality but also the competitiveness of EU shipping. Only in this way can it be ensured that the European shipping industry remains secure, sustainable, and successful while also contributing to global climate protection.

"We need a European Industrial Deal following the European Green Deal in the next five years," adds Bornheim.

Protection Against Protectionist Tendencies

The increasing protectionist tendencies worldwide are also extremely worrying for shipping, as they threaten free trade and access to international markets. The European Union benefits significantly from free access to these markets, which substantially strengthens its position in global supply chains and thus directly secures Europe's supply. Protectionist measures, however, threaten Europe's leading role and could long-term weaken the competitiveness of the EU economy. This also applies to the international shipbuilding markets, which must be kept open and accessible for EU shipping, especially to ensure the necessary fleet renewal for the decarbonization of sea transport in the coming years. Therefore, the EU must actively work to defend the principles of free trade to maintain its economic strength and global leadership position.

About the German Shipowners' Association

The German Shipowners' Association (VDR) represents the common economic and socio-political interests of German shipping companies at federal and state level as well as vis-à-vis European and international bodies. The VDR was founded in 1907 and merged with the Association of German Coastal Shipowners in 1994. With around 150 members, the VDR represents the largest part of the German merchant fleet. More information at www.reederverband.de.