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**Emanuele Grimaldi calls for support for shortsea shipping's role in European transport**

Challenges from competing modes are rising, warns Grimaldi Group boss

EUROPE's shortsea shipping industry faces mounting challenges from competing transport modes and will need support if it is to play a greater role in Europe's transport mix.

Speaking at European Shipping Week, Grimaldi Group managing director Emanuele Grimaldi said Europe's shortsea industry had been a success story in many ways. "We can't be too critical about it," he said. "Sixty percent of all shortsea shipping is controlled by European companies, with the biggest markets being the North Sea and the Mediterranean."

Some initiatives from Europe to support the industry had been very successful, Mr Grimaldi said. "At one point there was not a single service between Italy and Spain but now we have fleet of 10 vessels on this route. But now most of the routes are covered.

"We cannot accelerate the process by simply building another port within 50 km of where another line is based because they are both competing for the same market. If you give money to one shipowner but not another you will distort competition, so we have to be careful in how to progress."

However, shortsea shipping remained very political and needed a sensitive approach. In Greece for example, with its large island populations, shortsea shipping provides a lifeline. "We see what happens when there is bad weather and we can't connect to an island. The freedom of the people is connected with sustainable, competitive shortsea shipping."

Shortsea shipping was also vital to development of trade between European economies. "We want to see more commerce between the member states of the European Union," Mr Grimaldi said. "This will not happen only by building more motorways and fast trains. If we want to accelerate this trade the money should be given in a neutral way."

One way the EU could help was being participating in the ECA zones, where large investments were being made by shipping companies to make shipping more competitive both economically and environmentally. "If some contribution is given from the EU, that will be accepted with pleasure," Mr Grimaldi said.

Moreover, a contribution could be given for decongesting roads and money is given to hauliers and cargo interests to incentivise them not to transport by road. A similar system had worked well in Italy, Mr Grimaldi said.

German Maritime Shippers Council president Gerd Deimel added that shortsea shipping was needed to help reduce congestion and was part of the solution to the overcrowding on roads.

Mr Deimel said: "We need short-sea shipping but something like the SECA situation, which we have only in the North Sea and not in the Mediterranean, makes using a truck cheaper than using ships, so it is not a solution. We need to get a clear understanding of how we can get a competitive situation so we can move our stuff.

"Therefore it is important for the EU to promote shortsea shipping."