Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

It is with a great pleasure that I participate in this edition of the Motorways of the Sea Forum. I believe that this represents a perfect opportunity to exchange about the challenges that the shipping sector is facing in Europe and the contribution that Motorways of the Sea can do as a policy and financial instrument.

With roughly €1.2bn invested in the current financing period, the maritime portfolio of CEF, including its most prominent element, Motorways of the Sea, helps improving the quality and performance of maritime links throughout Europe and thus contributes to the achievement of a European Maritime Transport Space without barriers.

A highly efficient and performing maritime sector is essential for Europe. With 75% of the EU trade being transported on the seas, attractive and competitive maritime services are critical. But Motorways of the Sea equally concerns well-functioning of our ports, that are vital gateways connecting the EU market to its international partners. It is also about how we think and conceive the integration of maritime transport in the overall transport and logistic chain. Maritime transport is in essence only one element of a much diverse multimodal transport chain. Its single performance is critical but it cannot suffice if its integration in the overall transport network is not well achieved.

The importance of maritime transport, in this case the short-sea shipping component for intra-EU transport should also not be underestimated. Actually, 60% of the cargo flows handled in the major European ports are originating from short-sea operations. By providing around a third of EU internal trade, maritime transport is essential for the functioning of the internal market. It plays a clear role in linking different regions of the Union, preserving and attracting new industries and logistic activities, and supporting the greening of transport. On purpose, this time, I am leaving out the external aspect of maritime transport. But this time only.

Recently a panellist in a discussion I moderated referred to short sea shipping as the “maintenance-free highways”. I thought that the picture was telling and it was very easy to draw a parallel between this expression and the Motorways of the Sea. And as with highways, we want green and clean vehicles/vessels on those highways. And clean environment around them.

MoS is an indispensable instrument in our strategy on short sea shipping. The first EU communication on short sea shipping was adopted in 1995 and since then the issue has regularly figured in an important place in our policy. The 2009 EU maritime transport
strategy itself has a section fully dedicated to short sea shipping, recognizing clearly the contribution that Motorways of the Sea can make.

It’s fair to say that quite some progress has been achieved on the priorities that we identified in 1995 on the developments of short sea shipping in Europe. However, the European maritime sector continues to face a number of challenges resulting from changes in the economic and political environment. I would like to highlight some of these issues and also provide some food for thoughts on how these trends and challenges can actually be addressed and turned into opportunities.

Allow me to review these issues following the three pillars of Motorways of the Sea as described in the current MoS Detailed Implementation Plan.

**Environment:**

Let me start with the topic, which is probably in the mind of most of the operators nowadays, namely the entry into force of the global 0.50% sulphur limit. In less than 6 months from now, the new sulphur requirements will enter into force. This is a very important step to improve the sector’s environmental performance. A wealth of initiatives have already been taken at EU level to ensure correct and cost effective compliance and I am confident that the EU companies are getting ready for this important milestone. The three years’ experience of the EU with 0.10% sulphur limit in SECAs is an encouraging precedent for the smooth introduction of the 0.50% global sulphur limit.

But we also need to keep in mind the upcoming efforts that will have to be undertaken to curb carbon emissions. The adoption of the IMO strategy last year was a first important milestone, which now needs to rapidly materialize and deliver tangible emissions reductions.

We know that achieving the long-term climate goals will require efforts in the development of carbon neutral technologies, the deployment of renewable fuels and alternative propulsion. The experience, which we have gained in the past 5-10 years on the question of LNG has shown us that these are long term efforts requiring the cooperation of all actors. While LNG was initially limited to certain small segment of the short sea sector, it has now became a suitable alternative for deep-sea shipping. This experience shows us that short sea could be used as a real test case to pioneer a technology and we now need to replicate this approach for electric solutions and other alternative fuels. So, indeed, challenges can be turned into opportunities!

The experience we have gained on this topic also tells us another important thing: cooperation among actors is paramount! All hands on deck! In this respect, I hope that the European Sustainable Shipping Forum and the European Ports’ Forum will continue to be the good framework for enhancing dialogue and cooperation among us.

**Integration of maritime transport:**

Since 1995, the simplification and digitalisation of reporting formalities have always been highlighted as one of the key priorities to support the growth of European short sea shipping. With the 2010 Directive on reporting formalities, the national single windows have been established in the majority of the MS and a great deal of simplification had already taken place. But even then, shipping operators were found to still spend around 1-3 hours per port call on reporting.
We are very pleased of the recent agreement between the EU co-legislators on the proposal to create a European Maritime Single Window environment, to introduce a higher degree of harmonisation in data collection and digital formats, and possibly to re-use data submitted, making it possible to apply the ‘reporting once’ principle. And once in place, harmonised reporting on cargo arriving at and departing EU ports will facilitate the flow of information through the entire logistics chain. Finnish Presidency will work towards completing another important legislative initiative, on Electronic Freight Transport Information, that will build a multimodal digital environment for all transport modes.

Other efficiency gains need to be carefully looked into. This concerns for instance the optimisation of port calls, ensuring a smooth and seamless arrival and departure of ships. This could lead to a better information to operators on when berth would be available, in order to allow them to adjust their routing, their speed to ensure the most efficient operations and just-in-time arrival. On the other side, a system like this should also allow sufficient information flowing to the port authorities and operators, so that they can best adjust to the expected levels of traffic and cargo.

But efficiency and connectivity also needs to go beyond the maritime sector and reach out to the overall logistics chain. Once again, maritime is by nature multimodal, and hence the integration of the shipping links into the overall transport network is essential. In this context, I would also like to applaud the coordinator’s initiative to tighten the links between MoS and the land-based TEN-T corridors.

**Safety / human element**

Last but not least, let me conclude with a number of points concerning the safety aspect. Safety is and remains a top priority!

Over the last three years we have placed a lot of emphasis on ensuring that our, already comprehensive, legislative framework on maritime safety is fit for purpose at every level, from passenger ships to marine equipment, port state and flag state responsibilities. We have published last year the results of the Maritime Fitness check, which will be an important input into our reflection on future policy needs.

A crucial component of our system is our European Maritime Safety Agency. EMSA’s support to Member States contributes to the high-level of maritime safety, which we have in Europe and is a key factor in enforcing IMO and EU standards.

Safety is a pre-requisite: a pro-active approach to safety, security and pollution prevention can support the competitiveness and attractiveness of the sector, while maintaining the focus on quality shipping. A number of safety-related projects have been co-funded under the current Motorways of the Seas framework. Improving safety of operations and ensuring the right training for our crews is always an investment that pays back manifold.

The title of today’s MoS (“MoS today and tomorrow”) forum invites us to think about the future challenges and the role of the Motorways of the Sea. In general, I think that we would all agree that the elements highlighted in the Detailed Implementation Plan are long-term issues that will probably remain valid in the next years.

But let me invite you to slightly change the mindset and consider these challenges in terms of opportunities. Opportunities for new technologies, for new business models or for making the EU maritime sector a more competitive and attractive solution in the overall
transport system. The sector may be very different in 2030 or 2050 and the question is what contribution we can make to these changes.

There is a strong determination from the Commission to build on our past successes and to continue our dialogue. For EU shipping to remain a strong player we must work together and strengthen Europe’s global leadership in technology oriented, efficiency driven, and low emission waterborne transport. A safe, sustainable and competitive EU shipping industry requires a strong and solid EU maritime transport cluster!

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