



## ETF Response to the Council Conclusions on Europe's Maritime Industrial and Port Strategies

The European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF) **welcomes the adoption of the Council Conclusions on the EU Maritime Industrial Strategy and the EU Port Strategy.**

In particular, ETF **supports the emphasis on strengthening Europe's maritime industrial base, developing maritime skills, enhancing the resilience of critical infrastructure and reinforcing Europe's maritime technological leadership, as well as the recognition of ports as strategic assets for Europe's economy, energy security, resilience and competitiveness.**

At the same time, ETF notes that **important elements remain insufficiently addressed or absent, notably regarding the social dimension**, quality employment, workers' rights and concrete measures to deliver a just transition for maritime and port workers.

### Maritime Industrial Strategy

The Council's recognition of the need to attract and retain maritime professionals, strengthen maritime education and training, and promote upskilling and reskilling initiatives represents an important step forward.

However, **ETF regrets that the social dimension is still insufficiently reflected throughout the Conclusions. Quality jobs, fair wages, safe manning levels, effective enforcement of labour standards and collective bargaining are essential pillars of a sustainable maritime industry.**

**Workers must be placed at the centre of the Strategy, as Europe cannot secure supply chains, energy autonomy, fleet decarbonisation or critical maritime infrastructure without people.**

The EU can and should do more to promote socially sustainable shipping based on equal treatment and free from social dumping for all maritime professionals, regardless of nationality or flag. Work in European waters must mean European conditions.

ETF reiterates **that public support for the maritime sector, including industrial and shipbuilding investments, should be subject to clear social conditionalities**, including quality employment, training opportunities, fair recruitment practices and respect for collective agreements. Likewise, maritime State aid frameworks should contribute more effectively to the employment and training of European seafarers.

The Council's **focus on maritime skills must also be complemented by concrete measures** addressing recruitment and retention challenges, social protection, excessive working time and the attractiveness of maritime careers. Reskilling and upskilling linked to regulatory and technological change should be accessible to all workers, free of charge, and financed jointly by employers and public authorities.

ETF also welcomes the increased attention given to maritime security and resilience. Nevertheless, the role of seafarers as key actors in emergency preparedness deserves greater recognition. The Conclusions overlook the essential role of EU seafarers in resilience scenarios, fail to address the risks linked to excessive reliance on third-country crews in emergencies, and do not acknowledge



the connection between flags of convenience and security vulnerabilities.

Finally, the **Council Conclusions fail to acknowledge the strategic value of EU flags and the objective of enhancing the attractiveness of EU Member State flags** — an issue explicitly recognised in the Maritime Industrial Strategy itself. This omission is particularly regrettable given the crucial role that EU flags play in strengthening Europe's maritime sovereignty, resilience, security and employment.

## Port Strategy

The Council **rightly identifies the multiple challenges facing European ports**, including decarbonisation, digitalisation, geopolitical tensions, organised crime, cyber threats and increasing global competition. ETF particularly welcomes the recognition of the need to invest in training, workforce development and skills, together with the commitment to safe working conditions and social cohesion.

ETF also **supports efforts aimed at strengthening the security and resilience of ports**. Port workers are central to the protection of critical infrastructure and supply chains, and measures targeting organised crime and enhanced cybersecurity are necessary. However, any new security framework must be developed with the full involvement of social partners and in full respect of workers' rights, privacy and due process.

The Council's recognition of the risks that climate and environmental legislation may create for the competitiveness of European ports is also important. The transition to cleaner maritime transport must be accompanied by adequate investment in port infrastructure, alternative fuels, electrification and workforce skills, while guaranteeing that decarbonisation remains both environmentally and socially sustainable.

While acknowledging these positive elements, **ETF considers that employment, skills, collective bargaining and social dialogue should be recognised as cross-cutting pillars of the EU Port Strategy**. European ports can only remain competitive and resilient if they are underpinned by a skilled, well-trained and fairly treated workforce. The Strategy nevertheless lacks concrete commitments regarding quality employment, collective bargaining, social dialogue and the protection of labour standards throughout the port and logistics chain.

Furthermore, although **digitalisation and automation are identified as priorities, greater attention should be paid to their impact on workers and employment**. Technological transformation must be accompanied by social impact assessments, training opportunities and just transition measures developed together with workers and their representatives.

ETF also believes that **public and EU funding for port development should be subject to social conditionality**, including respect for labour rights, health and safety standards, collective agreements and meaningful social dialogue. ETF therefore calls for a stronger social pillar that places workers at the centre of Europe's port policy. European ports will only be truly competitive, secure and future-proof if investment in infrastructure goes hand in hand with investment in people.

Port workers are essential to Europe's strategic autonomy, economic resilience and energy transition. Their contribution must therefore be fully recognised and reflected in the implementation of the EU Port Strategy.



ETF will continue to engage constructively with the European institutions, Member States and social partners to ensure that the implementation of both Strategies delivers a sustainable, resilient and socially responsible future for Europe's maritime and port sectors. While the Council Conclusions contain several positive elements, their success will ultimately depend on whether workers and social considerations are fully integrated into future legislative, industrial and investment initiatives.

**ETF's full position on the EU Maritime Industrial Strategy and the EU Port Strategy can be consulted [here](#).**

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