
SEARICA DECLARATION ON THE COVID-19 CRISIS

The outbreak of Covid-19 has led the world in an unprecedented scenario, wherein countries have been forced to impose strict containment measures to abate the spread of the Coronavirus and protect European citizens and their health, that have unforeseen consequences on critical sectors of Europe's Seas, Rivers, Islands and Coastal Areas.

The entire maritime sector has been affected by the consequences of the crisis. Strategic sectors, from the fishing industry to critical infrastructures such as ports, sea and inland waterways and European supply chains, have been under a lot of strain and faced a sharp slowdown of their activity, with the risk of bringing the European economy to a standstill.

The waterborne transport sector, including ports, is strongly hit by this crisis. As it is responsible for almost 90% of the EU's external freight trade and a third of intra-European transport of goods, it is the engine of the European economy and provides vast opportunities for employment and industrial innovation.

It is also a cornerstone of tourism in and across Europe. Coastal and maritime tourism, Europe's main maritime economic sector in terms of employment, as a consequence of this pandemic, is suffering from enormous economic losses.

These cumulated social and economic impacts resulting from the crisis will be all the more significant in coastal territories, including islands and outermost regions, whose economy and accessibility depend more strongly on maritime transport and on the blue economy in general. With the standstill of waterborne transport, the EU is at risk of losing one of its major strategic assets.

The effects of the Covid-19 crisis also greatly impact the fisheries and aquaculture sector in the EU. The interruption of fishing activities, coupled with a drop of imports and exports and significant disturbances in normal distribution channels puts professionals in a critical situation with severe economic losses, with no clarity on prospects of recovering. New measures will be needed to support these sectors, in addition to those already adopted at EU level.

Maritime industries, including shipbuilding and maritime equipment, offshore wind energy and ocean energies, and other maritime technologies are severely hit as well, as short-term production but also new orders and investments are postponed. In a context of severe international competition, there is a need for Europe to preserve its industrial autonomy in these strategic industrial areas.

In light of the above, SEArICA:

- will act to defend our maritime sector's needs and to ensure that necessary measures will be taken to preserve its strategic role both during and after the crisis. In that aspect, welcomes the measures already taken and the action plans already put forward by the Commission;
- welcomes the first responses that the different bodies of the European Union have adopted over the last few weeks to face the Covid-19 outbreak and which are also accessible to the maritime sector;
- welcomes, in particular, the concrete measures proposed for the fisheries and aquaculture sectors;
- calls for urgent action to be taken to support strategic sectors that act as a cornerstone of our European economy, and for the adoption of adequate contingency plans, economic recovery action plans and a pan-European effort to support maritime established sectors, as well as sectors that are still emerging and depend on marine biodiversity such as blue biotechnology or seaweed farming;
- recalls the fact that the genetic properties of marine organisms are currently being used both to develop Covid-19 tests and for therapies demonstrates the interest for Europe to invest in marine research;
- calls for Europe's strategy for economic recovery to rely on multi-level governance and on strengthened partnership with national, regional and local authorities;
- recalls that maritime economic sectors and these territories can indeed provide a key contribution to Europe's Green Deal objectives in terms of climate action and biodiversity protection, and to Europe's energy, industrial and economic autonomy, defence and security;
- calls for the sustainable blue economy to be placed at the heart of Europe's strategy for economic recovery and therefore of future debates on the Multi-Annual Financial Framework.

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