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INFORMATION NOTE

From: European Commission
To: Council
Subject: Recent developments of the Blue Belt initiative
- *Information from the Commission*

Delegations will find annexed an information note from the Commission on the above-mentioned subject, which will be dealt with under "Any other business" at the meeting of the Council (Transport, Telecommunications and Energy) on 5 December 2013.

Information Note from the Commission

Recent developments of the Blue Belt initiative

The EU is highly dependent on maritime transport for its trade with the rest of the world but within the internal market, shipping is not used to its full potential mainly due to administrative burden, especially in the field of customs. Even though simplified rules for maritime transport have already been introduced by EU legislation, vessels travelling between EU ports still encounter a significant number of complex procedures. These procedures involve costs and delays that can make maritime transport less attractive for the transport of goods in the EU internal market.

Blue Belt is a concept according to which ships can operate freely within the EU internal market with a minimum of administrative burden and in which safety, environmental protection as well as customs and tax revenues are ensured by an optimal use of existing capabilities to monitor maritime transport and the cargo concerned. The European Commission adopted on 8th July 2013 a Communication, creating a policy framework for the future “Blue Belt”.

To prepare the initiative, the Commission tasked the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) to launch a pilot project demonstrating to national authorities, starting with customs authorities, which services SafeSeaNet can offer to support the aim of reducing administrative burden for maritime transport. The operational phase of the pilot project ran from May to November 2011. Results were presented to the transport ministers at the June 2012 TTE Council. Ministers were widely in favour of continued implementation and further development of the Blue Belt concept.

In October 2012, the key action number 2 of the Commission Communication "Single Market Act II, Together for new growth" (SMA II) called for the establishment of a true single market for maritime transport. This would be realised by no longer subjecting EU goods transported between EU seaports to administrative and customs formalities that apply to goods arriving from overseas ports to give an impetus to intra-EU maritime transport, comparable to that of other modes of transport (air, rail, and road).

The proposed approach is twofold:

- for purely intra-EU movements of vessels (currently limited to 10-20% of traffic) further simplification of the Regular Shipping Service scheme in the Customs legislation by shortening deadlines for the application procedure and making the procedure for adding new Member States to the service more flexible. The European Commission adopted on 5th November 2013 a modification to the Implementing Regulation of the Customs Code¹ in order to facilitate the granting by Member States of Authorised Regular Shipping Services. The new Regular Shipping Service scheme will be applied as of March 2014.
- for vessels carrying both EU and non-EU goods and calling also at non-EU ports, the so-called eManifest, an electronic harmonised cargo document would allow for facilitation and speeding up of customs procedures for EU cargo by enabling customs to distinguish between Union and non-Union goods. Currently, all goods arriving in EU ports are considered to be non-Union goods, even if they have been loaded in an EU port without having called in a third country port during the voyage. A further modification of the Implementing Regulation of the Customs Code has been prepared and will be submitted to the Member States by the end of 2013. Its approval is expected by end June 2014. Discussions with maritime and customs authorities as well as representatives from the maritime sector on the development and implementation are currently taking place. The eManifest should be ready to be applied as of June 2015 to coincide with the establishment of the National Single Windows as foreseen in Directive 2010/65/EC on Reporting Formalities.

Although the legislative work is done by customs colleagues, this is an important transport topic, targeted at facilitating maritime trade and enhancing the competitiveness of shipping in the EU. Cooperation between Transport Ministers and their counterparts dealing with customs matters is essential to put the "Blue Belt" objective successfully into practice.

¹ Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 1099/2013 of 5 November 2013 amending Regulation (EEC) No 2454/93 laying down provisions for the implementation of Council Regulation (EEC) No 2913/92 establishing the Community Customs Code (enhancement of regular shipping services); OJ L 294 of 6.11.2013 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:294:0040:0041:EN:PDF>