



Facilitating Short Sea Shipping: customs authorities informed of ship movements by Blue Belt pilot project

(Lisbon, 6 May 2011) Can a customs authority be certain that a ship declaring intra-EU goods has only visited EU ports? This is now possible for the 250 vessels voluntarily participating in the Blue Belt pilot project.

Started as an initiative of the Belgian EU Presidency, endorsed by the Council of Transport Ministers on 2 December 2010ⁱ and welcomed by Vice President Kallas of the Commission, the Blue Belt pilot project enters its operational phase this week. The European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) has prepared the Blue Belt pilot project in cooperation with Member States' customs authorities, the Commission services DG TAXUD and DG MOVE, the European Community of Shipowners' Association (ECSA) and the World Shipping Council (WSC). The project will automatically monitor the participating ships and inform the customs authorities, before arrival, of the actual voyages followed and the last ports visited.

"The Blue Belt pilot project, by sharing existing information on maritime traffic among different user communities, has a clear potential to further improve intra-Community trade by sea", says Willem de Ruyter, Executive Director of the Lisbon-based European Maritime Safety Agency.

The aim of the Blue Belt pilot project is to explore new ways to promote and to facilitate Short Sea Shipping in the European Union by reducing the administrative burden for intra-Community trade. The movements of *Blue Ships* will be monitored via the SafeSeaNet system operated by the European Maritime Safety Agency. Through the Blue Belt pilot project, customs authorities will receive a timely notification report before the arrival of a *Blue Ship* to an EU port. This contains information on the current and previous voyages, including expected or actual arrival and departure times, previous and next ports of call, and other pertinent voyage information. The Blue Belt pilot project will not duplicate or replace existing customs formalities and procedures. If successful, the outcome may be used to review existing procedures. Based on lessons learnt from the pilot project the feasibility and usefulness of establishing a permanent Blue Belt reporting system will be assessed at the beginning of 2012.

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ⁱ Council conclusions on full integration of waterborne transport into the EU transport and logistics chains