

EU commissioner courts Greek owners to push climate change agenda

Union of Greek Shipowners hails EU commissioner for transport Violeta Bulc's 'active and effective' stewardship

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Greek shipowners receive charm offensive from EU commissioner for transport Violeta Bulc as she pushes climate change agenda



DRAWING CLOSER? TRANSPORT COMMISSIONER VIOLETA BULC (LEFT) WITH UNION OF GREEK SHIPOWNERS' PRESIDENT THEODORE VENIAMIS THIS WEEK AT THE UGS OFFICES.

EUROPEAN shipping, and by extension Greek shipowners, should “lead the charge” towards a greener maritime industry, the EU commissioner for transport Violeta Bulc has said after meeting with Greek shipowners’ leaders on the sidelines of the Posidonia 2018 event under way in Athens.

She said that the global shipping industry had sent “a positive signal to the world” with the adoption of the International Maritime Organization’s initial strategy to cut greenhouse gas emissions.

“We want European operators to lead the charge and reap economic benefits from first-mover advantage in this space,” said Ms Bulc.

“To this end, I count on the continuous support of Greek shipowners in ensuring that the sector makes a successful transition to greener and ever-more technologically advanced operations.”

Greek shipping represents almost 50% of total EU fleet capacity and an even greater percentage of the oceangoing oil and dry bulk fleets.

The significance of digitalisation as a driver of the sector’s competitiveness and efficiency was also a focal point for discussions when Ms Bulc visited the Union of Greek Shipowners’ headquarters in Piraeus.

During the visit, the commissioner also met with representatives of Greek shipping’s new generation and she invited young shipowners to use their expertise to join efforts to make EU shipping a leader in technological innovation, according to an official release.

Ms Bulc’s agenda as transport commissioner has often seemed to contrast with the priorities of Greece and other southern European maritime nations that are focused primarily on oceangoing shipowning rather than shortsea shipping and the wider service cluster.

A competition probe into aspects of the industry's tax treatment in Greece has also left relations between Athens and Brussels partially under a cloud.

But insiders talk of “a better understanding” these days and the greeting given to Ms Bulc and the warmth in tone of the UGS statement afterwards were undeniable.

“Commissioner Bulc is a very active and effective commissioner for transport and we are especially grateful for the keen interest she has taken in the European shipping industry during her successful mandate,” said UGS president Theodore Veniamis.

Greece was described as “a stalwart of European shipping” that had a strategic role in serving extra-EU trade as well as being “a true ambassador of the EU's leading maritime position” globally.

“Recognition of its significance is much appreciated,” said Mr Veniamis.

The discussion had been “especially fruitful” and he looked forward to “continuing our constructive co-operation” on the main issues facing the maritime industry.

Mr Veniamis reiterated Greek shipping industry support for the International Maritime Organization's strategy leading to full decarbonisation of global shipping “as soon as possible this century”.

However, the UGS's position is that this “will not be achievable without the development of zero carbon fuels and technologies suitable for the global oceangoing fleet”.

This development “requires the commitment of all parties involved in world seaborne trade”, the UGS said.