

# Greece, Malta and Cyprus aim to present common front on shipping policies

- Thursday 06 October 2016, 17:30
- by [Nigel Lowry](#)

## Flag state trio pledges to fight for competitiveness of European shipping

**A TRIO of major Southern European flag states will make fighting for the competitiveness of European shipping a common cause, shipping ministers of Malta, Greece and Cyprus have said this week on the occasion of a meeting in the Maltese capital.**

It was the fourth tripartite meeting on maritime affairs since the three first agreed in 2014 on regular get-togethers with the goal of forging common positions on industry issues.

"There was a focus on maintaining the competitiveness of our shipping industries as well as a sustainable industry," said Malta's minister for transport and infrastructure Joe Mizzi, commenting on the meeting.

"We are all determined to contribute to further development of the sector," he said.

Speaking at the parallel Malta Maritime Summit, the minister said a maritime agenda would feature "prominently" among the country's priorities when Malta held the rotating presidency of the European Union Council in the first half of 2017.

The ministers discussed a number of hot maritime topics such as environment protection and greenhouse gas emissions, the social dimension of shipping, and pledged to step up co-ordination between themselves not only in the EU but at the International Maritime Organization as well.

The trio occupy the three top spots among EU flag states in terms of size of fleet and, as flags predominantly for oceangoing tonnage, have sometimes felt estranged from Brussels policy makers who focus greatly on internal market competition rules.

"The cornerstone of European success in the maritime sector is maintaining and enhancing its competitiveness, which can only be achieved by having flexible rules, policies and arrangements," Mr Mizzi said.

Creating "a favourable climate for maritime business within the [European] Community" was also a prerequisite for the industry's continued health, he said.

Marios Demetriades, who holds Cyprus' shipping portfolio as the country's minister for communications and works, said the three had agreed to strengthen co-operation and further co-ordinate the line they were taking on maritime issues in the interests of increasing their bargaining power at the various forums.

The upcoming presidency was "a great opportunity for Malta to put shipping again at the forefront of EU policy".

That, said Mr Demetriades, was "something that is not very frequent in the EU, I am afraid. I feel sometimes that shipping is neglected at European level unless it is about environment."

He said the three large flag states "should be listened to more seriously" on certain maritime matters in which they have a large stake. There were sometimes divisions between the views of the southern flag states and northern member countries.

"We intend to co-ordinate our actions so that we have a greater impact not only in the EU, but also at IMO," he said.

Main concerns included the need for "one set of regulations", developed through the IMO, and the importance of proper consultation with the industry prior to development of new legislation.

"We believe we should be careful about any new legislation and we must be really, really careful to not disturb the playing field between the EU and other countries," Mr Demetriades said.

Greece's minister for shipping and islands policy, Thodoros Dritsas, said the three countries were adamant on the primacy of the IMO for rule-making, which was the fit forum for finding solutions to all the current challenges facing the industry.

"We want to keep quality shipping standards high," said Mr Dritsas. "Malta, Cyprus and Greece have nothing to fear in that respect."

He also said he was confident "the Maltese presidency will be a milestone for shipping — and we will help in every possible way".

Others attending the Maltese Maritime Summit also expressed high hopes for Malta's term presiding over the council.

Malta should use its presidency to launch a campaign to achieve 100% ratification of IMO conventions by EU member states, said Peter Hinchliffe, secretary-general of the International Chamber of Shipping.

"I think it would be a fantastic step forward for the industry," he said.

Mr Hinchliffe claimed some European countries had "a very poor track record" on ratification.