

No Strategic Autonomy for Europe without its own Maritime Technology Industry

EU Trade Policy Review:

*A momentum for urgent and tailor-made EU actions in support of the
strategic maritime technology industry*

PRESS RELEASE

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On 18 February, the European Commission adopted its new Trade Policy review. This review sets the course for “*An Open, Sustainable and Assertive Trade Policy*” in the coming years in order to foster an “Open Strategic Autonomy’s model” for Europe.

Transport, defence and security, access to trade and sea, food and energy supplies and many more activities at sea not only depend on complex ships and offshore platforms but also require advanced maritime systems, equipment and technologies. Europe’s maritime manufacturing capabilities are therefore essential to Europe’s (maritime) strategic autonomy as well as to Europe’s ambitions to lead the twin green/digital revolution.

Yet, as highlighted in [SEA Europe’s response to the Trade Policy review consultation](#), ongoing unfair trading practices – worsened after Covid-19 – put the survival of Europe’s maritime technology industry at risk, especially in the absence of a strategic, tailor-made solution to enforce a level playing field in shipbuilding and of trade protection against rampant unfair competition from East Asia.

SEA Europe Secretary General Christophe Tytgat said “*Despite several statements and commitments, the maritime technology sector in Europe, particularly shipbuilding, is still waiting for concrete actions to close a unique legal loophole in trade defence instruments that has prevented shipbuilding for over three decades to protect itself against unfair trading practices. [Already in 1988](#), the then European Commission announced actions against trade distortions from Asian shipyards, admitting that it “could not refuse to allow this (shipbuilding) industry the trade defence weapons available to other industries”. Unfortunately, none of those actions announced have been adopted or ever materialised. As a result, Europe lost its complete merchant shipbuilding and part of its offshore building to Asia, leading to dangerous vulnerabilities and dependencies on Asia. With Covid-19, the remainder of Europe’s strategic shipbuilding sector is at risk – and thereby also its entire supply chain*”.

SEA Europe welcomes the European Commission’s firm commitment to “*develop its tools to protect European companies from unfair trading practices*” and to use “*autonomous tools to pursue EU’s interests where needed*”.

“SEA Europe firmly believes that the new Trade Strategy and the upcoming (new) EU Instrument on Foreign Subsidies offer the right political momentum for the European Commission to fulfil finally its responsibility in closing the unique legal loopholes in trade defence instruments for shipbuilding and therefore looks forward to working closely with the European Commission to adopt the necessary “autonomous” tools that will preserve and foster the European maritime industrial basis. This maritime industrial base is vital to Europe’s strategic autonomy, innovation and sustainable growth”, Christophe Tytgat concluded.

Background Note:

SEA Europe represents close to 100% of the European shipbuilding industry in 16 nations, encompassing the production, maintenance, repair and conversion of all types of ships and floating structures, commercial as well as naval, including the full supply chain with the various producers of maritime systems, equipment material, and services.

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