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ETS for maritime revision: The EU must not miss the opportunity to protect its ports and maritime connectivity

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Ahead of the European Parliament's Environment Committee vote on the maritime EU Emissions Trading System (ETS), FEPORT, representing European private port companies and terminal operators, the European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF), the European Shippers' Council (ESC), CLECAT, representing freight forwarders and logistics providers, the European Community Association of Ship Brokers and Agents (ECASBA), the European Maritime Pilots' Association (EMPA) and the European Tugowners' Association (ETA) call on Parliament and Council to act. **We cannot miss this opportunity to prevent transhipment traffic from shifting outside the EU and to protect fair competition and connectivity across European ports.**

The maritime EU ETS applies directly to shipping companies, but decisions about where ships call affect the entire port community. Ports and terminals, dockworkers, ship agents, freight forwarders and other logistics providers, tug and pilotage services, and road, rail and inland waterway operators all depend on regular calls. For cargo owners and European businesses, greater reliance on transhipment through non-EU ports could mean longer lead times, less reliable services and more complex supply chains.

We welcome the attention EU institutions are giving to the risk of ETS evasion. The amendment adopted on November 23rd by the TRAN Committee which is now before ENVI combines a voyage-distance criterion with fixed ETS reductions for different categories of port call. Shipping lines support the distance-based approach. For EU ports, however, the approach risks undermining the level playing field. Competing ports can serve the same markets and hinterlands, yet the services calling at them could face different ETS costs because of the length of the voyage. This could make longer routes more attractive and raise the relative cost of services connecting the EU with nearby trading partners.

The fixed reductions add a further distortion. Unloading just a few more transhipment containers at a single call could move a vessel into a category with substantially lower ETS costs. That gives shipping lines an incentive to consolidate traffic in fewer ports. Gateway and mixed ports, where transhipment is an important part of a wider business serving EU imports and exports, could lose regular calls. A less diverse port network would weaken maritime connectivity, reduce demand for port and hinterland services and leave shippers and freight forwarders with fewer routing options when disruptions occur.

Parliament and Council should give these risks further consideration as the revision progresses. ETS relief should be proportionate to the actual share of containers unloaded at an EU port for onward shipment to a non-EU port. This would target the cargo most exposed to relocation and avoid sharp changes in ETS costs at fixed cargo thresholds. Co-legislators should also consider applying the same principle to the subsequent outbound leg and covering container ships from 5,000 TEU, since some EU transhipment ports mainly serve vessels below 10,000 TEU. Existing customs information should be used wherever possible to limit additional reporting.

This approach should be accompanied by stronger criteria for identifying neighbouring container transhipment ports under the ETS Directive and by monitoring how the measure affects the distribution of traffic and services across EU ports.

This is the moment to get it right. Parliament and Council should use the remaining stages of the revision to agree a measure that curbs evasion, preserves the environmental integrity of the ETS and protects the port services, jobs and maritime connections that European supply chains depend on.

Signatory organisations

FEPORT — Federation of European Private Port Companies and Terminals
ETF — European Transport Workers' Federation
ESC — European Shippers' Council
CLECAT — European Association for Forwarding, Transport, Logistics and Customs Services
ECASBA — European Community Association of Ship Brokers and Agents
EMPA — European Maritime Pilots' Association
ETA — European Tugowners' Association