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## **Corona crisis: Need to secure 300 million tonnes of ocean-borne supplies for Germany**

### **VDR calls for open ports / concerns about seafarers: Crew changes, on-board supplies**

In view of the challenges posed by the spread of the corona pandemic across the globe, particularly for Germany at present, the German Shipowners' Association (*Verband Deutscher Reeder – VDR*) points out how important it is to have functioning maritime shipping services in place. 90 per cent of merchandise worldwide is transported by sea. Each year, close to 300 million tonnes of goods are imported or exported via German seaports alone. Maritime shipping – alongside trucks and railways – is the key pillar in the supply chain.

VDR President Alfred Hartmann: “The urgency not to allow this sea-based logistics chain to be disrupted will prove to be essential in the coming days and weeks – not only for Germany as an economic location, but for every single person. Each supermarket, every enterprise, but for instance also all hospitals, depend on merchandise transported by ships.”

Being the world's fifth largest maritime shipping nation, Germany makes a key contribution towards ensuring that no major supply bottlenecks occur; at least this has been the case to date. In the present situation, ships as closed units – often out at sea for weeks – are particularly suitable for transportation of goods: “We transport merchandise, not viruses,” said Hartmann. The VDR is not aware of any corona cases on board German merchant vessels to date.

However, the VDR has noted that drastic restrictions are increasingly being imposed on these merchant vessels entering ports. “Now that's a really disastrous development,” warned Hartmann. Hartmann had already made his appeal to keep ports open without fail in order to continue transporting goods by ship on the occasion of the summit meeting of employers and trade unions with Angela Merkel at the Federal Chancellery a few days ago, where it received wide approval. “Open ports must have absolute priority. This must now be taken into account in the course of the measures adopted in Europe and worldwide,” said the President of the Association.



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In this connection, the VDR President thanked the employees of shipping companies, especially the seafarers: “You are our primary concern. The men and women on board, who will find it especially difficult to be far away from their families at this time, are performing an enormously important service right now, for which we should all be very grateful.”

Hartmann reminded those present of the problem of increasingly difficult crew changes: In many ports, the crew members can no longer disembark to travel home, frequently after months of being out at sea. To make matters worse, immigration restrictions are being imposed in other countries, not only in the U.S. most recently. “The seafarers simply continue to work just about everywhere to ensure security of supply. Most crews cannot be replaced for at least one month. That deserves the highest recognition and respect.”

In this connection, President Hartmann called for seafarers to be exempted from travel bans, just like other groups of professions. “Seafarers must be able to embark so that ships can continue to sail.”

The German maritime shipping sector is concerned that vessels and their crews cannot be equipped with the necessary foodstuffs and consumer articles either, or only with increasing difficulties; this also applies to medical products, protective equipment and hygiene articles needed.

#### **About the German Shipowners' Association**

The German Shipowners' Association (*Verband Deutscher Reeder, VDR*) is responsible for representing the common business and social policy interests of German shipping companies at federal and state government level as well as in relation to European and international bodies. The VDR was established in 1907, and in 1994 it merged with the Association of German Coastal Shipowners. With a membership of around 200, the VDR represents the majority of the German merchant fleet. For more information, see <https://www.reederverband.de/en.html>

#### **Press photographs of Alfred Hartmann:**

<https://www.reederverband.de/en/press/press-images.html>

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