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German shipping sector optimistic about future course

2020 balance and outlook / new dynamic in shipping markets despite the pandemic / biggest challenges competitiveness and climate protection / vaccinations for seafarers

Today, the German Shipowners' Association (VDR) released [new figures](#) on the situation of the German shipping sector. President Alfred Hartmann and CEO Ralf Nagel used this occasion to comment on the most important issues the German shipping sector is facing this year: Germany as a shipping location, seafarers in the pandemic, and climate protection.

Almost a year after the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, many German shipping companies, particularly the larger ones, now have an optimistic view of the future. "We have largely put the crisis that has preoccupied us since 2009 behind us and, in many segments, we have surprisingly also navigated through the pandemic unscathed so far," said VDR President Hartmann, although he added that: "At the moment, no one can predict whether this positive trend will continue, especially in the container shipping segment." However, he continued, in today's exceptional global situation, the shipping sector has demonstrated just how vital the role it plays in trade and supply is. "We have kept sailing, and we have delivered in the truest sense of the word," Hartmann said.

The figures show that Germany remains the world's fifth-largest shipping nation, with a 4.5 per cent share of the global merchant fleet (down by 0.4 percentage points year-on-year). At the end of 2020, a total of 2,001 ships with a combined gross tonnage of 48.7 million were registered in German shipping registers, or 139 fewer vessels than the year before. Almost half of the German fleet now flies the flag of an EU country, especially the flags of Portugal, Cyprus and Malta. The number of ships sailing under the German flag has stabilised at 290. Owing to the decrease in the size of the German merchant fleet, the number of seafarers subject to social insurance contributions in Germany has recently seen a slight decline, to 7,558, while the number of sea apprentices newly coming on board remained roughly the same in 2020, at 409, despite the pandemic.

Germany as a shipping hub: A "new normal" after boom and crisis

"Following the years of unusual growth in the early 2000s – especially in the container shipping segment – and the subsequent decline, we now have a new normal: The German fleet is roughly as strong and in large parts even stronger than it was before this boom," CEO Ralf Nagel said. This applies, he continues, to the number of ships in various segments, of apprentices, of seafarers and of shipping companies, as well. "Despite the pandemic, we are seeing a new dynamic in some maritime shipping markets in which German companies are active," he noted, adding that this makes it all the more important to have framework conditions that are reliable and support Germany as one of the most interesting and dynamic shipping hubs in the market.



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Seafarers during the pandemic: VDR calls for seafarers to be given priority access to vaccines

Crew changes continue to present a major problem - and not only for German shipping companies. With crews, as with goods, there needs to be a functioning logistics chain: Entry into and exit from ports must be permitted, there must be flights into and out of the home countries, and entry into one's home country must be possible. "We are confronted with constantly changing regulations regarding tests and quarantines, which makes this task exceedingly more difficult," says VDR President Hartmann. The crew change crisis continues to impact an estimated 400,000 seafarers worldwide.

In addition, it is becoming evident that insufficient consideration has been given to seafarers to date when it comes to the vaccinations currently being administered worldwide. "Many more countries need to give them key-worker status and preferential access to vaccinations," the VDR president said. "We must not get into a situation in which seafarers cannot get on board because they haven't been vaccinated yet." This would only exacerbate the crew change problem, Hartmann warns, adding: "There are looming impacts on the global trade in goods that would have repercussions for us all."

Climate protection: EU emissions trading is the wrong path, IMO should set the course

Regarding climate protection, the VDR repeated its criticism of a regionally limited trading system for greenhouse gas emissions, like the one that the European Union plans to propose this year. "Shipping is the most international of all industries, so it needs international regulations," CEO Nagel says. "We doubt that a regionally limited emissions trading system can achieve what it aims at: reducing CO2 emissions in a lasting way. In any case, this has not succeeded in the aviation sector, which is already regulated in this manner. In fact, the exact opposite has been the case for aviation."

"Germany's shipping sector is determined to actively support a proactive, effective and global regulation," Nagel emphasised. "The appropriate forum for such regulation is the IMO, which has recently proven that it can regulate shipping globally and deliver on its promises with the mandatory switch to fuel oils with a low sulphur content." The industry aims to achieve or, where possible, even exceed the IMO's climate targets, the CEO continued, adding: "The crucial thing is that we need an energy revolution. All the efficiency measures on ships will in the long run not suffice; other marketable and fossil-free fuels are necessary."

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. Founded in 1907, the VDR merged with the Association of German Coastal Shipowners in 1994. With roughly 200 members, the VDR represents the majority of Germany's merchant fleet. For more details, visit <https://www.reederverband.de/en.html>

Press photographs by Alfred Hartmann and Ralf Nagel:

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

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