GREEK MARITIME POLICY-MAKING: EXPLORING THE EFFECTS OF THE EUROPEANISATION?

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ABSTRACT

The paper depicts the situation on maritime affairs on the European level and explores the effects of Europeanization on the Greek maritime policy-making. In doing so it discusses how the process of European integration and the activities of interest groups at a European level have affected Greek maritime interests and policy-makers, the ways that these policy makers act, and the future forms of their activities.

The focus is mainly on the examination of maritime interests’ representation. The increased presence of interest groups in the European integration process through the last years has changed the way that the economic and business interests’ organizations interact with the EU institutions and national governments. Maritime policy making was not an exception of this evolution and has followed this climate of Europeanization. Maritime interest groups have demonstrated in several cases their will to participate in the policy process and shape decisions concerning the maritime industries. Two most recent examples are, firstly, the mobilization of the maritime interest groups against two successive European Commission proposals for a port services directive (that have been both rejected), and, secondly the interest that they have demonstrated to contribute in the consultation process for a future EU Maritime Policy, initiated by the Green Book, that was published in June 2006.

In the context of these latest developments, Greece, a country where the maritime industry is of greatest importance for the national economy, surely needs a new approach of representation in the European level. The Greek administration readdresses the national-centered aspects of policy developments and integrates them in wider supranational policy perspective, while the Greek maritime interest groups need to find a broader representation formation in order to promote their interests. The paper addresses both these issues, emphasizing, among others, the validity of further research in this area.
1. Introduction

The paper depicts the situation on maritime affairs on the European level and explores the effects of Europeanization on the Greek Maritime Policy-making. In doing so it discusses how the process of European integration and the activities of interest groups at a European level have affected Greek maritime interests and policy-makers, the ways that these policy makers act, and the future forms of their activities.

The focus is mainly on the examination of maritime interests’ representation. The increased presence of the interest groups in the European integration process through the last years has changed the way that the economic and business interests’ organizations interact with the EU institutions and national governments. Maritime policy making was not an exception of this evolution and has followed this climate of Europeanization. Maritime interest groups have demonstrated through several cases their will to participate in the policy process about issues concerning the maritime industries. Two most recent examples are; firstly, the mobilization of the maritime interest groups against the two port services directive (that have been both rejected) and secondly the interest that have shown to contribute in the consultation process for a future EU Maritime Policy, initiated by the Green Book, published in June 2006.

Under these latest developments, Greece, a country where the maritime industry is of greatest importance for the national economy, surely needs a new approach towards the modes of representation in the European level. The Greek administration needs to readdress the national-centered aspects of policy developments and integrate them in wider policy perspective, while the Greek maritime interest groups to find a broader representation formation in order to promote their interests. The paper will address both these issues.

The structure of this paper is the following: Section 1 presents the contemporary characteristics of the relationship between interest groups and the EU institutions. This Section examines the interaction between these two groups of actors in two distinct directions. Firstly, it examines the ‘traditional’ relationship between interest groups and the Commission and, secondly, a new, evolving, relationship between interest Groups and the European Parliament. Section 2, focuses on the Europeanization of many aspects of public policy, and more explicitly on the widening scope of the EU policies. The case-study under examination is the European
Maritime Policy. Section 3, addresses the question of a new Greek approach towards the modes of representation in the European level. In the concluding section, the paper, also put forwards questions concerning the nature of the relationship between interest groups and EU institutions, indicating paths for further research.

2. The relationship between EU Institutions and Interest Groups

Since the early ‘90s, an evolution is taken place in the sphere of European public policies. This evolution has given an impulse to the development of a relationship between EU institutions and the formatted at European-level interest groups. This aim of this relationship seems to be the promotion of the European integration, through the mutual understanding of the goals of each one of the aforementioned groups of policy-actors (EU institutions & Interest Groups). A mutual understanding is expected to lead to an enhanced cooperation and coordination of actions, in order to promote European Integration. However, the reality is more complicated. Both EU institutions and Interest groups are rational political actors that seek to push forward their own goals, their own agenda. In this environment, Interest groups searching for the European Institution that will provide them with the so much needed access to the political process and also will have a certain amount of institutional power, so that they can either produce or block policy. On the other hand, EU institutions, desire the cooperation with Interest groups for a number of reasons. This ‘competition’ between the EU institutions, creates institutional tensions. At the moment, European Parliament and Commission are the two main ‘rivals’ that participate in this institutional game. The Council as a legislative body, which is composed from national delegations, it is expected that it will not be a destination for interests that operate and seek to achieve their targets in the European level.

2.1 The Commission and Interest Groups

The European Commission had always been the main target and favoured lobbying point for those aiming to influence the EU decision-making process (at least as far as ‘low’ policy-issues are concerned). This preference of interest groups can be attributed to the two very important characteristics of the Commission (Burns, 2004): firstly, European Commission is the watchdog of the Treaties and secondly is the
agenda setter of the European Union, i.e., the institution that puts the matters that will be discussed from the other EU institutions, the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament. Furthermore, the Commission itself has demonstrated an interest to promote the cooperation with the interest groups, via the organization of open (and, also via not ‘so open’- ??????????) discussions and structured processes in order to receive the opinion and the consultation of the experts of each sector. Illustrative examples in the case of maritime policy are the creation of the Maritime Industries Forum (MIF) in 1992, and more recently (2005) the organisation of public hearing - jointly with the European Parliament - for discussing the potential of market access to port services with the participation of the most important maritime interest groups (such as ESPO, FEPORT, ECSA, ESC, EMPA etc).

The European Commission is a destination for all the interest groups and lobbyists in Brussels, mainly because for its attribute as the agenda setter of the EU. This institution is characterized by a spirit of bureaucracy that prevails within its organization, due to its structure, which is divided into sectors, virtually one for each policy. Another related issue of the Commission’s function is the lack of resources, that hinders the flow of information and the acquisition of the so much needed expertise knowledge. For this reason the Commission develops relationships with interest groups in order to fill in this gap on the information required and acquire the expertise knowledge that is needed in order to produce realistic policies proposals. Interest groups have demonstrated the capacity to take advantage of these needs, gain an access point, and influence the political process (Mazey and Richardson, 2003). It is questionable the degree of influence that interest groups gain with the provision of expert knowledge, as influence cannot be measured, but it is certain that this ‘access good’ (Bouwen, 2003) gives them the opportunity to approach the political process more closely than else.

However, the acquisition of information is not the only reason that the Commission interacts with interest groups. The broader goal is the involvement of interest groups into the process of European integration, so that this process will gain a greater degree of participation. That is why the European Commission encourages the development of interest groups in the European level, the latter are also known as Euro-associations.
From their point of view, interest groups prefer to deal with the bureaucracy of the European Commission for three reasons (Richardson, 2001):

1. The involvement of the public opinion on the elaboration of the issues and the final decisions is deterred.
2. Bureaucrats are dealing with the details of the issues, an aspect of the process that matters a lot for the interest groups.
3. The bureaucratic arena is reliable source for information for the future policies.

Thus, one could reach to the conclusion, that the European Commission is a favourite destination for interest groups, perhaps the most favourite one. Taking into consideration the frequency of contacts between EU institutions and interest groups (maritime), as seen in Table 1, the Commission is the most contacted EU decision-making institution indeed.

### Table 1: Frequency of Contacts with EU institutions (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Daily</th>
<th>twice per week</th>
<th>weekly</th>
<th>monthly</th>
<th>annually/ rarely</th>
<th>never</th>
<th>n.a.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commission</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Parliament</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council Secretariat</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>53</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coreper</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministers</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other EU institutions</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


However, it seems that in recent times the Commission is not the sole point attention. This may occurred for at least two main reasons:

1. The Commission has often the tendency to ‘betray’ the interest groups, especially when this practice promotes further European integration and enhances the competences, institutional power, and status of this institution (Grossman, 2004)
2. The Commission has lost certain competences and legislative power after the changes that brought the Amsterdam Treaty (1997) in the co decision procedure (Burns, 2004).

At the same time, taking advantage of the aforementioned changes in the co decision procedure, the European Parliament, enhances its dynamic and come to participate
more actively than in the past in the game of interaction with interest groups (Pallis and Tsiotsis 2006a).

2.2 The European Parliament and Interest Groups

Since 1979, when the first elections for the European Parliament took place, the role of this particular institution in the EU (then the European Economic Community) has been gradually upgraded. Yet, until the early 1990s, the most powerful institution in the EU, as far as low or sectoral politics are concerned, remained undisputedly the European Commission. Although the European Parliament was the directly elected body of the EU, it did not have important competencies and was mostly playing a consultative role. However, the voices for the democratic deficits of the European Union and the urgent need to cope with this problem, lead to the empowering of the European Parliament with more competencies. The first step was the Maastricht Convention in 1993, which gave more powers to the European Parliament through the co-decision procedure (Burns, 2004). The empowering of the European Parliament completed after the Amsterdam Convention in 1997, in which some alterations of the co-decision procedure (named from then co-decision II) made the Parliament even more powerful. This particular development may shift scholars interest from the relationship between the Commission and the Council of Ministers, to the new bipolar Council – European Parliament (Nugent, 2000).

While it can be said that the Commission’s legislative role as well as institutional power is in a slight decline, on the other hand, it is clear that the power of the European Parliament follows an increasing rhythm. The co-decision gave more competencies to the European Parliament, which came even more powerful after the Amsterdam Treaty and the introduction of the co-decision II.

It seems that progressively the European Parliament is looking to expand its powers through either formal channels and treaty revisions or development of informal relationships with other organizations. This has been mainly achieved via an incrementalist and opportunist approach that is based on using whatever opportunities present them to increase its powers through small steps (Nugent and Buonanno, 2002). On the formal field, the chances that the European Parliament took advantage to promote its interests were detailed described above. In the informal field the
European Parliament is trying to expand its competencies with the development of special relationship with interest groups, especially of social and ecological character (Kohler-Koch, 1997). This special relationship was an initiative of the Commission (Mahoney, 2004), which the European Parliament endorsed at a later stage.

The European Parliament has transformed to a genuine co-legislature (Neuhold, 2001) as is already considered as an equal co-legislator with the Council (Garrett and Tsebelis, 1999). Under co-decision II, the European Parliament can veto unconditionally the proposals of the Council, without the need of support of either the Commission or one member of the Council (Garrett and Tsebelis, 1999).

Interest groups have noticed this change regarding the legislative powers of the European Parliament and has adjusted their interests advocacy in order to exploit the tendency of the European Parliament to develop a closer relationship with them, either for collecting the so much needed information or as an effort to broaden its base as well as the sensation over the European people. The structure of the European Parliament provokes deficiencies in the information flow. The European Parliament is particularly interested in the public opinion’s point of view in matters and the action of the institution in pan European as well as national, local level. Interest groups are once again, as with the Commission, ready to provide their two types of access goods (Bouwen, 2003): the information about the European encompassing interest, and the information about the domestic encompassing interest respectively.

At the same time, as the European Parliament is not an institution that acts through bureaucratic channels as the Commission, instead pays great attention on the public opinion, interest groups are starting to alter their strategies. They are not using pure access strategies but instead are showing a turn to strategies with more public character, also known as voice strategies (Beyers, 2004). The European Parliament not only participates active alongside with the Commission in the policy-making process as a lobbying-point but it also changes the way that interests representation is taking place and the method of approach from the interest groups. The Parliament has always shown a favour in those interest groups with public or environmental character and not particular in business interests groups, which is the majority of interest groups (Greenwood, 2003). In an attempt to alter this tendency of this institution, business interest groups are now following more public appealing strategies, alongside with their ‘traditional’ ones of access.
The EU maritime policy developments provide some illustrative examples. The most recent examples of the new ways of interest groups mobilisation has been observed in the discussions of two successive proposals for a Port Services Directive, especially the second one. Maritime interest groups publicized their opinion on the proposal and explain detailed their positions on each aspect of the proposal for a Directive. The European Parliament took advantage of this mobilization, in order to strengthen the relationships between itself and maritime interest groups, developing a relationship that was ultimately took the form of a Public Hearing jointly organised with the Commission, on June 2005. Maritime interest groups were against the adoption and implementation of a Port Service Directive, despite their different positions on certain provisions of the proposal (see Table 2). They expressed publicly that disagreement and in some cases (public demonstrations of dockworkers) very drastically. The result was the rejection of the proposal twice by the European Parliament. The very interesting element of these two rejections was that the enhanced public reaction of interest groups (including dockworkers) led to an enhanced majority of MEPs against the second Port Services Directive, compared to the first one.

**Table 2:**

**Summary of Maritime Interest Groups stance in the policy-making process**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ESPO</th>
<th>FEPORT</th>
<th>ECSA</th>
<th>ESC</th>
<th>ETF</th>
<th>EMPA</th>
<th>CLECAT</th>
<th>ETA</th>
<th>EBA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mandatory nature of authorizations for port services provision</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>n.e</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>n.e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitation of service providers</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>CC</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.e.</td>
<td>n.e</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>n.e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum Durations of authorisations</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>n.e</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>n.e</td>
<td>n.e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection procedure</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.o.e</td>
<td>n.e</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>n.e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-handling</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.e</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>n.e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation of existing providers</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>CC</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>n.e</td>
<td>n.e</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>n.e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional periods</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>CC</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>n.e</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>n.e</td>
<td>n.e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberalisation of Pilotage services</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

+ +: strongly positive; +: positive; - : negative; --: strongly negative; CC: support of the Conciliation Committee text; n.e.: No opinion Expressed; n.a.: non available

**Source:** Pallis and Tsiotsis (2006a)
It is quite intriguing to question if interest groups may - and for what reasons - prefer lobbying the European Parliament rather than the Commission. It could be argued that the proved blocking ability of the European Parliament and the time of intervention in the latter stages of the policy-making process gives Euro-level interest groups time to react properly (especially as their membership expands and internal governability is more difficult than before), stands as a good reason. Others could argue that apart from the European Parliament as an EU institution, interest groups can also approach the MEPs who as rational political actors (Faas, 2002) want to be re-elect and so they need information about their constituency; this the domestic encompassing interest (Bouwen, 2003). So interest groups have two targets: the European Parliament as an institution, and the MEPs as individuals. All these questions are matters in the sphere of European Political Science, worthy of further research.

3. Widening the scope of European Policies – The case of the EU Maritime Policy

The history of the Maritime Policy in the EU can be divided into five chronological periods (cf. Pallis, 2002). Each one of these periods has each own characteristics and through them it is clearly depicted the spectrum of different approaches of the EU towards the matter, from the exception of maritime transport form the Common Transport Policy during the first period to the holistic approach that the recent (2006) Green Paper promotes.

The first period initiated simultaneously with the attempt for a European Economic Community in 1957 and lasted until 1973. As mentioned above, during that period maritime transport has been excluded from the Common Transport Policy basis, so virtually no development take place for the Maritime Policy.

The second period covers a decade from 1974 to 1985. These ten years were in fact the preamble for a more active and drastic approach towards the issues that preoccupied the European shipping industry. It is in fact the first period that Shipping Policy is a part of the Common Transport Policy. Even though not major policy developments took place, the inclusion of maritime transport in the Common Transport Policy was by itself a great development.

The third period lasted only four years from 1986 to 1990. This short time span was full of action and legislative attempts by the EU, in an effort to regulate the shipping
industry. In 1986, the Commission put forward a proposal of four regulations regarding shipping. The four regulations were related with matters of cabotage, competition, antidumping tax and market access to third countries. This first package has not lived up to the expectations and did not fulfil the goals that the Commission had set (i.e. to halt the flagging-out of shipping). In this climate the Commission attempted, in 1989, to introduce a second package of measures regarding maritime transport, this time even more detailed. The measure that this second packaged proposed was:

1. A Common European Registry (Euros)
2. Port State Control and Maritime Environmental Policy
3. Common definition of the European ship owner
4. Cabotage
5. State aid

From the aforementioned measures, three were those that face the most difficulties. Cabotage was lifted several years after and with every state being a separate case. Greece was the last member state that has lifted the restrictions of cabotage, preserving its own protective regime for almost 15 years. The front of shipowners on the issue of cabotage was divided, between the protective South EU member-states and the liberal North.

On the matter of state aid, there was a united front of shipowners and employees. This united front gained the support of the national ministries (of transport and in the case of Greece of the Ministry of Mercantile Marine) and demanded even more state aid either as subsidies or as tax reductions. On the other hand, the ministries of economy which had to deal with fiscal problems and were focused on the restriction of public spending in an effort to reduce the deficits and the debts and fulfil the criteria of the EMU, were against any form of state aid.

The most important issue of this package of measures was the proposal for a European Registry of Shipping, also known as Euros. The criteria regarding the number of seafarers on each ship that would register under Euros divided shipowners and seafarers. This particular measure had as a target the reduction of unemployment among European seafarers. Shipowners were against this measure, stating that it would hamper the competitiveness of the ships flying European flags, while seafarers favoured the proposal. The second package of measures regarding the European
shipping industry can be characterized as a partial success or as partial failure, depending on the importance that one might attribute to a certain measure. Major factor that caused difficulties to both packages and the overall attempt of regulation of the shipping industry was the capital mobility that characterizes the shipping industry, (Aspinwall, 1995).

The fourth period started in 1990 and ended in 1996. During these six years the matters and the scope of the EU maritime policy expanded. Perhaps the most interesting developments of this period took place in 1996. In this year, two formal texts of the European Commission attempted the reassessment of Common policies regarding shipping (Theodoropoulos, Lekakou, Pallis, 2006). The strategic priorities of the European Union, for the development of policies regarding maritime transport policies, were based on three axes:

1. Ensuring legitimate competition under the international rules and regulations
2. Ensuring high levels of maritime safety
3. Enhancing the competitiveness of the European shipping industry.

Taking into consideration these three axes, in the fifth and most recent period the EU has worked towards a more integrated European Maritime Policy approach. In March 2004, the European Commission initiated a dialogue for the formation of a Green Paper for the EU Future Maritime Policy. Through this initiative the Commission aimed to a holistic approach of the European policies for shipping and the mean to achieve that was the use of the public consultation.

3.1 The 2006 Green Paper

A wide public consultation has started in June 2006 to end a year after. The spirit of this Green Paper is the transition of the sectoral approach of issues regarding shipping and those regarding the environment into a holistic approach. Among the most important aspect that the Green Paper incorporates into the EU Future Maritime Policy is the changes in maritime governance. The section in the Green Paper’s text that is dedicated to maritime governance is dealing with some very important issues for the member– states, especially the maritime ones. The issues that have caused more reactions from the maritime member-states and the maritime interest groups include:
• the integrated and holistic approach of the all the policies of the European Union concerning maritime transport, the reintroduction of the idea of a European registry,

• the Common European Space, an issue closely related with the matter of a European Coastguard,

• the direct participation of the EU in the IMO and the ratification of national conventions.

The Green Paper proposals on maritime governance deal with several other matters but the reference of these matters is closely linked with the spirit of an holistic EU maritime approach. The striking effect of these proposals is that, despite the maritime member states and interest groups statements in favour of the idea of an integrated European maritime policy, several of them have already opposed to ideas and thoughts that the Commission’s publication has put forward towards that direction.

For instance, a rather ‘united maritime front’, which includes maritime member-states as well as several maritime interest groups, is against the idea of Common European Space and a European registry, and, foremost (?) the participation of European Union in the International Maritime Organization (IMO). The Common European Space has faced the scepticism of several maritime industries as well some member states. Concerns have been expressed about the restrictions that could implement on the unrestrictive flow of the maritime transport. In the same spirit, the participation of the EU in the IMO, is thought to be a measure that would hinder the proper function of the IMO, while member states may loose the benefits of their individual participation.

Yet, despite the reactions and the objections on certain aspects of the Green Paper, the majority of the involved parties is in favour of the spirit of the proposed holistic approach, in the sense that this approach would enhance the effectiveness of the way that the European policies regarding maritime industries take place, and would also boost the competitiveness of the European shipping industry, with what this entails for the revenues of shipowners, the employment of the European seafarers and the national economies, especially in the case of the maritime member states.

The European Maritime Policy has come a long way from the exclusion of the first period to the holistic approach of the present period where the degree of involvement of the European Union has changed dramatically. This shift of interest and the
different stance of the EU institutions regarding Maritime Policy has already caused an alteration of national policies and approaches especially by the EU maritime member states, among the prominent of them is Greece. The era of exclusion or partial and fragmentary involvement on the sphere of European Maritime Policy has passed and all those member states that have used to deal with the problems on European level with the use of national channels of influence reassess their strategies. Alongside, the powerful national maritime interest groups have mobilized on European level as a mean to promote and protect their interests. The changes that this process has initiated in the Greek case, or will initiate in the future, and the challenges that Europeanization is posing in the Greek maritime policy-making will be discussed in the rest of this paper.

4. The new challenges for Greek Maritime Policy

Through time the reactions of successive Greek governments, as well as those of the Greek interest groups related with shipping industry, were either negative (the case of the two policy proposals packages during 1986-1989), or simply passive (the two cases of the two successive Port Services Directives in 2001 and 2006 respectively). It is noteworthy that although the Greek Government was in favour of the proposed changes in the European port system (market opening), arguing that they would boost the development of Greek ports, the Ministries of Transport as well as of Mercantile Marine, didn’t mobilize to openly support the Commission’s initiative which at that point was receiving severe criticism from other member states and several maritime interest groups.

Greek shipowners contribution to the process of the integration of European shipping and maritime transport policy has been rather limited, taking into consideration that they own almost half of the European merchant fleet (43%). In the past, the attempts of the EU were rather limited and restricted only to issues related with market regulation or employment and safety. Within this restrictive spirit of dealing with maritime transport issues, the power of the Greek and in general of the European shipowners, sourced from their unlimited capital mobility potential (Aspinwall, 1995), seemed enough to prevent any developments that were conceived as ‘negative’ by one the most important sectors of the Greek economy. Furthermore, on practical matters such as the regulation of the market, or the effectiveness of a potential European registry, the experience of shipowners on the behavioural characteristics of the
shipping market, provided the necessary arguments against any measures that would hamper the profitable status quo.

However, there are signs of change of the stance of the Greek maritime interest groups towards the prospect of the Europeanization of the maritime policy making. Since the establishment of IMO, the Greek shipowners due to the fleet size had a seat in the Council of this rule making organization as one of its members. Apart this global character of Greek shipping industry, recently it seems, that Greek shipowners are more prone to show a more active stance in the European front as well as in the international one (cf. Pallis, 2007). The year of 2007 Greeks are in the head positions of the four top industry associations, namely BIMCO, INTERTANKO, INTERCARGO, ICS AND ISF. Before that, in the 1990s they had assumed the presidency of ECSA, and have been active in its special Committees. As regards the European level, the publication of the Green Paper on the EU Future Maritime Policy, has been a very crucial development for the future of the sector and an opportunity for the Greek Shipping industry, to achieve a twofold target: protect the primacy of Greece as maritime leading nation, and guide the industry worldwide and in the European level, to solutions that will ensure effectiveness and enhance the competitiveness of the maritime transport.

The desire of the EU to promote further integration in all sectors of the European public policies and the holistic approach of the 2006 Green Paper for EU Future Maritime Policy implies the need for a new ‘Greek’ approach as well. The reaction and the first position paper that the Greek Government has produced for the Green Paper (Ministry of Mercantile Marine, 2006) was in fact rather sceptical. In several points the contribution of the Greek Ministry of Mercantile Marine, made the same remarks with the position papers of ship owner’s interest groups such as ECSA and ICS-ISF. Additionally, the UGS (Union of Greek Shipowners) in the preamble of its position paper (UGS, 2006) states clearly that: “Being an active member of ECSA and ICS the UGS wishes in the first place to associate itself with the initial comments on this issue already submitted to the Commission by the two organizations”. After that statement the rather brief contribution (3 pages only) of the UGS should not come as a surprise. One very logical argument here will be that as a member of ECSA and ICS, the UGS is showing a more Europeanized approach of interests advocacy. In fact UGS is one of the most powerful members of ECSA. It has an input on the positions
of this maritime interest group, it actually shapes them in a great degree. This is development related to the increased mobilization of the total of Greek maritime interest groups in every action and initiative of the EU regarding maritime transport. should be high and their positions bear more weight against other member states, that don’t have the same degree of involvement in the maritime transport, because the maritime sector doesn’t bear the same importance for other nations of EU. However, only one Greek maritime interest group contributes on the debate. Of course the participation in the Euro-associations is very useful for the Greek stakeholders. Yet there is the the problem that in many European level maritime interest groups, such as ECSA, certain stakeholders of the industry (owners of passenger or small cargo vessels) are not included (Corres, 2007). In that way, various problems that may occupy these stakeholders, like the problem of coastal transport in Greece, may remain outside of the matters under discussion.

Finally, as regards the Greek Ministry of Mercantile Marine’s position paper, the importance that was given to passenger transport in islands was rather limited. Coastal transport and connection between continental Greece and its island is a very ‘hot’ matter that bothers the societies of the islanders and has a high priority in their list of problems. On the preamble of the position paper it is stated that Greece is a coastal state with almost 10,000 habited and inhabited islands. The connection between the continental part of the country and the Greek islands is a lasting problem, that affects not only the Greek society as a whole and the country’s islands’ societies in particular, but it is also a serious barrier on the proper function of the Greek tourist industry, a main source of income for Greek islands. The Greek Ministry of Mercantile Marine although is a conversant of the subject has chose to deal rather epidermic with the matter and dedicated only half a page intervention on it.

Greece is showing, only ‘indications’ of Europeanization, not ‘hard proof’, but at least it seems that the stance that it is shaping the recently years is in the right direction. The actors that participate in that process are of two main categories. Firstly, the Greek national administration, which is participating through its Ministries, of Mercantile Marine and that of Foreign Affairs. The Greek administration’s main goal is to protect the national maritime sector from developments that may hamper its function and economic effectiveness. That may partially explain why the positions of the Ministry of Mercantile Marine are almost identical to those of maritime interest
groups such as ECSA, ICS and ISF, in which the active Greek participation is evident. Additionally, the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs prepared its own contribution and also proceeded to the creation of a website where stakeholders can express their point of view regarding the Green Paper for a Future EU Maritime Policy. Though the Greek Administration despite its slow reflexes and the close relationship with Greek maritime interests, and what problems that may cause, is demonstrating signs that it is willing to participate in the consultation process of the Green Paper.

The second category that is actively shaping a more Europeanized direction in its interests representation is the Greek maritime interest groups. With Greek national in top positions of European interest groups, Greek ship owners have the opportunity to make a decisive input in the most important initiative of the EU regarding maritime transport, the Green Paper. This decisive input it is apparent, when comparing the position papers of European maritime interest groups with the contribution of the MMM. However, Greek ship owners have also to deal with their own internal problems (i.e., limited participation of the owners of passenger or small cargo vessels, see above). The participation of the whole of Greek maritime sector would ensure a better representation and that all problems and issues would be addressed.

The aforementioned remarks create certain questions regarding the observed process of Europeanization. These are firstly, questions regarding the exact nature of this ‘special’ relationship between Greek maritime interests and how this may affect the industry both at national and at European level (taking into consideration that Greece is the leading maritime nation in EU). Then there are questions regarding the degree that Greek shipowners can shape the positions of European maritime interest groups (taking into consideration the top positions that they hold) and what responsibilities, and rights, does that situations results in. Greek interests, given the position of the country as the leading maritime nation in EU, will certainly attempt to exploit their position in order to protect the value of the national maritime sector. At the same time they might assume the leading role, promoting the interests of the European maritime sector, towards policies that would enhance its effectiveness and ensure its competitiveness.
5. Conclusions

The process of European integration has brought the evolution of the EU institutions into actors that not only shaping the policies of several sectors across the EU but also seeking the participation of the stakeholders of each sector in order the adopted policy produce the best results. In this favourable climate for interests’ representation in European level, interest groups have evolved. Their main goal was of course to protect and promote their interests in an environment of constant interference of the EU in areas that once were part of the national sphere. To achieve in their mission, interest groups developed relationships with EU institutions.

The European Parliament and the European Commission are the most ‘favoured destinations’ of the interest groups. Interest groups interact with these two EU institutions, so that they can gain access to the political process, by providing them their access goods (Bouwen, 2003). From their side, both the European Parliament and Commission interact with interest groups not only for the aforementioned access goods but also to promote further the concept of the European integration. At this point a lot of questions can be put regarding the relationship between EU institutions and interest groups, but two seem to be the most intriguing: firstly, which is the most favorite destination of the interest groups and secondly, EU institutions only concern when interacting with interest groups is the European Integration, or their own institutional enhancement, even through informal channels? All these questions are matters in the sphere of European studies and political science, worthy of further research.

Regarding Maritime industries, without doubt the ad hoc earlier EU interventions have expanded into an all-embracing Maritime Policy. Under the spectrum of these changes the mobilisation of the maritime interest groups was rather high. Maritime interest groups are actively participating in the consultation that has been launched by the Green Paper on EU Future Maritime Policy on June 2006.

Greece the maritime leading nation of the EU (and of the world) has not participated very active in the whole process. Furthermore, Greek maritime interest groups contribution has been very limited and has been identical with the positions of the large European or international interest groups (ECSA, ICS-ISF). Greece, as an administration, as well as a sector, slowly started to change its attitude towards the
European political processes and understand that the participation in them it is for its own benefit as a maritime country. By doing so the benefits would be twofold: firstly, the interests of the Greek shipping industry will be better advocated and secondly, Greece as a maritime and coastal state with many islands, could inform the EU institutions, on the actual problems sourced from its idiosyncrasy and demand supranational policies that would contribute to their solution. Finally, apart from the aforementioned goals, Greece as the leading maritime nation of world has not only rights but also the obligation to lead the maritime sector in a very critical period through safe paths that would avoid the dramatic crises of the past.

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