

EUROPEAN FUNDS AND HIGH TECHNOLOGY TO BOOST THE NAVAL SECTOR

Eva Novoa
FUNDACIÓN CENTRO TECNOLÓGICO SOERMAR,
GENERAL DIRECTOR

The European Commission's approval of the Next Generation EU Recovery and Resilience Fund is a unique opportunity for the European business sector that will undoubtedly also benefit the maritime sector if they are used efficiently and support initiatives that reach the entire value chain of the sector and the largest possible number of companies. The maritime sector is worth some €112.5 billion in the EU as a whole, which represents 23.3 % of the world total, led by Asian countries such as Korea, China, Japan and the USA. I have no doubts that the aforementioned aid can enable this industry to raise its position in this ranking, since Europe is a world leader in terms of added value both in high-tech ships and in onboard equipment and systems, highlighting the sector's firm commitment to the development of technology to develop prototypes and improve processes.

And, of course, it is necessary that the administrations defend and support the efforts of the Spanish maritime sector to reinforce the great potential it has as a reference in new ship prototypes, which must continue to rely on technology to move forward. So far this century, Spanish shipyards have carried out highly innovative projects with high technological capabilities applied to fishing, oceanographic, patrol, transport, offshore wind or tourist vessels, among others. Innovations that have also been implemented in repair and conversion, activities that

are of great importance for many of our shipyards and for the entire shipbuilding industry. We have also managed to make our prototype ships sustainable.

But we cannot stand still. To keep moving forward, Spain must capitalize on its current strong position in shipbuilding and ship repair in the high-tech segments and use the next 5 years to consolidate its position in Europe, while establishing a firm, united and coordinated position with the rest of the European countries to face strong international competition.

Because the maritime technology industry in Europe cannot remain static and comfortable in its current market niches, it must evolve. It needs to take actions. The next decade is likely to determine whether European shipbuilding can survive and grow or must undergo a new conversion.

There are many challenges it must take on, especially in the environmental area -with the use of new fuels-, digitalization and the application of smart technologies (such as artificial intelligence, big data, blockchain, machine learning, robotization, 3D printing or virtual and augmented reality), maritime safety and the exploitation of marine resources. And, of course, the development and study of the design of new and innovative prototypes. It is also necessary to train in new technologies both the new generations joining the sector and those already working in it in order to generate quality and stable employment, which will mean benefits for the whole society.



As I said before, this is a unique moment. Europe has approved the largest stimulus package in its history -€806.9 billion - , of which Spain is one of the most benefited countries to implement structural reforms. It is essential to use them in an effective and sensible way. The Spanish sector needs this aid to plan projects, to finance them -since among its peculiarities is the fact that it develops non-serialized products, each ship is unique- and to climb positions in the international ranking.

At this moment, the role of the Administrations must be transparent and close to the different agents and interlocutors of the sector, in order to have full knowledge of the needs of each link of the maritime value chain. It is time to join efforts and propose projects

to support and sustain with security the technological leap that society demands to maritime transport, and in this field the shipbuilding sector, the shipyards and the industry can contribute by developing an industrial activity that brings wealth to the areas where it is developed, that is a productive activity integrated with the environment in both urban and environmental areas, developing new types of ships with zero environmental footprint, implementing advanced technologies that lead us to have shipyards with efficient and sustainable processes, etc.

For all this, it is necessary to have programs that subsidize these actions, and that the administrative procedures are in accordance with the needs and peculiarities of the sector.

It is also important to know how these funds are being applied in our neighboring countries. In a study published last April by the CEOE (Spanish Confederation of Business Organizations), it is mentioned that in Italy the milestones linked to 2021 in the scope of the required reforms have been met in time and form and during the coming months most of the objectives will be to make investments. Portugal stands out for the detail and updating of data on the actual execution of funds, as well as for the progress in major projects. France stands out for strengthening the competitiveness of companies and reindustrialization, highlighting two measures for industries: the delivery of aid to relocate or develop activities in around 10,500 companies with an investment of more than €14 billion and the lowering of taxes on

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production, estimated at around 10 billion euros in 2021, which favored the growth of industrial companies.

Finally, we should mention the large number of tax incentives that have been implemented in the different national plans of countries such as Portugal, Denmark, France, Italy, Sweden, Greece and Austria. For example, we could mention some of them: tax measures to benefit the use of public transport, tax incentives that could improve the substitution of non-renewable natural resources by other biological resources, temporary increase of the tax deduction in companies that invest in technology, tax incentives to boost digital transformation or to implement major reforms in strategic industrial sectors.

As you can see, there are a lot of possibilities and we have a shipbuilding industry that is a strategic sector that requires large investments to carry out major structural reforms, which must face a stage of technological and training challenges. For this reason, we need to take advantage of this moment, launching projects and reforms that consolidate our competitiveness and our industry, and, for this, we need support instruments that take into account all the actors in the value chain of the sector (in the sector's value chain), are accessible and respond to the demand and type of companies that exist. It is the time to join efforts and promote sector projects that bring together the needs of all, shipyards, auxiliary industry, shipowners... ●

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