



The History of OCEAN

50 Years of European Ship Supply Excellence

ESTABLISHED 1976



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FOREWORD BY THE OCEAN CHAIRMAN

It is both an honour and a privilege, as Chairman of OCEAN, to introduce this book celebrating fifty years of our Association.

This anniversary represents much more than a milestone.

It is the story of generations of entrepreneurs and professionals who, through their commitment, experience, and vision, have helped build a strong European marine supply community.

It was precisely to celebrate this important anniversary that we decided to create this book: not only as a record of fifty years of OCEAN, but above all as an opportunity to preserve and share its history through the voices of those who helped shape it.

OCEAN's history is part of Europe's history.

The personal testimonies included in these pages bring to life the key moments, challenges, and achievements of our Association.

They pay tribute to the people whose dedication has made OCEAN what it is today.

They are also a powerful account of fifty years of European integration and tell the story of how nations and people became united in diversity.

This book allows you to explore how the European Union came to be, told through the lens of European ship suppliers.

Since its establishment, OCEAN has brought together National Associations from across Europe, providing them with a common platform and a strong, coordinated voice towards European institutions and other relevant authorities.

This role has been particularly important in addressing the regulatory and administrative issues that have historically characterised our sector.

Customs, Veterinary, and Taxation matters are among the clearest examples.

Marine supply is an international and highly time-sensitive activity that operates across borders and jurisdictions, often under conditions that conventional regulations do not fully address.

Over the decades, OCEAN has therefore played a strategic role in protecting the interests of its National Associations and their member companies by promoting a better understanding of the specific nature of marine supply and advocating for clear, proportionate, and workable rules.

One of OCEAN's greatest strengths has always been its ability to transform different national concerns into shared European positions. What can be difficult to achieve individually becomes stronger when addressed collectively. This principle has been at the heart of our work.

The Association has been around for fifty years and remains just as relevant today.

As an Italian serving as Chair of a European association, I particularly value the ability to bring together different national traditions, experiences, and perspectives around common objectives.

Europe's diversity becomes a strength when we turn it into cooperation and a united voice.

Looking ahead, our sector faces new challenges arising

from digitalisation, sustainability, increasingly complex regulation, and a rapidly changing international environment.

Our responsibility is therefore both to preserve the experience accumulated over the past fifty years and to prepare OCEAN for the future: defending the interests of European marine suppliers, strengthening cooperation among our National Associations, and ensuring that our sector continues to be effectively represented wherever decisions affecting its future are made.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the former Chairs, Board members, National Associations, companies, and individuals who have contributed to OCEAN's history, and in particular to those who have shared their memories and experiences in this book.

Vive l'Europe! Long Live Europe! Evviva OCEAN!



Costantino Zavoiani
Chair, OCEAN

European Ship Suppliers Organization

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CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS EUROPEAN SHIP SUPPLY? - BY MICHEL VAN HULLE

Executive Summary

Authored from the perspective of Michel Van Hulle (OCEAN Chair from 2003 to 2007 and former Chairman of the Koninklijke Belgische Beroepsvereniging der Scheepsbevoorraders / K.B.B.S. Belgium), this opening chapter introduces the vital, yet often unseen, world of European ship supply.

Blending personal history from the bustling docks of 1970s Antwerp with high-level European advocacy, Van Hulle outlines the evolution of the profession, its core operational principles, and the foundational role of the European Ship Suppliers Organization (OCEAN).

What is European Ship Supply?

Never heard of ship supply?
I understand.

I agree, it is easy not to know about us. In a way, we like it that way.
For centuries, my profession had been the quiet backbone of maritime life.
To understand the heartbeat of our industry, one must first step back in time.

To a time when I was working as the proud owner of my own ship supply company in Antwerp. Imagine the bustling Belgian port of 1970s Antwerpen: Cranes groaned, and steam whistled as a thousand ships vied for space along the Scheldt, turning the river into a chaotic, mesmerising theatre of global trade.

Beneath that frantic surface, we, the Belgian ship suppliers, moved like a silent, ghost-like master of choreography, delivering the vital necessities that kept the world's fleet humming. At the same time, the rest of the port remained blissfully unaware of the precision required to keep the gears of commerce turning.

It was a time when the maritime world was beginning to transform, yet the role of the ship supplier, the Chandler, remained as old as the sea itself.

And a ship was a floating city; the Chandler was the provider that kept its lights on and its crew fed. In those early days, businesses were typically small or medium-sized, deeply rooted in their local ports – so was I.

When researching for this commemorative book, I found a document in our archives from 1977 that caught my eye: It described the ship Chandler as *“a specialist with a truly unique calling providing essential services to a vast array of vessels, from the massive freight ships and passenger liners to the smaller fishing fleets, pilot boats, and rescue craft”*.

And before we move on, I know that you may be confused now, as I suddenly talk about a **ship Chandler**. Don't worry, in the modern maritime industry, the terms ship Chandler and ship supplier are essentially synonymous; they describe the same profession. The difference is largely a matter of history and linguistic evolution rather than function.

For those interested in the history of the profession:

The Ship Chandler: This is the traditional, historically rooted term. Etymologically, it traces back to the Old French chandelier (meaning a maker or seller of candles). As ships once relied on wax and tallow for light, the Chandler was the merchant who provided these essential consumables. Over centuries, the definition expanded to cover all the victuals, ropes, and hardware required for a ship to function. Today, “Chandler” carries a sense of heritage and the specialised, “go-to” nature of the trade.

The Ship Supplier: This is our modern, descriptive term. As the industry moved from the era of sailing ships to complex, high-tech maritime logistics, “ship supplier” became the preferred professional title. It explicitly defines the role as an economic operator responsible for managing the supply chain of thousands of technical and non-technical items. It emphasises the business-to-business relationship with shipping companies and the logistical sophistication required to operate in global ports.

So, while you will still hear the term “Chandler” used with a sense of respect for the long tradition of the craft, “ship supplier” is the standard, professional language used in trade associations like OCEAN and in interactions with European Commission officials.

Years later, during my time as OCEAN Chairman, I had the pleasure of listening to a wise EU Commissioner from Malta, Dr Joe Borg, Member of the European Commission responsible for Fisheries and Maritime Affairs (2004–2009), who offered another definition which I really liked. He said:

Ship suppliers play an essential role in maintaining maritime trade and shipping, enabling the whole system to work smoothly. Without them, the complex world of maritime logistics could not work, as they enable ships, of all sizes and characteristics, with very different schedules and requirements, to be ready for non-stop operation in all our ports. As a result, ship suppliers today represent a growing sector which has contributed to the creation of added value and jobs in our port

To me, as global supply chains face increasing pressures and stricter regulatory demands, this essential function is more critical than ever to keeping modern ports resilient and responsive.

Characteristics of European Ship Supply

I also get asked, often, to describe the realities of modern ship supply, and I would summarise them as such:

Time is money

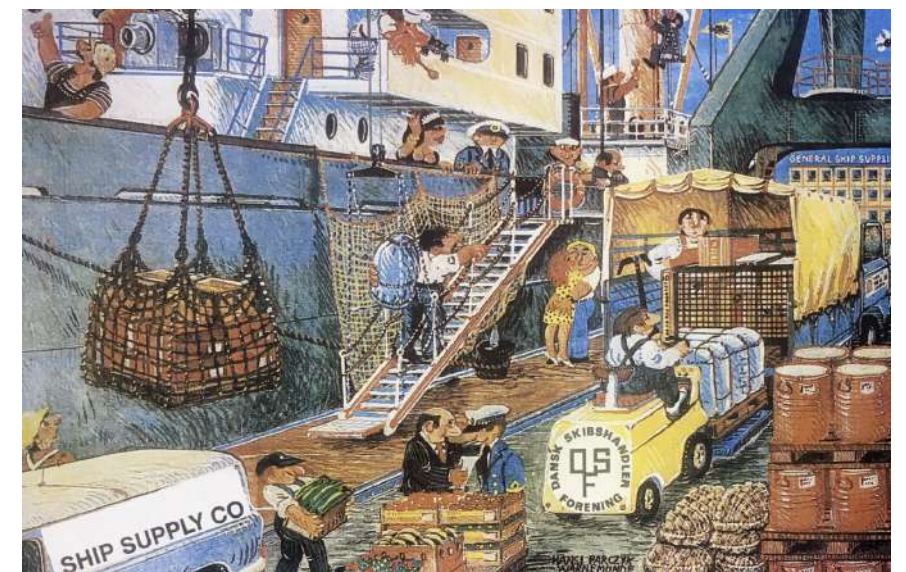
Modern maritime logistics operates at a relentless pace, and the ticking clock has always defined the reality of our work.

Whether it was a passenger ship mooring for a few hours or a cargo vessel needing a rapid turnaround, every minute of idleness meant heavy financial losses for the shipowner.

I look back on my time as Chair and observe the work of my colleagues today; the mission remains a race against time. We operate 24/7, 365 days a year because efficiency is not merely an operational goal; it is a fundamental necessity.



The London Museum Docklands Sailortown, a full-scale, immersive recreation of a 19th-century Victorian Wapping riverside street, includes a Chandler shop



The Danish Ship Suppliers Association's drawing of European Ship Supply

Yet, this around-the-clock commitment often clashes with administrative rigidities. I have seen countless times how shuttered customs offices over the weekend create unsustainable bottlenecks, forcing vessels to wait until Monday morning at a staggering cost.

It is my sincere hope that through the reform of the EU Customs Code and the integration of AI, we can finally shift toward a virtual customs office that mirrors our own 24/7 reality.

This "just-in-time" philosophy is the heart of our business, as we navigate a complex web of transport modes across borders to meet the narrowest of loading windows. We operate in a high-stakes sector, and time is money for every item we deliver and every vessel we help clear for departure.

The Ship Supplier: The Ultimate Generalist Specialist

A staggering breadth of inventory defines our work as ship suppliers. A vessel is a floating city, and the captain expects us to be the one point of contact for everything that city requires to function. Whether it is a specific technical spare for the engine room or a familiar brand of coffee to keep the crew's spirits high, we are the ones who make it happen. We manage a vast, eclectic assortment of goods, and our ability to source these items on short notice is exactly what sets us apart.

So, our warehouses are not typical inventory spaces. We must, at any time, manage thousands of distinct items - from everyday provisions like fresh produce, frozen meats, and dairy, to technical necessities like anchors, cylinder liners, and speciality machinery parts:

Provisions: We handle everything from fresh, perishable foodstuffs to luxury goods. Some of these come from our bonded warehouses; others come from the local market. All are managed with the precision required for small, mixed consignments.

Beverages and Tobacco: These goods are subject to strict excise controls. Managing the documentation for spirits, wines, beers, and tobacco is a core part of our professional responsibility, ensuring full compliance while maintaining efficiency.

Personal and Cabin Supplies: From toiletries for the crew to textiles, carpets, and curtains for the cabins, we ensure the vessel feels like a home away from home.

Technical and Electro-technical Stores: This is where our expertise is most critical. Whether it is complex navigational equipment, electro-technical products, or heavy-duty deck and engine spares, we must know exactly what a vessel needs to remain seaworthy. A mistake here is not just an error; it is a safety risk.

Maintenance and Operations: Our warehouses are stocked with the tools of the trade - paints, varnishes, chemicals, heavy ropes, and cables. We also supply the cleaning products needed to maintain the vessel's standards, as well as the critical, non-negotiable safety and lifesaving equipment.

Nautical Supplies: Even in the digital age, we provide the essential nautical charts, books, and software that guide a ship safely to its next port of call. We even supply the flags that mark a ship's identity on the high seas.

Taking care of all these supplies is no simple task. It requires a deep, technical understanding of what keeps a ship moving. Each product type requires unique handling, temperature control, and documentation.

We must maintain an intricate network of manufacturers and depots to ensure that even the most unusual or rare parts can be sourced and delivered with minimal notice.

We are the ultimate generalists and specialists in the same person, expected to handle everything from the mundane to the highly specialised, always under the pressure of the clock.

It is this versatility that makes the modern ship supplier a vital, yet often unseen, partner in the global maritime machine.

EU Customs Law makes or breaks EU ship supply

Efficient customs clearance is vital for supplying goods onboard international commercial vessels heading to international waters.

Without authorisation from customs authorities, the vessel cannot be supplied.

However, even today, despite all the technological advances, current regulations often struggle to account for our unique environment.

When a supplier delivers goods to a vessel, those goods are destined for consumption or use on the high seas. They do not enter the domestic market.

It is for this reason that I have always believed that, for regulatory purposes, a vessel bound for international waters should be treated as a third-country destination.

Because ship supplies have the vessel itself as their final destination, ship supplies are closely associated with exports.

At the same time, ship supply goods are consumed onboard the vessel when at sea; otherwise, we would call these goods cargo!

This also means that traditional ship supply goods are usually not “imported” into a country in the traditional sense – they would only be removed from a vessel if needed for repair or for temporary or longer-term storage, often under duty-free or bonded conditions.

Recognising this reality would streamline clearance procedures and provide the practical, harmonised framework our sector needs to remain competitive.

Ship supply = Teamwork

As a Belgian who has spent a lifetime navigating these docks, I can tell you that “storing the ship” is a collective effort, a true team sport that demands seamless cooperation between us, the shipowners, ship management companies, buyers, logistics providers, seaport operators, the captain, and the crew.

Beyond the vessel itself, this intricate dance relies just as heavily on customs, VAT, excise, veterinary, and port authorities, among many others.

Unity is strength - and nowhere is this truer than at the berth. In a sector where our supply windows are measured in mere hours, flexibility is not just an advantage; it is a necessity.

We require administrative systems, whether digital or traditional, that are as adaptable as the realities of the quay.

Whether I am orchestrating a delivery by truck, a small boat, or even a helicopter to reach a vessel in time, the regulations must account for the physical constraints of our large port areas and the uncompromising nature of these tight schedules. We are not asking for a free pass, only for a framework that respects the practical, high-speed reality of our daily work.

Bedrock of EU ship supplies: Duty Free

Providing goods on a duty-free basis forms the absolute foundation of our ability to compete on the world stage. I say this because our market is truly global, yet we are burdened by a weight of complex tax and customs administration that creates distortions our peers elsewhere simply never face.

Take the case of a ship supplier here in Antwerp competing for a contract against a provider in a non-EU port; the playing field must be level. If costs force us to inflate our prices because of local taxes that our global rivals avoid, the shipowner will inevitably choose to source their stores elsewhere.

In our world, the ability to provide goods on a tax- and duty-free basis is not a luxury - it is the bedrock of our international competitiveness. Because we operate in a truly global market, every port is a potential point of supply. If a vessel is deciding where to restock, the cost of goods and the efficiency of local services are the deciding factors.

Freedom from excessive taxation is the only way to prevent market distortions between different ports and, by extension, different nations.

We cannot allow administrative costs to outweigh the value of our service. If the tax burden in one Member State is higher than in another, or if the compliance process is too heavy, we lose that vital competitive edge.

We are not asking for special treatment; we are asking for a level playing field. Whether we are dealing with VAT or the varied national excise rules, we need regulations that acknowledge the unique, international nature of ship supply.

Our objective is to ensure that customs and fiscal legislation are framed with a clear understanding of the global competition we face every single day.

If we fail to harmonise these rules, we do not just hurt the ship supplier; we make the entire European maritime network less attractive to the global fleet. We must ensure that our rules act as a bridge to trade, not a barrier.

Ending the red-tape nightmare

We are currently locked in a race against global peers, where the pressure to deliver top-tier quality at competitive prices has never been more intense.

While I was so very proud to represent European interests as former Chairman of OCEAN, we still often find ourselves contending with trade barriers and bureaucratic hurdles that simply do not exist for our competitors elsewhere.

To stay ahead, we must resist the creep of excessive red tape at all costs.

An increase in administrative weight is not merely a nuisance; it is a direct catalyst for failure. If the burden becomes too heavy, shipowners will inevitably divert their custom to non-EU ports, and the business will surely follow them.

As a Belgian, I appreciate the need for structure, but not at the expense of our agility.

As I did as OCEAN Chairman, I do so today: I urge all Member States to prioritise trade facilitation with urgency.

Our goal is to ensure that European ports remain the most efficient, reliable, and accessible gateways for the global merchant fleet. We must keep our industry, our jobs, and our added value firmly anchored in Europe, for if we do not act to simplify our processes, the tides of trade will simply flow elsewhere.

What is OCEAN?

Since the 1970s, our profession has been defined by a patchwork of national associations, each bravely fighting its own battles against local customs and administrative barriers.

It was a fragmented landscape, yet one fuelled by a fierce, shared dedication to our trade. We were masters of the berth, but we were working in isolation. It became clear that if we were to survive the coming decades, we could no longer stand alone.

The turning point arrived in 1976.

A group of visionaries gathered in a room at Schiphol, and at that moment, the seeds of OCEAN were sown. The Koninklijke Belgische Beroepsvereniging der Scheepsbevoorraders, or Royal Belgian Shippers Association, was one of the founding members.

Remembering Roger van Uffel

I wish to pay tribute to the late great [Roger van Uffel](#), a founding Vice-Chair of OCEAN. Under his leadership, OCEAN soon stopped being mere local players and began its systematic engagement with the European project. He, together with our founders, also set the compass for the next fifty years with principles that still guide us today: *Mare liberum*¹, the firm belief that goods consumed on international voyages must be free of duty; a relentless drive for harmonisation across every Member State; and a commitment to building genuine, expert partnerships with EU institutions. With him in the driving seat, we moved from a collection of voices into a single, professional body. I want to thank him for all he has done for OCEAN in the early years.

During my time, we established a permanent presence in Brussels through a successful two-decade cooperation with a European association. I am immensely proud of what we have achieved since then, ensuring that the reality of the ship supply industry was heard in the halls where policy is written.

Later, you will read from fellow former Chairman, Dirk Cupido.

It was he who once remarked years later, during our 40th anniversary in 2016, that over the years, *"the challenges have only grown more intricate. We have weathered decades of evolution, from the earliest legislative drafts to the modern demands of digital transformation, sustainability, and the shifting landscape of a post-Brexit world. We have proven that our unity is our strength. We are no longer just advocates; we are the bridge between the technical, high-speed reality of the ship's berth and the legislative corridors of European power. Our story is one of unwavering commitment to ensuring that European ship supply is not just a participant, but a leader in global maritime trade."*

I couldn't agree more.

I hope you enjoyed this opening chapter of our chronicle.

And with this, I pass you to my good friend and colleague, former OCEAN Chair, long-standing OCEAN Treasurer, and former ISSA president, Jens Olsen, a testament to five decades of technical expertise, grit, and the enduring belief that our work is the heartbeat of the Union.

We have come a long way from those local customs disputes, and today, we stand ready to lead the future.

¹ Published in Latin in 1609, *Mare Liberum* (The Free Sea) is a foundational international law text by Dutch jurist and philosopher Hugo Grotius. Within its pages, Grotius introduced the concept that oceans are international territory, granting every nation the unrestricted right to use them for maritime trade.

CHAPTER 2: THE BIRTH OF O.C.E.A.N (1970 - 1980) - BY JENS OLSEN

Executive Summary

If you've ever wondered how a scattered bunch of local ship suppliers transformed into the authoritative voice at the heart of the European project, this chapter chronicles their "training ground" years in the 1970s.

Drawing on decades of perspective as an OCEAN Board member for over 30 years, former Chair (1997–2003), and long-standing Treasurer—as well as his tenure as ISSA President (2009–2013) representing the Dansk Skibsleverandør Forening (Danish Ship Supply Organisation)—Jens Olsen explores how the industry stepped out of the shadows of the warehouse to ensure the heartbeat of maritime trade kept pumping.

They realised that customs, taxation, and trade policy could not be written in a vacuum in Brussels, so they mobilised to ensure that the rules governing their livelihood were shaped by the people who understood the docks best—ultimately turning a bureaucratic threat into a permanent seat at the table.

This chapter is the story of how they learned that if you don't speak for yourself in Brussels, someone else will rewrite the rules of your trade without you, proving that it takes the grit of those on the front lines to ensure the European supply chain wins.

Let's dive in.

Introduction

When I look back at the 1970s, I see the ground floor of the house we now inhabit. It was a decade of great ambition but also a time when we were far too scattered.

Back then, ship suppliers were mostly small, local businesses.

We were focused on our own docks, our own customers, and the specific rules of our own countries. We had our own national monopolies to navigate, and the lingering tensions of a divided Europe often held us back.

To get a real sense of what ship supply was like, take a moment to picture a narrow street in La Spezia, Italy, back in 1963. Thank you, Alfredo Toasto, for sharing it with me.

Parked on the cobblestones is a sturdy, well-worn utility truck bearing the name Fratelli Pedrotti Forniture Navali. Leaning against the vehicle with relaxed confidence are four men whose daily work kept the port alive.

That canvas-covered truck was our mobile lifeline.



*Decades of leadership
within OCEAN and ISSA: Jens Olsen*

It carried everything a vessel needed after a long ocean voyage, from fresh provisions to vital engine spares, hauled straight from local warehouses to the quayside.

Back then, ship supply was a deeply personal affair.

There were no global digital networks or automated logistics chains. Success depended entirely on strong handshakes, local knowledge, and the sheer physical effort of tight-knit teams who knew every corner of the harbour.

You had to be fast, reliable, and present.

That local spirit built the foundation of our entire industry.

But even then, ship suppliers in the 70s understood that the future could not be managed from a single port.

They saw that if we wanted to compete, they had to stop acting like strangers.

They started to meet, to talk, and to dream up a way to speak with one voice.

It was a quiet start, but those first declarations were the sparks that eventually caught fire.

In the 70s, the European Communities (EC), as it was known then, had nine members, and eight of them were maritime nations with deep connections to the sea.

The ships arriving at these ports needed food, fuel, and parts, and thousands of independent, medium-sized businesses served them. The rising power of Brussels made it clear: the interests of ship supply had to be represented at the European level.

That was the birth of our mission.

O.C.E.A.N stopped being just an idea and became the official face of national associations at the heart of the European project in 1976.

Looking back from where I stand today, I see that decade as our essential training ground.

We moved from protecting our own patches of land to building a bridge that connected the hard reality of the ship's berth to the desks of lawmakers in Brussels.

We were no longer just local merchants; we were becoming a professional body with a seat at the table.

That shift changed everything, and it is why we are still here today. And this, this is the beginning of our story.



The Pedrotti brothers stand proudly beside their delivery van in La Spezia in 1963, capturing the hands-on, relationship-driven reality of ship supply long before the era of modern digital logistics.

Regulatory Developments in Europe in the 70s

Today, the European Union is often criticised for being too slow or too bureaucratic, and believe me, we in the ship supply industry have had our fair share of disagreements with the way policy is shaped in Brussels.

Yet, for all its imperfections, I remain convinced that the EU is one of the most remarkable achievements of our time. It has brought us peace and a level of prosperity that once seemed impossible. It has turned borders that were once barriers into gateways for us to live, work, study, and grow together.

Today, we operate with a level of freedom and wealth that is only possible because our nations chose to pool their resources, laws, and ambitions into one common body.

To truly understand why I speak so passionately about this project, you must look back to the seventies.

In those days, the dream of a unified Europe was still just that - a dream. For those of us working the docks, the reality was a collection of walls. There was no single market; for a ship supplier, every border was a gamble.

You would prepare a delivery, confident in your paperwork, only to have a customs officer in a neighbouring country reject it because their interpretation of a duty-free rule differed from the one you used at home. It was a constant, frustrating maze of inconsistent documentation and administrative delays that cost our clients dearly.

The 1970s served as the true crucible for the EC. This was a period of rapid institutional evolution, coinciding with the presidency of François-Xavier Ortoli at the European Commission:

It was a turbulent, formative decade that saw the bloc shift from a post-war economic experiment toward a serious, integrated political force. For me, looking back, it was the era when we in the maritime sector experienced our own bureaucratic awakening.

Some highlights from a ship supply perspective:

In 1973, the first major enlargement, bringing Denmark, Ireland, and the United Kingdom into the fold, shifted the Community's economic focus and forced us to think on a much larger scale.

By 1974, the creation of the European Council provided the political steering needed to weather global oil crises and economic shocks.

As the decade progressed, we witnessed the institutions grow in both power and reach.

The 1979 direct elections to the European Parliament were a watershed moment, turning a consultative body into a democratic voice with legislative weight.

Simultaneously, the launch of the European Monetary System that same year began to bring order to the chaos of exchange rates, laying the foundations for the stability we rely on today.

And for us, in particular, the EEC Customs Union, which had just been formed in 1968, evolved from a post-war tariff agreement into a sophisticated regulatory machine, forcing our industry to transition from fragmented national compliance to a unified, professional voice capable of shaping the very rules that govern the flow of maritime trade.

While these milestones made headlines, we were busy grappling with the nitty-gritty of the 1975 draft law on ship supplies. I will discuss this later, but for now, let me say: It was a messy time.

The Community was building a massive regulatory framework, trying to harmonise technical standards and dismantle the hidden trade barriers that kept goods locked in national silos.

We watched closely as the EC transformed from an agreement on coal and steel into a powerful regulatory architect.

I remember the realisation dawning on us: if we wanted to move goods across borders without being trapped by a dozen competing sets of rules, we had to stop watching from the sidelines.

We had to get inside the legislative machinery in Brussels.

That era proved that the dream of a common market was not just for the politicians; it required the grit and expertise of those of us on the quay to make it work.

We became the bridge between the quay and the law.

We are the ones who ensure that the people writing the rules in Brussels understand that a ship in port does not wait for paperwork.

We are the stewards of *mare liberum*, ensuring that the heartbeat of our maritime trade keeps pumping.

We were no longer just observers of history; we were helping to write it.

European Policy Issues Addressed by O.C.E.A.N in the 70s

Draft law to regulate the supply of ships, aeroplanes, and trains in international traffic

The first official draft for a regulation on ship supplies arrived on our desks in February 1976, following initial whispers and talks that began in July 1975.

The draft regulation tried to establish a unified European Community customs procedure for managing and taxing supplies, such as food, fuel, and maintenance items, on international ships, aircraft, and trains.

The Working Document of the first draft of a Council Regulation for the supply of stores for international ships, aircraft and trains from 12 May 1976.

It outlined clear rules for how incoming transport would have to declare, store, or consume existing goods, while detailing that outgoing journeys would be legally treated as exports.

C.5
Commission of the European Communities
Administration of the Customs Union

I.S.S.A. Secretariat
- 3 AUG 1976
2 HAMBURG 1, Raboisen 101

Crucially, it contained a simple premise: anything consumed beyond territorial waters should be free from taxes and import or export duties.

On its face, the intentions were sound: The EC wanted to harmonise customs procedures, define exactly what qualified as "ship stores" or "bunkers," and create a framework for delivering goods under duty suspension.

Have a quick look at just two images of this historic document, which is so vital for our story:

Brussels, 12 May 1976
Working document
For official use only

First draft
of a Council Regulation
on the customs procedure for the supply
of stores for international ships,
aircraft and trains

This early text proposed was the E.E.C. Commission's first attempt to define ship supply in Article 1. See picture beside.

Yet, the law also carried a frustrating flaw.

It proposed treating ships from European Economic Community member countries differently than vessels flying flags from the rest of the world, placing heavier tax burdens on our own regional fleets.

That did not sit well with us. And the reality on the ground told a different story.

The draft also hit a wall of national resistance, as local customs offices clung to their own enforcement habits. Most critically, it suffered from a fatal flaw: the people drafting the rules had never spent a day on the docks.

I felt, let's be honest, that the EC representatives had no genuine understanding of our ship's supply trade.

We had to make our opinion heard.

The Consultative Committee for Custom Problems, a diverse group representing trade unions, industry, consumers, and trade experts, met on April 22, 1976, to pick apart that first draft. The committee listened to our concerns.

We argued for fairness. We pushed for a system that made sense. Our persistence paid off.

The European officials listened. In March 1977, a new revision of this draft for an EC regulation emerged, which was more acceptable to ship suppliers than the first and second drafts.

Eventually, the EC, however, made the bold choice to scrap the flawed draft entirely.

So, why was this regulation so important for O.C.E.A.N.?

It was the spark.

In the words of the O.C.E.A.N Chair: "It is obviously of the greatest importance that ship suppliers should have a say in drafting regulations that concern their livelihood, particularly in view of the fact that theirs is a trade little known to those not immediately concerned with it."

CHAPTER I
GENERAL
Article 1

1. This Regulation shall lay down the customs procedure for the supply of stores for international ships, aircraft and trains.
2. For the purposes of this Regulation:
 - a. "stores" shall mean catering supplies, fuels and lubricants and sundry stores;
 - "catering supplies" shall mean any goods intended solely for consumption on board by crew members and passengers;
 - "fuels and lubricants" shall mean the products intended for feeding the propulsion units and operating other machinery and plant on board;
 - "sundry stores" shall mean products intended for the maintenance or repair of the means of transport as well as for the preservation, treatment or preparation on board of the goods carried.
 - b. ships: vessels used in sea transport falling within the headings 89.01 and 89.02 of the Common Customs Tariff;
 - c. vessels: vessels used in river transport falling within the headings 89.01 and 89.02 of the Common Customs Tariff;

The first attempt by the future European Union to define ship supply in the draft law on ship supply

Our founding fathers recognised that if we allowed our livelihood to be governed by outsiders who viewed our business as a mere administrative footnote, we would be stifled by bureaucratic red tape.

They saw the high stakes clearly - without a seat at the table, the regulatory environment would remain a fragmented maze of conflicting interpretations, making just-in-time delivery an impossible dream.

That draft law was not just a piece of legislation; it was the immediate catalyst for our collective action. It forced them to recognise that they had to organise themselves as a specialised, authoritative body to ensure the rules were written by those who actually understood the rhythm of the port.

That was the moment they stepped out of the shadows of the warehouse and into the light of the legislative process, forming the committee that would soon become O.C.E.A.N.

Butterfahrten

If the 1975 draft law was the catalyst for our existence, the famous "Butterfahrten" debate of 1976 was the first true test of our mettle.

"Butterfahrten" were duty-free shopping trips where travellers, notably from Western Germany, could purchase goods aboard ships sailing past territorial waters.

When the EC suddenly banned duty-free butter deliveries to passengers in late 1976, it triggered an unintended ripple effect. Supplies shifted toward transit routes from non-EC countries, prompting authorities to try to ban transit butter altogether.

For those who do not remember the era, these were peculiar excursions where West German citizens would sail just beyond territorial waters to purchase five kilograms of tax-free butter. It was a niche consumer phenomenon, but by December 1976, it had become a lightning rod for regulators in Brussels.

The E.E.C, eager to close what it saw as a tax loophole, moved to halt these sales. The problem was the blunt instrument they chose. The authorities threatened to ban all transit-related duty-free deliveries, failing to distinguish between a passenger buying a bargain and a professional ship supplier provisioning a vessel for a voyage.

The danger was immediate and twofold:

First, it was a classic case of regulatory overreach. A blanket ban on transit-based tax-free goods would have decimated the legal protections we rely on to keep ships stocked efficiently.

Second, it created an existential operational confusion. By lumping professional ship supply in with these butter excursions, regulators risked treating the essential victualling of a vessel as a mere retail activity.

We knew we had to act, and quickly.

We rolled up our sleeves.

O.C.E.A.N opened direct channels of communication with Brussels, explaining that cutting off transit traffic would inflict heavy damage on international commerce.

We stepped into the fray to argue for a targeted, sensible approach. Our message to the regulators was clear: provisioning a ship is a technical service, not a storefront operation.

We had to educate them on the nuance of our work, forcing the Commission to recognise that a ship in port is a working platform, not a shopping mall.

Our arguments struck a chord.

The European authorities listened, withdrew their harsh proposals, and set up a balanced compromise limiting passengers on seagoing ships to modest, reasonable allowances: one kilogram of butter, one of cheese, and one of meat products, alongside a couple of litres of wine or other agricultural goods.

Of course, we pushed back for a sensible two-kilogram butter limit without unnecessary red tape. Though the Council of Agricultural Ministers postponed their final votes through the spring of 1977, those intense negotiations taught us a vital truth.

Every customs detail, agricultural decree, and tax debate ultimately boils down to one core mission: defending fair competition for ship suppliers everywhere, whether inside or outside the European Union.

Moreover, we had successfully defended the core integrity of our industry against a policy that, left unchecked, had the potential to cripple our trade operations far beyond the butter markets.

It proved that O.C.E.A.N was not just a seat at the table - it was a shield for the professional standards we hold dear. We showed the Commission that they could not draft policy in a vacuum; they needed our eyes on the quay, and our voice in their corridors.

Organisational Developments in O.C.E.A.N in the 70s

As a Dane, I can say that our story began in Copenhagen, where the first informal meetings for what would later become the International Shipsuppliers & Services Association (ISSA) took place.

ISSA became our global family, a platform for us to share knowledge and stand together. For O.C.E.A.N, ISSA is the global compass, while we are the European engine, ensuring the complex rules reflect the practical, urgent needs of our fleet.

The true hero of those early days was Mr Olaf Boldreel, our first O.C.E.A.N Chair.

I still picture him standing on a bustling Copenhagen dock, staring at crates trapped not by the sea, but by a tangle of contradictory national regulations.

He saw the truth clearly: We were trying to run a modern, international business while chained to the habits of a bygone era. He grew tired of shouting at deaf ears in the corridors of power. He knew we needed a navigator, not just an observer.

He took that frustration and turned it into the foundation of O.C.E.A.N.

If you want to understand how we moved from a collection of frustrated dockside businesses to a respected partner in Brussels, you must look at that Tuesday, 29 June 1976.

That morning, representatives from seven national ship supply associations (Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands) gathered at Schiphol.

We arrived as separate voices, but we left as one. This was the moment O.C.E.A.N was born, forged in the heat of a shared necessity to address the EC's looming regulations.

Our mission was simple, if ambitious. We had to act as a reality check for the policymakers in Brussels.

When the EC released its initial draft regarding customs procedures for ships, planes, and international trains, it was clear that the theorists behind the text had never stood on a wet quay at four in the morning.

Their work was elegant on paper, but it clashed violently with the port's gritty pace.

C.2
Minutes of the meeting of a committee of members from Common-Market Countries of the Board of the ISSA.

Tuesday, the 29th June 1976 at Schiphol(Amsterdam).

====
Present: O.Boldreel, president Denmark
S.Fronk The Netherlands
P.Isidore France
L.Larson Denmark
R.A.Murrant Great Britain
R.van Uffel Belgium
P.Zanotti Italy
Dr.J.Buter, secretary The Netherlands

- ====
- I The president, Mr.Boldreel, opens the meeting at 11.00 a.m.
 - II This Committee is established by the ISSA-Board to study a draft from the E.E.C.for the regulation of the supply of ships, aero-planes and trains in the international traffic. This draft was made to be discussed by business circles, which are interested in this matter.

On account of the report of Mr.Vranken and the discussion in this Committee, the E.E.C.-officials stated at the end of the meeting that the draft for ship supplying etc.should be replaced by another draft. In this new draft the officials would start from the following principles:
 - no differences between ships under E.E.C.-flags and ships under flags of third countries;
 - no differences between different categories of ships with an exception for private - not commercial - ships;
 - a review of the proposed rations for ships during their stay in harbours.
 - IV The discussion in this ISSA-Committee leads to the conclusion that it is urgent to institute a special association inside the ISSA of ship suppliers in the Common Market. The E.E.C.has only official contacts with associations for E.E.C.-countries.

Members of this association should be the ship suppliers from E.E.C.-countries and their associations which are members of ISSA.

Excerpt of minutes of the meeting from 29 June 1976 of a committee of members from Common Market Countries of the Board of ISSA – the first meeting on record from a future O.C.E.A.N.

I remember when we received that first 1976 revision. The minutes of our first meeting recalled our discussions. See picture beside.

We sat down and tore it apart, line by line.

We did not just complain about the flaws.

We rolled up our sleeves and drafted the specific, operational fixes needed to make the law functional.

It became a rhythm of constant back-and-forth communication.

We kept pushing, revising, and explaining the mechanics of moving goods from a warehouse shelf to a vessel's hold until the language started to make sense.

Looking back, our most vital takeaway was simple yet profound: trade regulations cannot exist in a vacuum.

By injecting our hard-won experience into the legislative process, we secured our greatest victory.

Every change we recommended was designed to clear the path for efficiency, ensuring that the final framework acted as a bridge rather than a barrier.

We proved that when lawmakers listen to the people on the front lines, the entire European supply chain wins.

At the helm of this initial effort, as I said, was my late, great friend and colleague, Olaf Boldreel, whose influence shaped the organisation for 13 years as O.C.E.A.N Chairman.

His tenure provided the stability necessary to navigate the early, often turbulent years of establishing a seat at the European table.

He is the author of the first ever “O.C.E.A.N Explainer” document of 13 June 1977 called “What is an O.C.E.A.N ship chandler’s job going to be like in 1978?” – see below.

He did not work in isolation.

The organisational structure was reinforced by the early contributions of figures like Roger van Uffel from Belgium and Georges Garguilo of France, who eventually succeeded Boldreel as the second Chairman.

This core group acted as a strategic board, bridging the interests of seven national member associations from across the EC member states:

Belgium: Belgische Beroepsvereniging der Scheepsbevoorraders / Union Professionnelle Belge des Approvisionneurs de Navires

Denmark: Dansk Skibshandlerforening

France: Syndicat National des Approvisionneurs de Navires

Germany: Verband Deutscher Schiffsausrüster e.V.

Italy: Associazione Nazionale Provveditori Appaltatori Navali

Netherlands: Nederlandse Vereniging van Scheepsleveranciers

United Kingdom: British Association of Ship Suppliers (BASS).

They were not there to complain; they were there to build.

That meeting was the foundation of O.C.E.A.N, and our primary mission was to act as a technical reality check for the European lawmakers who were drafting the future of our trade.

We understood that if we did not speak for ourselves, no one else would.

When the EC released its initial draft regarding customs procedures for ships, aircraft, and trains, it was clear that the theory on the page had no heartbeat.

It was a sterile, bureaucratic document that ignored the chaotic, high-pressure reality of the port. We took that text and broke it down line by line.

We did not just critique; we provided the operational blueprints to make the regulation functional. We were no longer just observers of history; we were helping to write it.

This led to the pivotal moment on 18 October 1976, when Dr J. Buter sent the official letter to the European Commission that served as our “birth certificate”.

It was a clear declaration of intent; we were the Organisation de la Communauté Européenne des Avitailleurs de Navires.

Note the word Avitailleur. It was a calculated choice.

In French maritime law (back then, French and German were the go-to languages in the EC, not English as it is today), this is not just a merchant; it is a specialised technical expert responsible for the total victualling of a vessel.

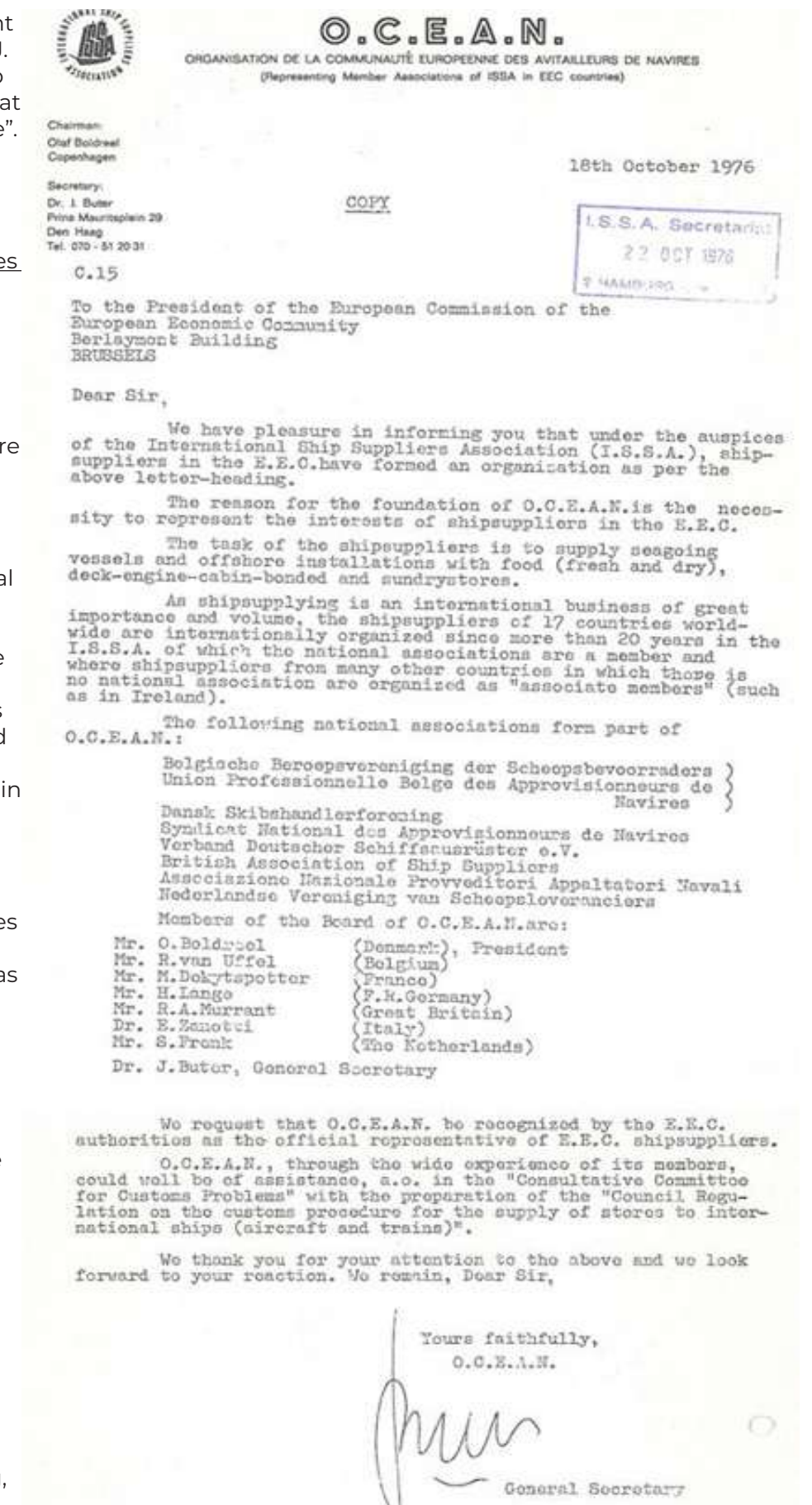
By adopting a French title, we signalled to the Commission that we were credible, serious professionals who understood the nuances of international trade law better than anyone in their quiet offices.

It was also very clever, as Organisation de la Communauté Européenne des Avitailleurs de Navires would spell O.C.E.A.N. – the name was born. The impact was immediate.

By March 1977, a second revision of the draft law appeared, and for the first time, we saw our united voice at work.

The regulators were finally aligning the legal framework with the actual mechanics of moving stores from dock to vessel.

Most importantly, we successfully pushed for a strict boundary between professional ship provisioning, our trade, and the messy, passenger-focused duty-free retail world.



First ever letter by O.C.E.A.N to E.E.C authorities on 18 October 1976

This protection was essential; it kept our operational needs from being caught in the crossfire of retail policy debates.

As we navigated these shifting legislative waters, we coalesced around a central, guiding pillar: mare liberum. We held firm to the stance that supplies intended for seagoing vessels must remain duty-free to ensure the health of our maritime sector.

This was not just a lobby point; it was our philosophy.

We turned the end of that first draft legislation in the late seventies into a hard-won victory. We realised then that effective trade policy cannot be written in a vacuum. It requires the grit and the hands-on expertise of those of us on the quay.

We were a coalition of visionaries, anchored by the long-standing leadership of our first Chairman, Olaf Boldreel, and supported by tireless advocates like Roger van Uffel and Georges Garguilo.

Together, we transformed the scattered voices of national associations into a singular, cohesive force.

We bridged the interests of our foundational states and turned a bureaucratic threat into the backbone of our future advocacy.

We had proven our value as the essential technical partner to the European authorities, ensuring that the regulations governing our livelihood were, at long last, shaped by the people who understood the docks best.

Highlight of the Decade

The momentum generated by the June 1976 gathering at Schiphol, which I mentioned earlier, demanded a formal, structural transition.

By autumn, the organisational groundwork was complete, and on 18 October 1976, Dr J. Buter, acting as General Secretary, dispatched the correspondence that would serve as the official birth certificate of O.C.E.A.N.

Addressed to the President of the European Commission at the Berlaymont Building in Brussels, this letter was more than a mere administrative update; it was a clear declaration of intent.

It notified the European authorities that, under the auspices of the International Shipsuppliers Association (ISSA), the ship suppliers of the European Economic Community had formally established a dedicated representative body. This document stands as the definitive starting point of O.C.E.A.N., marking the first day of what would become a half-century of unified European advocacy.

In the letter, the organisation articulated its core mandate with professional clarity:

"The reason for the foundation of O.C.E.A.N. is the necessity to represent the interests of ship suppliers in the E.E.C. The task of the ship suppliers is to supply seagoing vessels and offshore installations with food (fresh and dry), deck, engine, cabin, bonded, and sundry stores."

The document also rooted O.C.E.A.N.'s legitimacy in its global heritage.

It emphasised that ship supply was an international business of significant volume, noting that suppliers across 17 countries had already been organised within ISSA for over two decades. This connection provided the new European body with immediate credibility and a wealth of global best practices.

The historic letter formally introduced the seven founding national associations that would anchor the organisation's work. With this official request for recognition, the industry successfully transitioned from fragmented national entities into a singular, cohesive voice, ready to engage with the architects of European policy.

However, this letter did more than start an association.

It required European authorities to realise that maritime logistics is a unique trade operating across borders, tides, and strict time limits.

Ordinary land rules simply do not fit a vessel waiting at dock for fresh provisions.

That first message opened a door.

It also demonstrated a vital truth: *you cannot craft effective trade regulations in isolation from reality*.

Over the years, we learned that lesson again and again.

Customs, veterinary rules, and taxation are complex hurdles, but dealing with them together gave us strength.

What is heavy for one national association becomes lighter when shared across Europe.

As a former Chair, I value how our diverse traditions blend into a single, clear voice. Europe is strongest when our differences turn into unity.

Today, our sector faces new currents of digitalisation and green sustainability. We stand ready to protect our members and guide European maritime supply into the future.

Legacy of the Decade

The second part of the 70s set O.C.E.A.N on a path to becoming the true, authoritative voice for ship supply in Europe.

We grew in membership and influence not by chance, but by staying true to the principles we carved out in those early, turbulent years.

Every step we took in the 1970s, from that first gathering at Schiphol to our successful intervention in the *Butterfahrten* case, was a building block for the stature we enjoy today.

When I reflect on those days, I see the threads that still pull through our work: The first formal engagement in Brussels taught us how to be heard; the battle over Butterfahrten taught us how to defend the integrity of our trade; and the development of the *mare liberum* principle gave us our North Star. These were not just historical milestones; they were the essential training for every challenge we have faced in the decades since.

We learned that port and policy must always be in sync.

To me, the 1970s established far more than an organisation.

They ignited a movement toward harmonisation of European maritime trade that has endured for fifty years and shows no sign of slowing.

We built a machine that is durable, respected, and, above all, necessary.

Looking ahead, I am confident that the groundwork we laid back then remains the surest footing for whatever stormy legal waters our industry must navigate in the future. We did not just build an association; we secured the heartbeat of maritime supply for generations to come.

By the end of the decade, the aims of O.C.E.A.N. had been clearly defined. In the words of our first Chairman, our objectives were *"to promote the interest of ship suppliers in EC member states in close co-operation with EC, national customs and agricultural authorities, in order to achieve a mutual understanding on our special problems."*

What is an O.C.E.A.N ship chandler's job going to be like in 1978?



O.C.E.A.N.

ORGANISATION DE LA COMMUNAUTÉ EUROPEENNE DES AVITAILLEURS DE NAVIRES
(Representing Member Associations of ISSA in EEC countries)

Verband Deutsche
Schiffsausrüster e.V.
23. JUNI 1977
2 Hamburg 1, Raboisen 101

Korsør, the 13th June, 1977.

"What is an OCEAN ship chandler's job going to be like in 1978?"

Ship chandlers throughout the world have for centuries had a quite special job in providing service for the shipping trade.

With very few exceptions, such as Denmark who maintains some of the world's highest specific purchase taxes, we have generally quite freely been in a position to supply to all shipowners the goods required for the operation of:
The freight trade, the route & passenger service, river navigation (compare with C 3 section 15), fishing, the navy, expeditions, pilotage and coastguard, rescuing and surveying, sand dredging and fishing boulders from the sea floor, cable & buoy laying, pleasure cruising, and, over the last few years, for derricks as well as offshore installations etc., to provide the essential oil and gas for the Common Market.

These very much different ships call at the ports at all hours, and in view of all the modern facilities available to-day, the ships stay in port very briefly only - passenger ships frequently a few hours only, some even less. During this brief span of time, the ship chandler has to provide the ships with the necessary equipment, such as provisions and security equipment etc. required for the further operation of the ship, for time losses, as you would know, run into very heavy amounts to be paid by the shipowners.
To meet these demands from the shipowner, all customs formalities have to be reduced to an absolute minimum but, of course, should be arranged in a manner to ensure that full accounts control can be verified later.

Sea-going vessels of all nations sailing in international waters (having left the territorial waters of their countries) can use freely on board duty and excise free goods for their crews, passengers, and the ship. Duty-free goods are, among other things:

- provisions for all persons onboard
- beverages and tobaccos
- articles for everyday use for the ship and all persons onboard
- things used for installations on the ship
- deck & machinery stores, all means of operation

Most of these groups of merchandize are stored in our not duty-paid stores, and when supplied as Seagoing Ship Stores these goods which are not comprised by the Rome Treaty Provisions Section 9, sub-section 2, are considered re-exported from the Common Market free of duty and excise.

Our troubles do not really begin until, rather than selling agricultural products of a third country duty & excise free via our not duty-paid stores, we want to sell Common Market agricultural products from the freely negotiable market which will meet the provisions of the Rome Treaty Section 9, Sub-section 2. The goods are supplied as Seagoing Ship Stores without incurring duty and excise when exported, and despite the deduction of the restitution laid down, the merchandize becomes far more expensive than the duty & excise free third country goods.

The commission decree No. 192/75 equalizing supplies of ship's provisions - even within the Common Market - with exports to a third country should be interpreted so as to apply to transit supplies outside the Common Market, too. The goods are, subject to the full control of all countries and to due verification by the shipmaster or the shipowner, carried onboard one of the home country's ships and consumed onboard in international waters. Thus, you cannot, as demanded in case of ordinary exportation to a third country, verify that the merchandize has gone into the free trade of the third country. Restitutions determined by destination can, for the same reason, not be used in case of supplies to ships in international operation since their destinations are frequently changed during the trips.

OCEAN should be consulted by the respective work committees when provisions are worked out for the shipping trade, in order to prevent practical and technical difficulties in this highly specialized line. As an example, the sugar export tax for ship's provisions could really have been avoided altogether. We could probably have prevented supplies of Common Market agricultural products for shop sales on board being stopped. We believe that it is against common sense not to exploit the advertising/PR value involved in selling our exclusive Common Market agricultural products onboard these passenger liners, rather than leaving the entire initiative to the third countries.

We should have avoided the butter restitution stop on the 1st - 2nd - 3rd April which had quite unreasonable consequences.

Further, it is altogether unreasonable that the regulations governing ship consumption during docking at yards, pertaining to fishermen, navy vessels, and pleasure cruisers should be made more rigorous. This applies particularly to pleasure cruisers as the place of tourism would then be entirely out of proportion to society as a whole.

As regards ships calling within the same member state and receiving or discharging passengers and goods, you can, like on flights and other third country liners, stamp the ticket as a check so that those not leaving the country will not have the opportunity of buying duty & excise (free) goods. Further, this can be checked at the gangway.

If the Commission introduces, slowly and backed by varying motivations, in this manner a great many limitations in the "freedom of the seas", the Common Market exchange-gaining enterprises will immediately emigrate to the third countries; in fact, you cannot miss the progress of new third country passenger lines whereas Common Market ships have to surrender.

As far as I have understood (from C 29, subsection 1), the principle of the Common Market is supposed to be that the competitiveness of the Common Market countries should not be rendered weaker in activities outside the Common Market. Thus, if third country flights and ships proceeding from one Common Market port to the other can sell duty-free goods to the passengers, the Common Market should within itself provide the same possibilities.

- 3 -

We hold that you cannot discuss directive 1 on ship's provisions without including directive 3 on luggage provisions at country borders, ports, and flights, as well as directive 6 on value added tax in the negotiations for government control of all these provisions should not be performed until upon arrival at the customs area both with regard to goods purchased duty & excise free, and goods purchased in the free trade of another country.

Our way of transportation creates some more and heavy problems in relation to our particular trade's road transport, both at home and abroad. We cannot be subject to the same provisions applying to large exporters for they transport large loads of the same type of merchandize whereas we transport a wide range of goods but less quantities of highly varying goods. The limitation "to be used onboard in international waters" has already led to a registration of these goods, "Seagoing Ship Stores". Also from a veterinary point of view, exemption clauses for ship's provisions are required when considering once again the competition from third countries.

Thus, a meeting involving all parties concerned would no doubt prove highly useful so that, in considering the particularly complicated work of the ship chandlers, regulations governing ship's provisions, the ship chandler's administration, and government control be harmonized with the performance of his duties in order that we may avoid in future any "distorted" competition and misinterpretations, as well as create progress by increasing sales of Common Market products, and thus provide more jobs.

I do hope that the entire OCEAN board will come forward with their comments to-day in order that we may be absolutely sure that we may establish a proposition providing maximum conditions for the Common Market ship chandlers.

Yours Sincerely,

O. Boldreel
President

Memo to be despatched to:

- all Common Market ship chandlers (to be used vis-a-vis national authorities, politicians, trade organizations etc.)
- the Common Market Ship Owner Association with the ferry shipowners
- Common Market airlines
- Common Market politicians in the Europe Parliament
- Common Market social and economic council members
- Tax Free Traders

CHAPTER 3: PROFESSIONALISING O.C.E.A.N (1980-1990) - BY BOB BLAKE

Executive Summary

If you thought the eighties were just about neon lights and synth-pop, this chapter reveals the high-stakes reality behind the glass walls of Brussels, where we transformed from a fledgling committee into the essential architects of maritime policy.

With a dash of British wit and plenty of "proper graft," former O.C.E.A.N Board member Bob Blake walks you through how O.C.E.A.N championed the pragmatic blueprint for the Single Market, waged an existential war against VAT-hungry bureaucrats, and navigated a dizzying array of regulatory headaches to ensure our industry didn't just survive, but thrived.

It is the story of how we earned our seat at the table, whilst honouring the British contributors like Peter Hickson and John Davey, who helped O.C.E.A.N secure a future for ship supply in an integrated Europe.

Introduction

You might wonder what a Brit is doing here, writing a chapter for a book about the European Union.

Well, you likely know that the United Kingdom was, for over forty years, a central part of this illustrious world. The United Kingdom officially joined the EC, the predecessor to the modern European Union, on 1 January 1973 and officially left the European Union on 31 January 2020.

We were a strong voice in O.C.E.A.N from the very beginning.

We played a vital role in shaping the eighties and later held the Chairmanship of the association in the nineties. I was pleased to serve as a long-standing Board member, and I am happy to report on the developments of those years.

As we moved into the eighties, the landscape of our industry underwent a profound shift.

The excitement of our initial founding had settled into the hard, steady work of professional advocacy. I remember those years as a time when we stopped being the new group in the room and started being the trusted technical advisors the Commission actually relied upon.

During this decade, our proactive engagement with EU authorities became more than just a necessity; it became our identity. We were instrumental in shaping policies that finally began to account for the unique, often invisible aspects of ship supply. It was a period of fine-tuning. We were not just fighting to exist anymore; we were fighting to ensure that every regulation coming out of Brussels supported our competitiveness rather than stifling it.

I saw firsthand how our presence in the room prevented disaster.

In a market that was becoming increasingly integrated, the threat of administrative gridlock was always looming. Yet, time and again, we steered the conversation.

We made it clear that a ship does not wait for a rubber stamp and that the efficiency of our supply chain directly contributed to the health of the broader European economy.

As we say back in England, keep your eye on the ball. That was our mantra. We stayed focused on the practical mechanics of the trade, translating abstract EU directives into operational realities that kept our members efficient and our ships moving.

It was not always glamorous work, but it was essential.

By the time the eighties drew to a close, we had helped build a European market where our industry could not only survive but also truly thrive amid the era's rapid changes.

Regulatory Developments in Europe in the 80s

Looking back, the eighties were a period of monumental ambition where the European project finally shed its post-war shell and began its transition into a true Single Market.

For us in the ship supply industry, these were the years that turned high-level political rhetoric into the practical, borderless reality we recognise today.

If I had to pick the moments that really changed the game, a few stand out as the true highlights of that decade.

History took a sharp turn with the 1985 White Paper on the Completion of the Internal Market. Without blowing our own trumpet, British leadership proved vital in bringing the Single Market to life.

Sure, the final treaty was a collective effort, but the technical vision and the political drive behind it were heavily influenced by British leadership.

The primary architect was Arthur Cockfield, the British Commissioner appointed in 1985.

He authored the landmark 1985 White Paper on completing the internal market. His work identified the exact list of roughly 300 legislative changes required to remove the physical, technical, and fiscal barriers that were stifling European trade.

Without his pragmatic, list-driven approach, the Single Market might have remained an abstract political concept rather than a concrete legislative roadmap.

Furthermore, the British government under Margaret Thatcher was a major proponent of the Single Market at the time.

The UK government championed deregulation and the removal of trade barriers, seeing them as ways to create a more competitive, free-market environment across Europe.

So, in short: we, the British, provided the technical blueprint and the political push necessary to move the Single Market from a goal into a reality.

For us in the ship supply industry, that meant we were working within a framework with a distinct British "common sense" influence on trade efficiency and the elimination of red tape.

Then came the 1986 signing of the Single European Act. This was our point of no return. Entering into force on 1 July 1987, this was the most critical development of the decade.

It launched a massive legislative program to remove the "non-tariff" barriers, such as differing national regulations and health/safety standards, that still caused significant bottlenecks at internal borders despite the absence of customs duties.

For us in ship supply, the introduction of the Single Administrative Document (SAD) in 1987 marked a major step toward simplifying customs procedures for ship suppliers.

It replaced a multitude of national forms with a single, common document, significantly streamlining the transit of goods between member states.

On 20 May 1987, the Convention on a common transit procedure was established, providing a unified system for moving goods across the territories of the EU and its partner countries (such as EFTA members), again of great benefit to the European ship supplier industry.

Throughout the decade, O.C.E.A.N worked with the EC to harmonise "behind-the-border" provisions. While internal duties had been abolished in 1968, the 1980s saw the development of more cohesive rules for common origin, warehousing procedures, and product classification to ensure that customs provisions were applied consistently across the board.

Ship suppliers could, for the first time, regularly envision supplying vessels in ports outside their own jurisdiction.

Make no mistake, before the Single Market reached its full stride in 1993, the dream of free circulation was still a work in progress.

For those of us on the ground, life at the border remained a series of stop-start frustrations.

Our lorries and our travellers were constantly flagged down for tax, statistical, and regulatory checks that felt like they would never end.

The EC was still untangling a messy knot of national VAT and excise rules.

Because every country held onto its own tax rates and exemption schemes, we faced a daily gauntlet of administrative bottlenecks. It was exhausting work.

We spent the decade watching the Commission push through the Sixth VAT Directive to bring some order to the chaos of fiscal reporting. We lived by Directive 69/169/EEC, keeping a sharp eye on every change to personal allowance limits to make sure our duty-free trade didn't vanish overnight.

On top of that, the long, uphill climb to harmonise excise duties on alcohol and tobacco was a constant headache. Without a unified system, we were forever dodging the double taxation traps that could sink a ship supply business.

It was a time of immense pressure, but it taught us how to fight for our space in the new Europe. We weren't just moving goods; we were helping to pave the road toward the seamless, borderless trade we enjoy today.

As we say in the UK, it was a proper graft, but it was the only way to build a future for our industry.

For us, these were not just dry fiscal adjustments; they were "administrative battles" we were constantly fighting, as each change threatened to erode the specific tax status that allowed ship suppliers to act as a vital, competitive link in international maritime trade.

There are two other key events worth mentioning:

1986 saw the enlargement of the EC involving Spain and Portugal.

This changed the geography of our trade overnight. Bringing the Iberian Peninsula into the fold significantly expanded the European shipping map for us. It forced us to think much more broadly about the Atlantic and Mediterranean supply routes, adding a new complexity and a fresh vibrancy to our network.

Finally, the 1989 Delors Report arrived.

While the Maastricht Treaty came a bit later, this report laid the essential foundations for the Economic and Monetary Union. It signalled to the business community that the transition from a collection of national economies to a single, stable financial bloc was not just a pipe dream; it was actually happening.

These milestones laid the solid foundations upon which our modern maritime supply community stands today.

For us, they meant moving away from the era of local interpretations and toward a system in which our paperwork in a British port began to carry the same weight as it did in a Dutch or German one.

It was a messy, intense time of legal evolution, but it laid the ground for the efficiency that O.C.E.A.N members rely on now.

We were no longer just watching history; we were helping to build it, ensuring that our industry remained at the very heart of this new, integrated Europe.

European Policy Issues Addressed by O.C.E.A.N in the 80s

Looking back, that was a busy period. We were constantly in the thick of it, navigating a regulatory landscape that felt like it was shifting every time we turned around.

We were not just watching policy from the sidelines; we were in the engine room, working to ensure the unique needs of our trade were not lost in the rush toward integration.

This was the profound effect of creating a Single Market.

Suddenly, the rules of the game changed - all laws were now European, and they impacted every single one of us.

Often, these new regulations were drafted without an understanding of our niche, meaning many were incorrect, incomplete, or simply failed to consider the specific impact on ship supply.

We had to take care of every one of them, diving into the fine print to protect our members' interests.

It is no surprise we were busy during this period; we were helping rewrite the rulebook to ensure our industry could survive the transition.

Throughout the eighties, we tackled a dizzying array of issues, each one a critical test of our resilience.

To make sense of those turbulent waters, we can group our battles into four vital fronts:

Customs and Trade Regimes,
Taxation and Duty-Free Rules,
Warehousing and Logistics, and
Health, Quality, and Compliance

Let's look at them, one by one.

1. Customs and Trade Regimes

Correct Customs Treatment on Ferry Boats: We fought to maintain the traditional view that supplies for vessels operating between EU and non-EU ports were essentially exports. By ensuring these goods were exempt from EU duties, provided they were consumed onboard and not re-imported, we protected the core competitiveness of our members.

Maintenance of EC Export Restitution: The Community provided financial refunds to exporters of specific goods, and we insisted that ship supplies be treated as equivalent to exports. We worked tirelessly to preserve this system, arguing that any removal would put EU suppliers at a severe disadvantage against global competitors.

T5 Documents and Loading Lists: These were our bread and butter for proving exports. Without clear, standardised procedures, ship suppliers faced endless delays at borders. We pushed for a regime that made these requirements predictable, ensuring our deliveries reached the vessel on time.

Exemption from Export Levies for Ship Supplies: Since these goods were destined for consumption at sea and not for re-importation into the EU, we argued they should remain

free from export levies. We successfully maintained this exemption, preventing the unfair administrative and financial strain that would have followed.

Application of EC Regulation 2730/79: This regulation governed export refunds for agricultural products, and its uneven application across member states was a nightmare for our industry. We pushed for strict, uniform enforcement so that a supplier in one country was not penalised compared to a colleague in another.

2. Taxation and Duty-Free Rules

"Butterfahrten" Revisited: The 1981 German court case (No. 158/80) changed everything. The Commission mandated customs duties on goods from third countries for travellers. Still, we worked to ensure that these items kept their exemption from excise duties and VAT, provided they stayed within personal allowances.

Tax-Free Allowances (Duty-Free Travel): Throughout 1984, the Council of Ministers frequently adjusted these limits. We monitored these shifts with eagle eyes, knowing that if the regulations on what travellers could bring back changed too much, it would threaten the duty-free status that allowed us to be a competitive link to the global maritime market.

3. Warehousing and Logistics

Regulations on Bonded and Victualling Warehouses: This was a major point of contention. We found that the EC member countries were deeply divided, with some favouring "open" bonded warehouses and others sticking to "closed" types. We lobbied for a harmonised, supportive regulatory framework that allowed us to operate efficiently regardless of the national model.

Control of Product Registration for Victualling Warehouses: Goods kept in victualling warehouses required strict monitoring. We addressed the registration process to ensure that while we stayed compliant with EU law, the reporting requirements did not become an administrative burden that choked our operations.

Regulations on Working Hours for Lorry Drivers: When the EU moved to standardise driver hours to improve safety, we had to intervene. The "one-size-fits-all" approach risked grinding our supply chains to a halt. We engaged with authorities to ensure the unique, time-sensitive demands of port logistics were carved out of these rigid rules.

4. Health, Quality, and Compliance

Certificates of Veterinary and Quality Prescriptions: Provisions of animal origin required rigorous health and safety checks. We navigated the complexities of these veterinary certificates, ensuring our suppliers could meet the high European standards without triggering unnecessary cargo delays.

Tariff Numbers for Technical Products: Proper classification under the Combined Nomenclature was essential to avoid disputes over duties. We worked to ensure that technical parts supplied to ships were classified accurately, preventing the misapplication of tariffs that could happen when customs officials misunderstood the nature of our trade.

These were not just dry law changes.

To us, they represented the fine line between a thriving trade and a crippled one. We understood that if the regulations shifted too far, they would threaten our role as the primary link between European ports and the global maritime market.

We fought to protect that integrity, ensuring that as Europe harmonised, it did not accidentally dismantle the duty-free protections that were the heartbeat of our industry.

It was exhausting work, but it was essential; we were not just protecting our margins, we were securing the future of European ship supply.

Organisational Developments in O.C.E.A.N in the 80s

Looking back, the eighties were our decade of growth.

It was a time of consolidation and rapid movement, where we navigated economic shifts and political changes by building a systematic presence within the corridors of the EC.

We secured our standing not just by showing up, but by establishing the permanent working groups and structures that have sustained us for decades. It was, in every sense, our coming of age.

Our leadership evolved to match this ambition:

The transition from Olaf Boldreel of Denmark, whose steady hand guided us through our precarious early years, to Georges Garguilo of France towards the end of the decade marked the moment we stopped asking for recognition and started demanding it.

We became a fixture in European trade discussions, moving away from a posture of mere reaction to actively shaping the economic reality of our industry.

A total overhaul of our secretariat mirrored this maturity.

At our board meeting in Monte Carlo on 18 October 1982, we bid farewell to our founding Secretary General, Dr J. Buter.

After six years of tireless diplomacy, he retired, with Chairman Boldreel honouring his legacy with a gift of Copenhagen glassware – the archives show.

On 1 January 1983, Dr Norbert Traub of Hamburg took over.

Coming from the German Ship Suppliers Association, he arrived with deep knowledge of EC procedures and a Rolodex filled with the right contacts in Brussels.

On 1 January 1987, we moved our headquarters

SYNDICAT NATIONAL DES APPROVISIONNEURS DE NAVIRES
Département de la Seine-Normandie 32
Région de la Seine-Normandie 32
CC : T. M. B. O. C. P.
LE PRESIDENT
3 1. MRZ. 1989
NOUVELLE ADRESSE :
17, Quai Louis-Pasteur
34200 SETE
Tél 07 74.04.39
Téléx 490502

Dear Colleague,

The President Olaf BOLDREEL acknowledge me to day by letter" Mr W.F.VAN NOORTWIJK HAS ENTERED INTO A COMPROMISE AGREEMENT WITH Mr R.VAN UFFEL, REGARDING THE CHAIRMAN OF OCEAN, AND RECALLED HIS CANDIDATURE AND CAST HIS VOTE FOR Mr GARGUILO.

I am very sensitive about the decision of the Association of Netherland.

With your help, absolutely indispensable, we will follow together and intensify our action to try to obtain that our Profession must remained and recognized to its right place: EXPORT AND 3 rd COUNTRY.

Myself, with gratitude, I like to thank you for your trust and I hope to give you the best devotion to obtain many satisfactions for our aspirations after 1992.

Until success, I promise you to follow the best approach near the European Authorities work already started on behalf the French Shippers Association.

As Chairman of OCEAN, I have to do my best as an European Chairman and you can be sure of my willing to do so.

With your help, I hope to reach, together, a successful solution.

With my best Thanks for your trust, I joint to each Member of the "OCEAN TEAM" my most sincerely Friendship.

Georges GARGUILO

Georges GARGUILO
Conseiller du Commerce Extérieur de la France
With Compliments
Président du S.N.A.N.
Vice-Président O.C.E.A.N.
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Georges Garguilo takes over as Chair in 1989 with a promise to ensure that ship supply remains and is recognised in its right place: EXPORT AND 3rd COUNTRY

to the Netherlands under the leadership of Dr A. J. M. Th. de Groot, who ran an incredibly tight ship. By juggling our interests alongside those of the Netherlands Association of Ship Suppliers and the Agricultural Wholesale Federation, he gave us a singular, authoritative voice in the heart of Europe.

Just 10 months on, Mr Laurens van der Ziel took over as Secretary of the Netherlands Association of Shippers on 1 October 1987, succeeding Mr De Groot. In his first letter to O.C.E.A.N members, on 13 November 1987, he reflected on how far the organisation had come:

O.C.E.A.N. finds itself today, 11 years after its foundation, in a decisive stage. O.C.E.A.N. has been formed as an EC-organisation with EC-authorities in Brussels as interlocutors. We can conclude that 'Brussels' has never been so important as now. Examples: the Single Administrative Document (SAD), new regulations on bonded warehouses etc.; product-liability, etc.

Trade and industry, and especially those industrial circles that have interests outside the national borders, must have a voice in Brussels. A permanent dialogue must be started between us, the ship suppliers operating in EC-connection, and those EC-officials and EC-politicians who are important to us.

Such a dialogue does not come into being from one day to the next. It has to be worked on. Contacts have to be made and subsequently kept. That is the task of O.C.E.A.N.: being heard in Brussels.

Introduction letter by Mr Laurens van der Ziel, O.C.E.A.N General Secretary, from late 1987.

Our visual identity caught up with our professional status in London on May 14 and 15, 1983. When the Board unanimously approved our first formal logo, it was more than just branding.

It was a signal that we were a permanent institution. That emblem became the hallmark of our legitimacy in every letter we sent and every meeting we attended. Besides the logo, we were also building our reach.

During that same London meeting, we opened the doors wider than ever before.

With ten representatives from seven nations and observers from Portugal and Spain in the room, we recognised the European project was expanding. The UK had temporarily left O.C.E.A.N and acted as an observer at this meeting.

We rolled out the red carpet for Spain and Portugal before they even officially joined the European Communities (EC) in 1986, waiving admission fees and setting a clear path for them to join as full members.

We even created an Associate Member category for countries like Ireland, where national associations were still developing. We were building a coalition that spanned the continent.



O.C.E.A.N.

ORGANISATION DE LA COMMUNAUTÉ EUROPEENNE
DES AVITAILLEURS DE NAVIRES
ORGANISATION OF SHIPSUPPLIERS IN EC-COUNTRIES

The first logo and branding of O.C.E.A.N

Should O.C.E.A.N be independent?

Back in 1983, a strong wind blew through our London board meeting. We sat together and asked ourselves a bold question: should we cut our ties with the International Shippers Association (ISSA) and sail completely on our own?

Some of us felt the pull of total independence.

Fast forward to a crisp autumn day on 30th September 1984 in Rotterdam.

We gathered, looking out over the busy Dutch waterways, ready to settle the matter.

After a hearty exchange of views, we realised that sticking together was our greatest strength.

We chose to remain part of the broader family, yet we drew a clear line in the sand to keep our management entirely our own.

We knew our community of European ship suppliers needed a steady hand and a voice of its own to shape the future of trade.

Highlight of the Decade

As the eighties drew to a close, and the Single Market was being rolled out, a quiet crisis began to brew within the glass-walled offices of Brussels. It was a threat that promised to dismantle the very foundation of our industry. Under the steady guidance of our second Chair, Georges Garguilo of France, we found ourselves navigating the turbulent waters of rapid European integration.

The vision of a borderless Single Market was grand, but it cast a cold, bureaucratic shadow: a formal proposal by the European Commission to abolish VAT exemption for ship supplies.

For the thousands of us who kept the maritime industry running, this was not just another policy shift - it was an existential threat.

The Commission's proposal ignored an age-old reality: ships are not extensions of the land.

Because ship supplies consumed on the high seas are never re-imported into the European market, they have always been treated as exports, immune to the reach of local turnover taxes.

To impose VAT now would tax goods that were, by definition, destined for the international stage. It made no sense, and we knew it.

We launched a vigorous, relentless campaign, armed with arguments that cut through the bureaucrats' academic theories to reveal the harsh, practical consequences.

We warned of an economic exodus.

If our members were forced to add VAT, ships would simply bypass European ports, taking their business - and their vital revenue - to non-EU competitors. We weren't just protecting our margins; we were protecting the economic viability of European ports.

Beyond that, we highlighted the administrative catastrophe that would inevitably follow. With VAT rates varying wildly across the EU, the proposal threatened to trigger a chaotic web of internal competition.

Ship suppliers in one country would be forced to navigate a different fiscal reality than their neighbours, turning every simple delivery into an accountant's nightmare for both businesses and customs officials. It was a battle for the soul of our trade. By the time the decade faded into the nineties, the fight over VAT had become the definitive challenge of our era.

The groundwork we had laid, our professional reputation, our technical expertise, and our presence in Brussels were pushed to the limit. We had to prove that the "administrative nightmare" we described was not an exaggeration, but the inevitable outcome of ignoring the unique, international nature of maritime trade.

That struggle defined our decade, proving once and for all that for European ship suppliers, the difference between prosperity and extinction was often written in the fine print of a tax code. We stood our ground, and in doing so, we secured our seat at the table for the years to come.

C'est la vie, as Georges Garguilo would say - sometimes you have to fight for what is rightfully yours.

Legacy of the Decade

Looking back at the path we travelled, the 1980s were more than just a calendar decade; they were the crucible in which our modern identity was forged.

We began as a group finding our feet, and through the persistent, often gruelling, efforts to influence customs, excise, and VAT policy, we matured into a force to be reckoned with.

It was an era of intense learning, where we moved from being reactive spectators to becoming proactive architects of the regulatory environment that governs our ships today.

This transition, forged in the heat of the VAT battle, marked a decisive evolution in our organisation's character.

By the close of the 1980s, O.C.E.A.N had successfully moved beyond the role of a mere observer in Brussels, transforming into an essential architect of maritime policy.

The decade had been a baptism by fire, forcing the Board to cultivate a level of professional capability and strategic insight that would remain the bedrock of the association for generations.

Surviving the fiscal storms of the late eighties changed us. We stepped out of that pressure test with quiet self-assurance.

The old friction with European officials, born from defending our survival at every turn, melted away. In its place grew a steady, working partnership built on mutual respect and shared problem-solving.

This shift in stature meant that as the 1990s approached, O.C.E.A.N no longer operated in a purely reactive stance, scrambling to mitigate the impact of external mandates.

Instead, we had developed the technical expertise and diplomatic reach required to sit at the table when the future of European trade was being designed.

Looking back, I am immensely proud of the role the British Association of Ship Suppliers played in this transformation.

We stood shoulder-to-shoulder with our European colleagues, bringing a pragmatic, common-sense approach that was vital during those challenging years.

I must pay tribute to the many British figures whose vision and hard work shaped the very soul of this organisation.

My heartfelt thanks go to the late, great Peter Hickson, whose leadership as O.C.E.A.N Chairman provided us with the clear-eyed direction we so often needed in the 90s.

I am equally grateful to my successor, John Davey, whose commitment was unwavering; his dedicated service as O.C.E.A.N Vice Chair, right through until the complexities of Brexit, perfectly encapsulates the British contribution to this European project.

The momentum was clear: the foundation was solid, the voice was authoritative, and we were prepared to steer our industry through the next era of integration. We had not only protected our trade; we had earned our right to shape the future of European ship supply.

Until we meet again, goodbye.

CHAPTER 4: THE EU SINGLE MARKET (1990-2000) - BY STEFAN ERICSON

Executive Summary

Join former O.C.E.A.N Chair Stefan Ericson as he revisits the 1990s.

He explores how this period marked the defining crucible for the European ship supply industry, propelling national providers out of isolated local routines and into the heart of a centralised, single market. Anchored by the creation of the European Union, the launch of the Single Market in 1993, and monumental regulatory shifts like the Community Customs Code, Ericson explains vividly how this era forced our profession to adapt rapidly to supranational rules.

He stresses that decisive advocacy, exemplified by our successful defence of export-equivalent tax exemptions under Georges Garguilo, the streamlining of external trade statistics, the standardisation of bonded warehouses, and early adaptation to digital transit systems like NCTS and O.C.E.A.N, transformed us from a reactive trade group into a respected, proactive policy partner.

Stefan Ericson concludes with a defining truth. Protecting the ancient maritime freedom of the seas for today's world requires constant vigilance and a single, undivided European voice.



The first OCEAN Chair from Sweden, Stefan Ericson

Introduction

My name is Stefan Ericson, and as O.C.E.A.N Chairman from 2007 to 2011, I see the 1990s as the defining era that transformed our industry. For us in Sweden, joining the EU in 1995 alongside Finland and Austria was not merely a political milestone but a shift that fundamentally widened our horizons. This decade, anchored by the Maastricht Treaty's creation of a formal European Union and its three-pillar framework, dragged us from the relative comfort of national regulations into the complex, centralised machinery of Brussels.

While we in Sweden eventually opted to retain our own currency, the era taught us that we could no longer afford to operate in isolation.

We matured from local business owners into active European stakeholders, proving that when we unite our national voices, we ensure the heartbeat of the ship supply industry is heard loud and clear in the halls of power.

Regulatory Developments in Europe in the 90s

I remember the cold, crisp mornings in Gothenburg when the nineties truly began. In Sweden, we often say "*små grytor har också öron*" (little pots have ears too).

It was a lesson we learned quickly as we watched the political landscape shift in Brussels. We soon realised that if we were not listening closely to every word coming out of the Commission, we would

lose our place in the new order. This was the time of the two "Jacques": first EU Commission President Delors (until 1995), followed by President Santer.

When the Maastricht Treaty came into force on 1 November 1993, it felt as though the map of Europe had been redrawn overnight. By formally establishing the European Union (EU), this agreement did more than change our name; it created a "three-pillar" house that fundamentally altered our daily operations. This is because it laid the legal groundwork for the Economic and Monetary Union, which eventually gave many countries in the EU a single currency (Although Sweden became part of the European Union in 1995, it opted to maintain its national currency rather than adopt the euro following a national referendum in 2003) while also forcing us to transition from merely following domestic rules to engaging with a centralised, supranational legislative system.

For a Swedish ship supplier, the world suddenly became much larger. We were no longer navigating by the familiar stars of our national customs laws; we were entering a vast, uncharted sea of supranational regulation.

The new EU three-pillar structure felt complex, even distant, but it was the new reality that governed every crate of supplies we delivered to the docks:

The First Pillar (The European Communities): Handled economic, social, and environmental policies, including the single market and the Economic and Monetary Union, operating primarily through supranational integration.

The Second Pillar (Common Foreign and Security Policy - CFSP): Focused on joint foreign policy, diplomacy, and security/military matters through intergovernmental cooperation.

The Third Pillar (Justice and Home Affairs - JHA): Managed police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters, asylum, immigration, and the fight against international crime through intergovernmental coordination.

Then came the Amsterdam Treaty in 1997. It brought a focus on the human side of our work - our rights, our social standards, and the fabric of the society we lived in. It made me realise that being a ship supplier was no longer just about port logistics. It was about being part of a collective European project. We had to adapt to this new pace.

The most critical milestone in the 90s for our industry was the official launch of the Single Market on 1 January 1993.

By operationalising the "four freedoms" - the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people - the EU sought to dismantle the physical and administrative barriers that had historically fragmented our trade.

Background

The Four Freedoms form the bedrock of the European Union's Single Market, guaranteeing the unobstructed movement of economic resources across member state borders:

Free Movement of Goods: Allows products to cross national borders within the EU without tariffs, quotas, or unnecessary technical barriers. (For ship suppliers, this means our provisions and technical parts can flow smoothly to ports across different member states.)

Free Movement of Services: Enables businesses and professionals to offer their services across national borders without facing discriminatory restrictions based on their home country.

Free Movement of Capital: Ensures that money, investments, and payments can move freely between EU countries, facilitating cross-border business transactions and financing.

Free Movement of Persons: Grants EU citizens the right to live, work, study, and retire anywhere within the Union without facing nationality-based discrimination.

As regards customs policy in the 90s, the progress was monumental and truly transformative.

The 1992 Community Customs Code (CCC) provided the essential technical scaffolding for this new era, merging the disparate regulations of twelve independent countries into a single Customs Union effective 1 January 1993.

For everyone in our sector, the arrival of the Community Customs Code was a true turning point. By replacing an archaic labyrinth of 150 different forms with the paper Single Administrative Document, it drastically streamlined our daily operations.

To me, it stood as the most visible symbol of European market integration, introducing a universal language for customs declarations across every Member State.

Under the CCC, the SAD served as the universal declaration form for three distinct procedures: export, import, and transit. For our industry, this meant that when we moved ship stores, we no longer had to navigate a dozen different national formats; we utilised one consistent set of data fields, codes, and requirements, whether we were moving goods through a customs warehouse or clearing them for delivery to a vessel.

It transformed the administrative burden from a national regulatory labyrinth into a unified, predictable process, dramatically increasing the speed and efficiency of our clearance operations at every port in the Union.

Moreover, for us as ship suppliers, the 1992 Directive on General Arrangements for Excise Goods (92/12/EEC) was transformative because it established the duty suspension system, allowing us to move highly-taxed products like tobacco and alcohol across borders without triggering immediate excise liabilities.

By implementing a system of Excise Movement and Control (EMCS) predecessors, the Directive mandated that these goods could be transported between authorised warehouses under bond, ensuring that we accounted for excise duty only when the products were finally released for consumption in a Member State. In practice, this meant we could maintain efficient, tax-deferred supply chains across the European Union, provided we strictly adhered to the administrative requirements of tracking these sensitive goods from the moment they left the manufacturer until they were safely on board the vessel.

The Sixth VAT Directive became essential for managing tax-exempt supplies in a borderless market. The essential legal provision for our industry was Article 15, which created a harmonised framework for VAT exemptions on the fuelling and provisioning of commercial vessels, effectively treating these supplies as exports to ensure they remained tax-free and competitive within the newly integrated European market.

Furthermore, we integrated Council Directive 97/78/EC of December 1997, which established a unified EU framework, including rules for us in ship supply, to ensure consistent food safety standards for animal products entering from third countries. By requiring comprehensive documentary, identity, and physical checks at officially designated Border Inspection Posts (BIPs), the directive created a cohesive process across all member states.

When Austria, Finland, and my own country joined the Union in 1995, our geographic footprint expanded in a way that felt truly transformative, breathing new maritime life and fresh, pragmatic voices into the European regulatory discourse.

This momentum was sustained by the 1994 launch of the European Economic Area, which bridged the gap for neighbours like Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein, folding them into the Single Market's reach.

Around the same time, we saw the Schengen Area start to peel back the layers of internal border controls, a bold step toward the seamless movement of people. At the same time, the 1999 arrival of the euro as an accounting currency signalled that the continent's economic ambitions were finally settling into place.

For us in the ship supply trade, these were not just distant policy shifts; they were the defining years we learned to navigate the sophisticated machinery of a modern, integrated Europe, stepping up from our local docks to become vital participants in a grand, unified enterprise.

European Policy Issues Addressed by O.C.E.A.N in the 90s

One of the most significant challenges O.C.E.A.N faced in the early 1990s was the European Commission's proposal to impose VAT on ship supplies.

VAT on ship supplies

The Battle for the Freedom of the Seas

When the Single Market threatened to sweep away our traditional tax exemptions, we faced a crisis that could have crippled our entire profession.

Under the steady leadership of our second Chairman, Georges Garguilo of France, OCEAN drew a line in the sand. Georges brought a fiery determination to the role, rallying us to mount a vigorous resistance against the looming threat of value-added tax on ship stores.

For generations, our trade operated on a simple, logical premise: supplying a vessel was legally equivalent to an export because those goods were consumed at sea and never re-imported into the European market.

Slapping a tax on those provisions would have shattered our livelihoods. Vessels would simply bypass European ports, placing their orders in non-EU neighbouring countries to avoid the extra cost.

On top of that, national VAT rates across the member states were completely unharmonized. If the tax went through, it would have created a chaotic race to the bottom, pitting European port against European port in an unfair internal struggle.

A Venetian Encounter and a Seville Turning Point

We took our fight straight to the doorsteps of the decision-makers.

The campaign reached its crescendo in November 1991 when Georges led a delegation to the World Export Gathering in Seville.

We invited national authorities and EC officials to sit down with us, look us in the eye, and listen to the economic realities of our business. We explained why maritime provisioning cannot be squeezed into standard retail boxes.

That persistence paid off in a historic recommendation from the European Commission's Committee on Commerce and Distribution.

That consultative body, tasked with guiding internal market policies, looked at the evidence and acknowledged the harsh truth.

They recognised that taxing ship supplies would drive maritime trade away from Europe and inflict severe economic damage.

Their objective backing gave the European Commission the justification it needed to drop the tax plan entirely.

It was a massive victory for survival, cementing ship supplies under export-equivalent status and safeguarding the ancient maritime principle of *mare liberum* for the modern era. More importantly, it forged a bond of trust and cooperation between O.C.E.A.N and European lawmakers that still defines our work today.

Warehouses: Open, Closed or In-between?

Walking into a ship supplier's warehouse in the 1990s told you a lot about which side of a European border you were standing on.

Even though the Single Market promised a level playing field, our daily reality involved a patchwork of customs rules that could drive a business owner mad.

Nowhere was this more evident than in how different nations regulated our bonded and victualling warehouses.

Our operations ground to a halt or flew smoothly, depending entirely on national bureaucracy.

Take Denmark, France, West Germany, and Great Britain.

Those countries trusted us with "open" bonded warehouses.

Operating under our own responsibility as warehouse keepers, we enjoyed round-the-clock access.

We managed our incoming and outgoing stock by simply notifying customs for periodic checks, rather than begging for permission in real time. It was efficient, modern, and built for the lightning-fast rhythm of maritime trade.

Cross the border into Belgium, Greece, or Italy, however, and you step back in time. Those nations clung to restrictive "closed" warehouse systems.

We had to live with dual-key access where customs held one key, and we held the other.

Need to load a vessel at midnight?

You either waited for normal working hours or paid heavy overtime fees for a customs officer to turn the lock.

The Netherlands sat somewhere in the middle, stationing customs officers right at the entrance to oversee movements during the day while offering overtime provisions.

External Trade Statistics: Three Codes instead of 100s

Every ship supplier knows the sinking feeling of staring down a mountain of paperwork just to clear a single vessel.

Back when our [external trade statistics](#) were a patchwork quilt across the European Economic Community, life at the dock was exhausting.

We moved immense volumes of diverse goods, and local authorities expected itemised listings down to the last spoon.

Pragmatism saved us.

Forward-thinking member states stepped in with clever shortcuts.

Germany introduced the *“Statistische Sammelnummer”*, allowing us to group low-value goods under a single number rather than itemising everything.

Our Dutch colleagues had their own version, using thresholds like HFL 850. It was a sensible fix that kept the customs officers happy without drowning our offices in red tape.

When the EU Customs Union finally matured, and the Combined Nomenclature became our shared rulebook, a new headache arrived.

A single supply run to a vessel might include fresh provisions from the early chapters of the tariff book, and countless miscellaneous items scattered everywhere in between.

Listing every single toothpick and bolt individually would have brought port logistics to a grinding halt.

Fortunately, European legislators listened to our practical concerns and crafted a set of special export codes designed specifically for our trade.

These codes let us group massive categories of goods under unified headings, keeping ships moving and customs databases accurate:

99302400 covers our food supplies, agricultural goods, and beverages from chapters 1 through 24.

99302700 handles the vital mineral fuels and lubricating oils of chapter 27 that keep engines turning.

99309900 acts as our catch-all safety net for everything else that falls outside the first two groups.

These streamlined codes are more than just administrative relics.

They are the hidden engine keeping modern ports running at speed.

Because our industry thrives on rapid turnarounds and countless small, varied shipments, these grouped classifications cut through the administrative fog.

They prove that when regulators understand the rhythm of maritime trade, everybody wins.

The NCTS Challenge: Early Digital Transition

As we raced toward the turn of the millennium, our daily routines at the warehouse and the dock shifted overnight.

Europe introduced the [New Computerised Transit System](#), or [NCTS](#), swapping our familiar paper transit documents for blinking computer screens and electronic data interchange.

This digital wave swept across the European Community and reached our partners in EFTA, bringing Iceland, Norway, and Switzerland into the same electronic grid.

For us ship suppliers, this transition was a trial by fire.

Our entire operation relies on moving ship stores smoothly from the point of entry straight to a waiting vessel without triggering heavy import duties and taxes along the way.

Getting those transit procedures right was the only barrier keeping us from drowning in administrative fees.

Adapting to the new system felt like learning to navigate without a compass.

Yet this digital leap marked the true beginning of our long journey with customs modernisation, setting the stage for technology to become our everyday reality in the decades ahead.

Organisational Developments in O.C.E.A.N in the 90s

Passing the Torch in Brussels

When Olaf Boldreel stepped down as our chairman in 1989, he handed the leadership baton to his dear friend and colleague, Georges Garguilo, from France.

Olaf had fought tooth and nail for our industry for many years, earning our deepest respect.

Storms on the Boardroom Deck

By 1994 and 1995, tensions boiled over inside our own boardroom.

Many O.C.E.A.N board members felt that the legislative output rushing out of Brussels was simply too vast for any single Chairman to handle alone.

Some worried we were missing vital chances to make our voice heard before laws were cast in stone.

Change was overdue.

That frustration came to a head at a specially called board meeting in London in 1995.

Georges Garguilo ultimately chose to step down, and Peter Hickson from the United Kingdom took the wheel.

Peter enjoyed the backing of the board as he dedicated most of his energy towards defending our ship supply trade interests.

Finding Our True Rhythm

Peter served for one term, and in 1997, my friend and colleague from Denmark, Jens Olsen, stepped up to take the position, with our members fully in agreement.

Jens expanded the focus of the association:

Operating procedures and working habits had lingered since our early days, and the board knew it was time for a spring clean. They were no longer fit for the 90s.

We rolled up our sleeves.

Slowly but surely, the atmosphere around the boardroom table shifted.

We stopped rowing in different directions and started pulling together as a single crew. That spirit of unity survived every leadership transition that followed.

It became our hallmark, what we fondly call the O.C.E.A.N way, earning the quiet admiration of friends and colleagues across the international maritime community.

Finance Troubles - Our parent ISSA to the rescue

Financing a European trade association was always going to be challenging, as budgets are tight and the "added value" for an extraordinary expense such as "interest representation" in far-away Brussels needed to be justified.

No wonder that standing together around a meeting table in Barcelona back in 1998, O.C.E.A.N members faced a precarious financial crossroads.

With the funds available to pay for required services dwindling, the question was: How to secure enough funds to go on?

Salvation arrived through a steady partnership with O.C.E.A.N's mother organisation, the International Shippers & Services Organisation, or ISSA. ISSA President Geoffrey Marchant and ISSA Treasurer Alfred Borg offered O.C.E.A.N. a lifeline, a generosity we must call out!

As a result, it is no exaggeration when I say: Without ISSA, there would be no O.C.E.A.N today - that is a fact!

With their vital assistance, we weathered that storm and secured our footing once and for all.

From that moment onward, O.C.E.A.N achieved complete financial independence, leaving direct contributions from ISSA behind and standing entirely on its own two feet.

That milestone paved the way for a deeper bond.

Since its inception, all O.C.E.A.N Chairmen have respected the relationship between O.C.E.A.N and ISSA, consistently cultivating mutual respect.

When I later stepped into the presidency of ISSA as Executive Vice President, I carried that same commitment across the threshold. I am proud to see succeeding O.C.E.A.N Chairs carrying that torch forward, ensuring our global network remains united, strong, and entirely self-reliant.

Growing O.C.E.A.N

Then came the mid-1990s wind of change. When Finland, Austria, and Sweden joined the European Union in 1995, our family grew.

I still smile when I think of our Nordic colleagues stepping into the fold.

They brought a breath of fresh northern air, bringing deep maritime traditions and sharp insights into shipping lanes that we had long needed.

Even Austria, landlocked and nestled in the Alps, reminded us that Europe is a web of rivers and inland waterways connecting every corner of our continent.

Highlight of the Decade

The first O.C.E.A.N book: The Ship Supply Industry, moving into 1992

Did you know there was a book long before this one?

Looking back across the canvas of the 1990s, our true highlight was not merely surviving regulatory change, but finding our voice through our very first formal publication: *"The Ship Supply Industry, moving into 1992"*.

Released as the Single Market took shape, this document captured our industry at the historic threshold when Europe's decades-long journey—from the 1958 Treaty of Rome and the 1987 Single European Act down to the 282 laws dismantling internal borders—finally culminated on 1 January 1993.

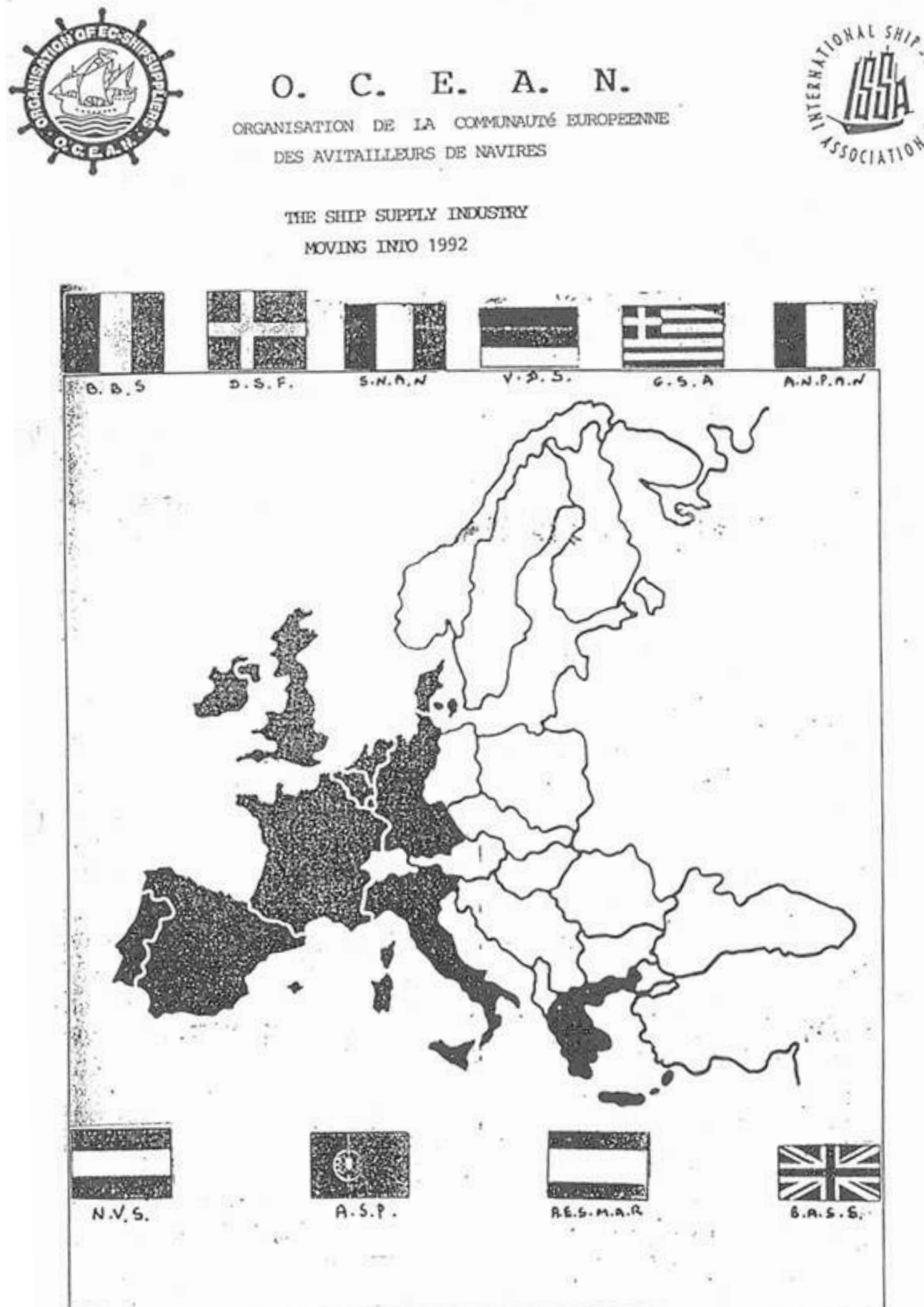
While the new borderless market opened a vast economic space across participating nations, its initial broad-brush VAT rules threatened our trade by ignoring the realities of maritime provisioning.

By uniting under Georges Garguilo to secure our export-equivalent VAT exemptions, O.C.E.A.N placed itself at the heart of this European evolution.

One of the key benefits of the document was that it helped greatly to explain why charging VAT on ship supplies was impractical:

Publications like this transformed us from a quiet trade group into a specialised voice capable of commanding the attention of Brussels regulators.

Today, as the Single Market spans millions of citizens and businesses, that inaugural book remains a living testament to our presence, proving that cooperation overcomes division and secures the freedom of the seas for the modern age. O.C.E.A.N was there when it all started, and our very first guide stands to prove it.



OCEAN's very first formal publication: "The Ship Supply Industry, moving into 1992"

1. VAT

- (a) The proposal is for all stores to be charged VAT at the point of supply. Vessels arriving into the E.C. would be charged VAT on everything they had on board. Each Shipping Company or owner master would be registered for VAT and make a normal return. However, a foreign flag vessel could only reclaim VAT under the 13th VAT directive once annually. VAT could only be reclaimed if the stores were ordered by the owner for the ships use and not for the personal use of a crew member. (e.g. personal radio).

This system would be impracticable to operate. It would have widespread inaccuracies and generate the requirement for more Customs Officers to make the collection of VAT from every vessel arriving from foreign waters

OCEAN's very first formal publication: "The Ship Supply Industry, moving into 1992"

Legacy of the decade

Looking back at the monumental shifts of the 1990s, I see a decade that did far more than simply redraw political maps.

It fundamentally reshaped who we are as ship suppliers.

When I reflect on those years, I remember how we in Sweden, alongside our colleagues in Finland and Austria, when we joined the European Union in 1995, were suddenly pulled from the comfortable, predictable rhythm of national regulations into the buzzing, complex machinery of Brussels. That transition was not just a political milestone; it was an awakening that permanently widened our professional horizon.

We quickly learned the old Swedish saying, "*den som viskar han ljuger inte, men den som inte lyssnar missar vägen*" (he who listens closely does not lose his path).

We realised that if we did not pay strict attention to every policy debate and legislative shift coming out of the European institutions, we would lose our place in the emerging single market.

The creation of the European Union through the Maastricht Treaty, the introduction of the **Single Market in 1993**, and the sweeping customs modernisations forced us to grow up fast. We could no longer operate as isolated local businesses. Instead, we had to mature into active, vocal European stakeholders.

Through gruelling battles, such as fighting off the threat of unharmonised value-added tax on ship stores under Georges Garguilo's fierce leadership, mastering new electronic transit systems, and preserving our export-equivalent status, we proved a vital truth.

We learned that the ancient maritime principle of *mare liberum* does not protect itself; it requires constant, vigilant advocacy.

By uniting our national voices, we ensured that the heartbeat of the ship supply industry was heard loud and clear in the halls of power.

The 1990s taught us that when European nations and industries pull together, the challenges of integration become the very foundations of our future leadership.

CHAPTER 5: THE POST-9/11 AWAKENING (2000-2010) - BY ALFREDO TOSATO

Executive Summary

The decade from 2000 to 2010 transformed O.C.E.A.N from a reactive trade group into a proactive architect of European maritime policy, as former Chairman Alfredo Tosato describes.

Under the leadership of Presidents Jens Olsen, Michel van Hulle, and Stefan Ericson, and powered by a dedicated Brussels secretariat, the organisation successfully navigated profound historical shifts. These included post-9/11 security regulations, the 2004 'Big-Bang' EU enlargement, the digital transition to e-customs, and the 2008 financial crisis.

This chapter explores the key milestones in O.C.E.A.N's journey - such as securing crucial legal protections for tax exemptions under Article 786 and Article 148, achieving AEO certification, and hosting landmark delegation visits in Genoa and Porto - which proved that the gritty, time-sensitive realities of the quay could be successfully harmonised with the high-level discourse of Brussels.

Introduction

Benvenuti. My name is Alfredo Tosato from ANPAN, the Italian Ship Suppliers Association. I served as O.C.E.A.N Vice Chairman from 2009 to 2011 and as Chairman of the European Ship Suppliers Organisation from 2011 to 2015.

Looking back at the decade from 2000 to 2010 feels much like reading the pages of an epic maritime novel, where every stormy chapter ultimately tested our resilience and proved our worth.

Over these ten transformative years, our European community did not merely survive the seismic shifts of security, digitalisation, and enlargement; we stood shoulder-to-shoulder with Brussels to forge a modern, unified path forward for the vital profession of ship supply.

In this chapter, I explore how the O.C.E.A.N transformed from a reactive group into a proactive architect of European maritime policy by mastering post-9/11 security, digital customs, and historic EU enlargement.

No surprise, for me, the defining moment of these efforts remains the Genoa Triumph, our crowning achievement where we successfully brought European lawmakers out of their Brussels offices and onto the quayside to witness firsthand why our profession matters

Sei pronto?

Let's get into it.

Regulatory Developments in Europe in the 2000s

My grandfather used to say that life is much like navigating an old wooden vessel through a sudden storm on the Mediterranean. You hold the wheel tight, trust the compass, and watch the horizon.

When I look back at the decade spanning from 2000 to 2010, I see those exact waters. They were the times of the European Commission presidencies of my fellow Italian Romano Prodi, from 1999 to 2004, and José Manuel Barroso from Portugal, from 2004 to 2014.

It was a remarkable ten-year stretch that completely reshaped our continent, our businesses, and our daily lives as ship suppliers.

The decade began with the 9/11 disaster.

I remember that morning. I had just arrived, having driven over the night through the desert and over mountains, from Aden to Sana'a (Republic of Yemen), and walked to my local office.

I passed in front of a TV shop and saw, live, the collapsing of the first tower. The images from New York were impossible to comprehend. The world as we knew it fractured in a single morning.

It took me 3 days to escape from Sana'a, pass through Abu Dhabi and Kuwait, and safely return home to Italy.

Once arrived, I noticed how much Europe had changed, too.

I realised with a chilling clarity that our borders, our open seas, and our bustling ports were no longer immune to the dark tides of the world.

As Italians say, non c'è rosa senza spine - there is no rose without thorns, and our peaceful European garden was suddenly facing a very sharp reality.

Brussels moved with a speed I had rarely seen in all my years in trade.

Our leaders locked arms with Washington, recognising that an attack on one free society was an attack on us all. The old bureaucratic walls between member states started to crumble under the weight of a shared vulnerability.

Suddenly, Europe had to act as one. The Union pushed through sweeping changes, binding our legal systems together with the European Arrest Warrant and tightening intelligence sharing through Europol so that criminals and extremists could no longer slip through the cracks of separate jurisdictions.

Down at the waterfront, our daily life transformed overnight.

Security at our European ports and airports grew stringent, turning what used to be casual customs checkpoints into fortress gates designed to protect every single container and supply route. It was a stressful time for ship suppliers trying to keep trade moving while adapting to endless new layers of red tape. Yet, looking back, it taught us an enduring lesson. When external storms gather, Europe cannot afford to stand as isolated islands. We had to become a single, resolute anchor.

There were more positive moments, though, too.

I still vividly recall that mild morning of 1 January 2002, when I walked across the wide stone paving of the port in La Spezia. Stopping by a familiar newsstand on the corner, I reached into my pocket and pulled out a brand-new euro banknote to pay for the morning paper.

Holding that fresh piece of paper money for the very first time felt surreal and wonderful.

For decades, our business had juggled the heavy mechanics of international trade across old borders and shifting national currencies.

But standing right there by the docks, watching the ships move in and out of the harbour while holding the physical proof of a united continent in the palm of my hand, I knew everything had changed. As we say in Italy, chi la dura la vince - if you persevere, you win. That single banknote felt like the victory of a shared European dream finally coming to life.

For us in the maritime supply sector, this single change was nothing short of a small miracle.

Suddenly, trading across borders stopped being a complicated puzzle of fluctuating national lire, francs, and Deutschmarks.

Transactions became smoother, prices clearer, and our supply chains more united. It gave us a tangible sense of a shared home.

Then came 1 May 2004. This was the moment Europe tore down its old walls during the historic big bang enlargement.

That was the unforgettable day when the big bang enlargement tore down old dividing lines and ten new countries joined the European family overnight, stretching our community from the Baltic to the Mediterranean: Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

For ship suppliers, this meant our network expanded instantly.

Ports that once felt distant and complicated suddenly became part of our daily backyard. A few years later, in 2007, the welcoming circle grew even wider as Romania and Bulgaria joined our ranks.

Our maritime routes grew richer, and our professional community stronger.

Of course, a large ship encounters rough weather.

Midway through the decade, the European project hit a temporary squall when voters in France and the Netherlands questioned the proposed **European Constitution**.

For a moment, policymakers in Brussels held their collective breath. But Europe is resilient.

Instead of giving up, leaders went back to the drawing board and crafted the **Treaty of Lisbon**, which finally came into force at the end of 2009. It gave the Union sharper tools, a clearer voice on the global stage, and a stronger framework to protect our shared rights.

At the same time, **our passport-free Schengen zone kept growing**, allowing our delivery trucks and service teams to cross borders without endless delays at customs checkpoints. Time is our most precious currency in ship supply; when a vessel is waiting in port for spare parts and provisions, every single minute counts.

Yet, no journey is without its tests.

Just as we were mastering these new rules, the **global financial crash struck in 2008**, quickly turning into the Eurozone sovereign debt crisis by 2010. It was a harsh wake-up call. Ports grew quieter for a brief moment, credit tightened, and businesses across Europe had to tighten their belts. But just as lighthouse keepers keep the flame burning through the darkest nights, our industry adapted, tightened our operations, and weathered the storm together. During this era, customs policy underwent a seismic transformation as the European Union prioritised stringent security measures to align with global trends.

While the Commission wisely avoided the impracticality of total container screening, it introduced the mandatory **Entry Summary Declaration (ENS)** and the **Import Control System (ICS)**, alongside their export counterparts, the **Exit Summary Declaration (EXS)** and the **Export Control System (ECS)**.

Throughout this time, the **Authorised Economic Operator (AEO)** system became the defining system for the industry. It required small and medium-sized suppliers to integrate high-stakes security and compliance protocols into their daily operations, a challenge most have since met with pride and resilience. Today, I am proud to say that most EU ship suppliers are AEO certified.

The Security Amendment of the Community Customs Code

The key legislative customs measure we had to deal with at the time was Regulation (EC) No 648/2005 (adopted on 13 April 2005), which amended the 1992 Community Customs Code. Subsequent implementing rules, such as Commission Regulation (EC) No 1875/2006, included, for the first time, rules specifically for operational contexts like ship and aircraft supplies.

In particular, Article 786 (Paragraph 2b) explicitly mandated that the formal export declaration rules had to be used when [EU] Community goods were delivered tax-exempt as aircraft and ship supplies, regardless of the ultimate destination of the vessel or aircraft.

I need to pause here for a moment. Let's remember the exact text:

COMMISSION REGULATION (EEC) No 2454/93 of 2 July 1993

Laying down provisions for the implementation of Council Regulation (EEC) No 2913/92 establishing the Community Customs Code (amended on 21 May 2010)

CHAPTER 2 Permanent exportation

Article 786

1. The export procedure, within the meaning of Article 161(1) of the Code, shall be used where Community goods are to be brought to a destination outside the customs territory of the Community.

2. The formalities concerning the export declaration laid down in this chapter shall also be used in cases:

(a) where Community goods are to move to and from territories within the customs territory of the Community where Directive 2006/112/EC or Directive 2008/118/EC does not apply;

(b) Where community goods are delivered tax-exempt as aircraft and ship supplies, regardless of the destination of the aircraft or ship.

However, in the cases referred to under points (a) and (b), it shall not be necessary to include in the export declaration the particulars for an exit summary declaration set out in Annex 30A.

That single sentence under (b) in the EU's rulebook is the quiet bedrock of our entire profession!

Before Article 786(2b) came along, delivering provisions, deck stores, and duty-free goods to vessels was a messy patchwork of national rules and customs grey areas across European ports.

For a ship supplier, why did this matter so much?

The Legal Shield for Tax Exemption: Because ships sail out into international waters, the goods we deliver - food, engine parts, bonded stores - are legally entitled to be exempt from VAT and excise duties. Without a formalised, EU-wide export procedure specifically recognising ship supplies, local customs offices could reject our paperwork, leaving our clients and us exposed to heavy tax liabilities. Article 786(2b) gave us a uniform, bulletproof legal passport across every port in Europe, proving beyond a doubt that these goods were officially leaving the EU fiscal territory.

Certainty Regardless of Destination: Ships rarely travel in straight lines. A vessel might load provisions in Genoa, drop off part of the crew in a non-EU port, and make stops elsewhere. By explicitly stating that these rules applied regardless of the vessel's ultimate destination, the regulation cut through endless bureaucratic arguments. It recognised that the moment provisions cross the gangplank of a ship leaving for international shipping lanes, they are effectively exported.

As we say, *carta canta* - paper speaks. That article gave our industry the exact paper trail we needed to operate legally, protect our tax exemptions, and keep ships provisioned without drowning in local red tape.

Eventually, the decade was drawing to a close, and Brussels was busy drafting the Modernised Customs Code in 2008, setting gears in motion that would rattle port offices for years.

E-customs

Yet long before that ink dried, a quiet revolution had begun in 2004 when the European Union announced its vision for an entirely paperless trade environment.

Following a landmark European Commission communication in late 2003, Decision No 70/2008/EC laid down the law.

Piles of physical paperwork were marked for extinction, replaced by interoperable electronic networks that we had to learn to master. That digital shift evolved steadily through later reforms, forever changing how we clear goods at the dockside.

Official Controls Update

Yet, customs forms were only part of our daily trial. Around the same time, the Official Control Regulation hit our desks, bringing a rigorous wave of food safety and hygiene scrutiny.

Suddenly, every provision we loaded onto a vessel had to match stringent EU health standards.

We had to draft careful position papers explaining the unique realities of ship chandling so that lawmakers in Brussels understood how food supplies worked on a rolling deck. In those testing moments, OCEAN had a pillar of strength in Mr Dick Peterse from the Netherlands.

His steady guidance throughout the 2000s helped us keep our quay-side operations fully aligned with European health rules without losing our practical edge.

EMCS

Just as we caught our breath from digital customs and food safety, the paper trail for bonded goods vanished into thin air. The arrival of the Excise Movement and Control System (EMCS) meant the end of the manual paper documents we had used for decades to supply vessels with fuel, tobacco, and alcohol.

Moving from traditional paperwork to electronic tracking felt like trying to change a ship's engine while sailing through a gale. We had to synchronise our internal systems with live electronic monitoring of duty-suspended goods, completely reshaping how we managed tax-exempt ship stores.

EMCS officially became operational in April 2010, allowing member states to begin processing electronic administrative documents. It became fully compulsory across the European Union on 1 January 2011, completely replacing the old paper-based accompanying administrative documents.

OCEAN actively followed this development over the years and became a member of the EU Commission's Excise Contact Group (ECG).

Recasting VAT Law

VAT also evolved, but less so for ship stores.

While the landmark VAT Directive of 1977 served as the backdrop, the 2000s saw it replaced by Directive 2006/112/EC, which sought to simplify and modernise VAT rules across the Union.

For ship suppliers, this was critical because the tax-exempt status of their deliveries relies on a precise interpretation of these VAT rules.

Throughout this legislative transition, OCEAN's consistent advocacy was vital to ensure that the fundamental principle that ship supplies are exports remained enshrined in the updated European VAT framework, shielding the industry from potential tax liabilities during the cross-border movement of goods.

Later, Dirk Cupido spearheaded this effort during his time as the VAT rapporteur for OCEAN and Vice Chair, which resulted in Directive 2006/112/EC explicitly addressing ship supplies under Article 148. That specific section mandated that Member States exempt value-added tax (VAT) on goods delivered to fuel, provision, and equip seagoing vessels.

It covered everything essential for a ship's journey, including:

- Foodstuffs and provisions for consumption by the crew and passengers on board.
- Fuel, lubricants, and gas are required to operate the vessel's engines and machinery.
- Spare parts, safety equipment, ropes, and maintenance supplies incorporated into or used by the ship.

By bringing these exemptions into a clear, unified text, Article 148 gave our industry the legal certainty that provisioning international vessels would not trigger domestic VAT burdens, protecting the smooth flow of maritime trade across every European port.

So, you see, a lot was going on in the early 2000s!

Looking back at those ten eventful years, I realise that the story of the European Union between 2000 and 2010 is ultimately our story too. It proves that when we pull together, we can overcome any rough sea.

European Policy Issues Addressed by O.C.E.A.N in the 2000s

The 2000s marked a pivotal era in which OCEAN shifted from a reactive advocacy body to a proactive partner in European policy. The following developments defined the organisation's engagement with the European Commission:

OCEAN: Member of the EU Trade Contact Group of the EU Commission

I remember the quiet tension in the room when we finally secured our seat at the DG TAXUD Trade Contact Group table. It was more than 20 years in the making.

Ever since that first formative draft of the ship supply rules landed on our desks in 1976, we have fought to ensure our profession had an official voice within the European Economic Community.

We didn't wait for an invitation; we went straight to the heart of policy development.

Already in 1976, OCEAN had secured its seat at the heart of the Consultative Committee for Customs Problems, participating as the recognised expert on ship supply, starting with that very first crucial meeting in May 1976. That early presence laid the foundation for decades of trust, proving that when lawmakers and industry practitioners talk openly, everyone wins.

Being part of the Trade Contact Group meant we were sitting directly across from the architects of the Modernised Customs Code (MCC) and, later, the Union Customs Code (UCC). It meant we could translate the messy, time-sensitive reality of delivering fresh food, fuel, and deck stores into practical rules that lawmakers could actually understand, just like we have always done for more than two decades. Looking back, that strategic appointment turned OCEAN from an outside voice into an essential partner.

We protected our industry from drowning in fragmented national rules, proving that when trade associations and European officials work side by side, the arteries of maritime commerce stay open, secure, and strong.

The 9/11 Security Paradigm Shift

I also remember the fierce urgency in our meetings right after the 2001 security crisis shook the world. Brussels rushed to secure every inch of Europe's borders, erecting digital walls and imposing mandatory pre-arrival data rules for everything crossing our frontiers.

We had to step in immediately. We argued a fundamental truth that lawmakers sometimes overlooked: when our members load provisions, fuel, and spare parts onto a vessel bound for international waters, those goods are not entering the domestic commerce of another nation. They are part of the ship's life support system.

By leaning on the global standards of the Revised Kyoto Convention under the World Customs Organisation, OCEAN secured a common-sense solution. We carved out an exemption that spared ship supplies from rigid pre-arrival notification deadlines and heavy security data burdens. It was a defining moment for our organisation, proving that we could protect the breathless speed of port operations without ever compromising on safety.

The AEO Revolution

When the Authorised Economic Operator (AEO) scheme first rolled out across Europe, it initially looked like a fortress built strictly for multinational giants with armies of compliance officers.

For smaller ship supply family businesses working around the clock at the dockside, the initial criteria felt completely out of reach.

Stepping into the drafting working groups changed the trajectory.

Sitting at those tables ensured the rules could actually work for independent, medium-sized chandlers without crushing them under impossible administrative weight.

Seeing OCEAN members achieve AEO status across the continent remains a defining milestone, proving that strict security and smooth trade operations can go hand in hand.

Ship Supply = Exports

That same relentless spirit drove the fight to codify our most fundamental truth: ship supplies equal exports.

Anchoring arguments to Article 786(2)(b) of the Community Customs Code Implementation Provisions protected the tax-exempt status of our stores, ensuring customs authorities understood that the moment provisions are loaded onto a vessel heading out to international waters, those goods have officially left the territory, no matter where the ship's journey ultimately takes it.

Background

Article 786(2)(b) of the Implementing Provisions to the Community Customs Code (Commission Regulation (EEC) No 2454/93, as amended by Regulation (EU) No 430/2010) plays a critical role in international trade, logistics, and maritime law.

Article 786(2)(b) mandates that the formalities concerning the standard export declaration must be used:

"where Community goods are delivered tax-exempt as aircraft and ship supplies, irrespective of the destination of the aircraft or ship."

When did Ship Supplies leave the EU?

Is ship supply really the same as an export? There was a heated debate across Europe on this issue during this time. I remember a vivid conversation with our long-standing Chairman of the OCEAN Working Group on Customs & Taxation, Mr Alves Pinto. He has been a ship supplier from Porto for almost half a Century (started in 1972). I asked him a fundamental question: When have ship supplies left the EU to count as genuine exports?

Sounds like a question with such an easy answer, right? Here is what he said:

"Ship supplies delivered on board of a vessel, for consumption by crew or machine, have left the EU when that same vessel has left the EU.

What EU?

Oh, sorry, I mean the Customs Territory of the EU as defined by the Union Customs Code.

Well, ok, so when does a vessel leave the EU customs territory? Easy answer, too, right?

Well, maybe not so.

Some would argue that ship stores, by definition, are meant to remain on the vessel until they are used up; otherwise, they would not be called "ship stores" but "traditional cargo".

I don't deliver ship stores in containers to be loaded onto a vessel at the departure port and unloaded at the arrival port for consumption in a different country.

Ship stores have one destination: The vessel! Not the country.

Consequently, ship stores should not be treated like traditional cargo. Once onboard a seagoing vessel, and that vessel is leaving the port of a Member State, the supply is done.

The goods never see the EU again. Sure, ship supplies may now dip in and out of other EU ports as more traditional cargo is loaded and unloaded before the final journey in international waters.

Yes, the actual ship supplies are not unloaded again; they usually remain on board until they are fully consumed. As a result, I would argue that any EU exit is completed, at the latest, when the vessel departed the port.

What about the 12-mile zone?

Territorial waters, as defined by the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, are a belt of coastal waters extending at most 12 nautical miles (22 km; 14 mi) from the baseline (usually the mean low-water mark) of a coastal state. The territorial sea is regarded as an extension of the state's sovereign territory.

If we apply the 12-mile zone as the point where the EU customs territory ends, although this is not formally defined, then most ship supplies would also leave the EU when a vessel leaves an EU port. Hardly ever can a seagoing vessel stay within this zone once it has left the port of a Member State.

Does the vessel's nationality matter?

Some argue that if a vessel's flag is European, then the supply to vessels in EU harbours should be treated as an intra-EU supply. Ship supplies delivered to vessels would not have left the EU.

This may be plausible if the vessel was in a dry dock or anchored for a long period. But given that every vessel usually leaves the port as soon as possible (charges!) and will also leave the 12-mile zone, we are back where we were. Ship supply leaves the EU once it's loaded on board a seagoing vessel.

No matter how you spin it, the analysis points in one direction: Ship supplies are not like traditional cargo. They stay and are consumed on board the seagoing vessel. Once delivered, they have been removed from EU free circulation; they are gone.

Finito. Done!

A vessel leaving the port of the EU should be enough for customs officials to certify that these special goods have left the EU".

I can only agree with this analysis, Mr Pinto. Thank you.

Technical Challenges of "Open Movements"

The transition to digital customs clearance promised a smooth electronic horizon, yet OCEAN members quickly ran into a stubborn barrier known as the "[open movement](#)".

The computerised customs system of the EU Member States was designed to automatically close export declarations the moment proof of loading was verified, instantly safeguarding our vital VAT and excise exemptions.

In fact, under Article 796d(2) of the CCC Implementation Provisions, the border customs office was legally required to forward an exit confirmation message to the export office by the end of the working day following the goods' departure.

In practice, however, things rarely went according to plan.

When border authorities failed to transmit that message on time (after a ship supply had successfully taken place) or neglected to recognise ship supplies as genuine exports, open export movements remained dangerously unclosed—resulting in operational consequences such as delayed confirmation of exports or tax uncertainty.

Because different member states imposed unobserved local hurdles or overlooked strict legal timelines, companies found themselves carrying an undeserved administrative weight for provisions that had already left the European Union.

Remember, vessels do not select their ports based on whether local customs officials fully understand our trade, meaning our operators had to untangle these phantom open files through sheer persistence constantly!

So, we had to get to work, and I need to thank our Dutch colleague Peter de Haas Jr. for this great support, time and effort during this time, travelling back and forth to Brussels to talk to EU Commission officials on behalf of all of us.

Ultimately, using the concept of "alternative proof", we managed to obtain a workable solution. Today, new IT solutions have made "open movements" a challenge of the past for ship suppliers.

Organisational Developments in O.C.E.A.N in the 2000s

When [Jens Olsen](#) took over as Chairman of OCEAN between 1997 and 2003, he charted a calm course through waters that were just beginning to churn with new European security demands. Jens wrote Chapter 2 of this book.

We needed that northern resilience.

Soon after, [Michel van Hulle](#) stepped forward from Belgium to guide us from 2003 to 2007, bringing a grounded, pragmatic touch to the deck as we faced sweeping modernisations. You have heard from him in Chapter 1.

Then came [Stefan Ericson](#) from Sweden, the first time a Chairman from Sweden was at the helm of the association. He wrote chapter 4 of this book. Stefan held the O.C.E.A.N Chairmanship from 2007 to 2011 and steered our community through the tangled digital maze of electronic data exchange. This was the time when I served as Vice-Chair, eventually taking over as Chair in 2011, a memorable moment.

[Matti Kokkala](#) was elected as O.C.E.A.N's new treasurer, ensuring financial continuity for the organisation's expanded activities.

Each of these leaders brought more than just administrative skill; they brought a shared belief that our community could adapt, thrive, and secure its rightful place in the evolving story of the European Union.

Administration Matters

Behind every presidential term I served, our Secretariat provided the steady heartbeat that kept our institutional memory alive and our voice sharp within the halls of Brussels.

The first major hurdle we faced was shifting our lobby anchor away from Den Haag, where [Laurens van der Ziel](#) had guided our secretariat.

We needed to be closer to the pulse of power.

Moving our partnership to [Dr Karsten Seidel](#) in Brussels changed everything for our advocacy. Because Dr Seidel already represented three other bodies, he walked the corridors of the European institutions daily, bringing an invaluable direct line to the Commission straight to our doorstep.

Nurturing strong ties with the European Commission and related institutions was always at the heart of our mission. Having Dr Seidel and several of our board members step into official working and advisory roles gave our profession a genuine seat at the table.

One memory that always brings a smile involves a special pre-Christmas gathering Karsten organised right in the heart of Brussels: Commissioners and influential maritime figures filled the room, sharing a festive evening that blended high-level policy dialogue with genuine human warmth.

It was a triumph that laid the groundwork for the kind of celebrations we now host for our fifty-year jubilee, proving that diplomacy is always sweeter when shared among friends.

Between 1998 and 2003, he anchored our administrative core with scholarly precision, laying deep roots at our Brussels headquarters. We owe him a great debt for putting O.C.E.A.N on the map in Brussels.

He eventually handed the torch to [Baastian Zwiijnenburg](#) from the Netherlands, who transitioned our office through 2003 and 2004 with a sharp Dutch eye for operational clarity while we tried to find a new foothold in Brussels.

Following his tenure, our secretariat entered a long partnership with another European trade association, the [European Meat and Livestock Trading Union \(UECBV\)](#), as it was known, led by [Jean-Luc Mériaux](#) from Brussels. Mr Mériaux was our excellent Secretary General from 2005 to 2019 – an impressive 14 years! He, along with Senior Policy Advisor and Brussels Representative [Mr Arne Mielken](#), anchored our European presence through years of monumental regulatory shifts, keeping us steady when the tides of law turned around us.

Around the time of the millennium change, we also brought in [Spencer Eade](#), the ISSA Secretary in London, to act as our administrative secretary. That move tied our board communication together with a professional thread, giving real structure to our daily operations.

When we tried keeping our treasury functions under his London roof, things did not quite click as planned, so [Jens Olsen](#) took on the ledger for a couple of years before handing those reins over to [Matti Kokkala](#) from Finland.

From O.C.E.A.N. to OCEAN: Inside the Strategic Rebrand and Digital Overhaul

The Porto Spring OCEAN Board meeting decided to overhaul and revamp the OCEAN Website, and adopted a new identity for OCEAN.



The 2009 – 2025 Logo of OCEAN

This modern logo featured a dynamically tilted deep-blue ship's helm encircled by gold European stars, symbolising navigation and cross-border cooperation.

Formerly punctuated as O.C.E.A.N., the organisation dropped the dots and was renamed OCEAN, giving it a contemporary, high-tech corporate edge.

Together, these elements captured the essence of international maritime trade at that time and the vital logistical support required to keep global fleets provisioned and moving forward.

We also presented the new website, www.shipsupply.eu, and the new OCEAN logo in the European Parliament on 5 November 2009.

But this was not about cosmetics; it was a discussion on the future of ship supply.

Standing before lawmakers, our Chair Stefan Ericson, alongside ISSA President Jens Olsen, a member of the European Parliament, Graham Watson, and Mirosław Zieliński, Director of Customs from DG TAXUD of the European Commission, faced a room full of eager minds.

Customs expert and chair of our customs working group, Peter de Haas Jr., guided our debate on the Modernised Customs Code (MCC) with a steady hand.

We wanted everyone in that room to understand that behind every customs rule lies the livelihood of a ship supplier. As we shared views on the future of trade, I felt an immense sense of pride. We were showing Europe that our voice matters.

Looking Beyond the Horizon

Our family grew wider and stronger with the turn of the century.

When the European Union welcomed [Cyprus](#) and [Malta](#) to the fold in 2004, our maritime routes shifted southward, bringing new energy and distinct regulatory traditions right into our midst.

By late 2009, our membership map also needed redrawing:

On 6 November that year, we stretched our arms beyond traditional EU borders: Welcoming the [Norwegian Maritime Suppliers](#) and the [Turkish Ship Suppliers Association](#) as observers changed the rhythm of our community.

I still smile when I think of the dedication



Jens Olsen (ISSA President), Mirosław Zieliński (Director, Customs, DG TAXUD), Stefan Ericson (OCEAN Chair) at the OCEAN debate at the European Parliament on 5 November 2009

shown by [Ms Marit Eggen](#) from Norway and [George Saris](#) from Turkey. Their energy brought fresh, valuable perspectives straight from major seafaring nations that sat outside the Brussels bubble. They reminded us that European ship supply cooperation does not stop neatly at a political boundary.

As the decade closed, the Cyprus Ship Suppliers Association (CYSSA) had also joined OCEAN.

Around the same time, voices from [Latvia](#) and [Bulgaria](#) joined our chorus. Representatives from over fifteen countries sat around our tables, turning what could have been a chaotic Babel of national interests into a single, coherent European voice.

Harmonising those divergent laws and customs was no small feat.

Yet, we managed it because our shared commitment to the maritime profession always outweighed our differences.

As we closed out that decade, OCEAN stood as a battle-hardened, unified family. We had weathered regulatory storms, debated customs codes, and built lasting bridges with the European Commission. We learned that when lawmakers and industry professionals sit together to craft sensible policy, everybody wins.

Highlight of the Decade

If I may be forgiven for looking beyond the formal halls of Brussels, my fondest memories of that decade actually belong to three extraordinary milestones elsewhere.

True fellowship cannot always be legislated in a meeting room. Sometimes, it has to be forged where fierce commercial competitors can finally break bread, look each other in the eye, and realise we are all sailing in the same boat.

25th Anniversary

Our first grand gathering took place at the dawn of the decade in 2001, when we dropped anchor on the historic [HMS Belfast on the River Thames in London](#) to celebrate twenty-five years of OCEAN. Standing together on that venerable ship made it a day to remember truly.

As the decade drew toward its close, two more unforgettable chapters unfolded in the sunlit ports of Genoa and Porto:

The Genoa Triumph

Under the warm Italian sky in Genoa in February 2009, we hosted the European Commission's "Subgroup A" of the EC-MCCIP (Modernised Customs Code Implementation Project) for an intensive three-day session.

We brought over twenty officials from the European Commission and ten different Member States



Alfredo Tosato (OCEAN Chair), Michael Lux, Head of Unit, Customs, DG TAXUD, with representatives of the Port Authority, Subgroup A Meeting on the Modernised Customs Code (MCC), Genoa, Italy, February 2009

down to the Ligurian coast for a simple reason. We wanted them to feel the pulse of our profession. With the invaluable support of local friends like ANPAN, ANASPED, ATRI, Costa Crociere, Ligabue Catering, and Nuova Darsena Shippers, we opened our doors wide.

Walking those busy quays, our guests saw firsthand why ship supply is a trade unlike any other. You cannot manage maritime logistics with generic rubber-stamp rules. I was convinced that "Brussels" needed to witness our reality to appreciate why we require dedicated, uniform procedures across the entire Union. Chi non risica, non rosica, as the old saying goes; you must step into the arena to win change.

I am, to this day, grateful to Mr Michael Lux, Head of the Unit of the Customs Legislation of DG TAXUD from the European Commission, who listened closely during those dockside talks. When he spoke to our community afterwards, his words carried reassurance. He acknowledged that walking our warehouses and meeting local freight forwarders, chambers of commerce, and maritime agents gave his department a clearer lens on our daily struggles. He left us with a promise that economic operators in our sector could always count on EU support.

That visit proved that European law works best when lawmakers and practitioners share a cup of coffee and look each other in the eye.

I remember it fondly.

A Toast to Tomorrow in Porto

The final highlight took place only a few years later. In May 2009, standing in the dimly lit Sandeman Cellars of Vila Nova de Gaia, we raised a glass of aged tawny port in a traditional brinde to toast a digital frontier. The rich wine reflected centuries of maritime heritage, yet our conversation focused entirely on the future.

I turned to Maria-Manuela Cabral, the European Commission's Head of Unit for e-customs, and asked her a simple question. Was the impending July rollout of computerised customs procedures a revolution or merely an evolution?

The Associação Portuguesa de Fornecedores de Navios (APFN) had brought our OCEAN Board to the historic city of Porto for this exact dialogue. Mr Pinto, our esteemed Portuguese Board representative, proved to be an unmatched host equipped with a deep well of practical legislative knowledge. He guided us through local supply warehouses and later arranged a voyage on the traditional rabelos down the Douro River. Drifting beneath the majestic Ponte D. Luis, the scenery was magnificent. The business at hand was critical.

We needed to understand how decisions drafted in Brussels translated to local docks. Joaquim Ferreira, Fatima Gaio, and Fernando Pereira from the Portuguese customs directorate joined us to dissect the incoming legal and IT shifts.

We debated the practical realities of the Modernised Customs Code and warehousing procedures before turning our attention to the new Automated Export System. Tracing the journey of port wine from cellar to ship provided the perfect backdrop to analyse the computerisation of the excise control system. Theory met practice in a highly tangible way.

Having Mrs Cabral travel to Portugal demonstrated the European Commission's genuine commitment to transparent dialogue.

Lawmakers and economic operators sat at the same table to work through complex digital transitions during turbulent economic times. We built a vital foundation of trust that afternoon. It sent a clear signal that Brussels valued practical input from the front line of maritime logistics.

That spirit of collaboration continues to drive our industry forward into an increasingly digital and sustainable era of global trade. We proved that we can honour our European traditions while fully embracing legislative innovation.



OCEAN Board members meet in Porto in Spring 2009 along with Maria Manuela Cabral, Head of Unit, Risk Management and Security, DG Taxation and Customs Union, European Commission

Legacy of the Decade

The legacy of OCEAN in the first decade of the 2000s is defined by its successful transformation from a reactive industry group into a mature, proactive architect of European customs policy.

By navigating the dual pressures of the post-9/11 security revolution and the onset of customs digitalisation, the organisation secured its role as an indispensable partner to the European Commission.

Through tireless advocacy, most notably the successful push to exempt ship supplies from burdensome Entry/Exit Summary Declarations and the influential codification of their status as "exports", OCEAN defended the sector's operational flexibility against the rising tide of border securitisation.

This era of engagement, bolstered by the "Genoa Triumph" and the strategic partnership with DG TAXUD, culminated in clear regulatory victories, such as the confirmation in Article 20 of Regulation (EC) No 113/2010 that goods intended for on-board consumption maintained their special status.

Ultimately, OCEAN's legacy in the 2000s lies in its ability to harmonise the gritty, time-sensitive realities of the quay with the high-level discourse of Brussels, proving that the ancient mare liberum principle could be effectively modernised to sustain the vital artery of European ship supply in an age of unprecedented regulatory complexity.

I am proud of what we achieved.

CHAPTER 6: CUSTOMS REFORM & BREXIT (2010-2020) - BY DIRK CUPIDO

Executive Summary

In this chapter, former OCEAN Chairman Dirk Cupido reflects on the turbulent expanse of the 2010s.

From the heavy fog of the European sovereign debt crisis that threatened to fracture financial architectures to the political shock of Brexit and shifting transatlantic tides, the European maritime community faced extraordinary pressure.

Yet rather than panicking, industry leaders rolled up their sleeves to secure vital breakthroughs, such as the Union Customs Code Annex B, to bring order to chaotic quays, navigate complex veterinary rules, and welcome new members from the Baltic to the Black Sea with open arms.

Cupido emphasises that the core lesson to draw from this decade is simple and unshakeable: political maps will shift, economic storms will test collective resolve, and bureaucratic hurdles will try to slow progress, but true strength ultimately lies in human adaptability and daily dedication.

As he noted during OCEAN's 40th anniversary in 2016 and maintains today, European ship suppliers remain a reliable, strong, and stable partner to all vessels, captains, shipowners, and ship managers calling at European ports.

Introduction

I am Dirk Cupido, former Chairman of the Nederlandse Vereniging van Scheepsleveranciers (NVVS), the Dutch Ship Suppliers Association. I proudly served as OCEAN Vice-Chairman from 2011 to 2015 and as OCEAN Chairman from 2016 to 2019.

During this decade, our work successfully championed the vital UCC Annex B for ship supplies, so I will highlight that.

In this chapter, I am also encouraging you to read the major 2016 study on ship supply, a one-of-a-kind study that explains what ship supply is in a customs context.

I will also remember our OCEAN's 40th anniversary celebrations in 2016 and how we put EU engagement into action by holding OCEAN meetings from Riga to Sofia – remarkable events and locations!

Of course, the low point of this decade had to be the UK's decision to leave the European Union on 23 June 2016. So, for the second half of the decade, we were heavily involved in the political fallout and our Brexit preparation, which was hard for all of us.

Nevertheless, the decade proved that OCEAN's collaborative approach could deliver practical results that benefited the entire European maritime supply chain.

I wish you an enjoyable read.

Regulatory Developments in Europe in the 2010s

We are pragmatists in the Netherlands. We know that water finds a crack, and in this ten-year stretch, Europe had plenty of cracks to test.

Under the watchful eye of European Commission Presidents José Manuel Barroso and later Jean-Claude Juncker, the continent weathered profound storms.

The European Union experienced a relentless cycle of crisis, structural reinvention, and digital transformation.

As the dust settled from the 2008 global financial crash, the continent was immediately plunged into the sovereign debt crisis.

Europe at breaking point? Drowning in debt!

During the peak of the European sovereign debt crisis, starting in 2010, Greece came within a hair's breadth of sovereign bankruptcy and a forced exit from the Eurozone, a shock to all of us. Greece was soon followed by Ireland, Portugal, Spain, and Cyprus; all were drowning under mountains of unsustainable public debt.

For Greece, the situation degenerated into a terrifying free fall.

The Greek government revealed that its budget deficits had been vastly understated, triggering an immediate panic in global financial markets. Bond yields skyrocketed, locking Athens out of international borrowing markets and bringing the country to the absolute precipice of sovereign bankruptcy and a catastrophic exit from the euro.

What made the crisis so deeply threatening to the entire European project was the dangerous feedback loop between weak governments and fragile banks. European commercial banks, many of them German and French, held massive amounts of government bonds from these vulnerable countries. If Greece went bankrupt, those bonds would become worthless overnight, threatening to drag down banks across the continent and trigger a domino effect that could shatter Europe's entire financial architecture.

Brussels and the capitals of the Eurozone were forced into emergency mode, leading to sleepless nights of marathon crisis summits.

Leaders had to invent entirely new institutional machinery on the fly, as the EU treaties had never envisioned a mechanism for bailing out a bankrupt member state. This resulted in unprecedented and often bitterly contested rescue packages, orchestrated jointly by the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund. This triumvirate quickly became known across the continent simply as "the Troika."

In exchange for hundreds of billions of euros in bailout funds, debtor nations were subjected to crushing austerity measures.

Governments were forced to slash public spending, cut pensions, raise taxes, and sell off state assets. While these emergency interventions ultimately prevented a total collapse of the Eurozone and laid the groundwork for permanent stability firewalls like the European Stability Mechanism, the human cost was immense.

Across Athens, Dublin, and Lisbon, citizens took to the streets in fierce protest against the drastic economic medicine prescribed from Brussels.

For us in the maritime and logistics sectors, that paralysing wave of uncertainty hung like a heavy fog over every port, reminding us how fragile prosperity becomes when financial systems fracture and trust gives way to fear.

Amidst this heavy political weather, the European Commission pushed forward with sweeping structural integration to modernise the continent for the twenty-first century.

Brexit

The summer of 2016 brought an institutional shock that rattled the foundations of our trade, culminating in the United Kingdom's vote to leave the European Union and setting off years of intense EU-UK constitutional friction.

On 23 June 2016, the British public voted in favour of Brexit, or exit, from the European Union (EU). Of the British electorate, 17.4 million (51.9%) voted for Brexit, compared to 16.1 million (48.1%) for continued membership, with an overall turnout of 72.2%, higher than most expected.

UK LEAVE Campaign promises had painted a picture of effortless global trading realignment, yet reality quickly introduced a sobering maze of bureaucratic hurdles.

For the remaining twenty-seven member states (and certainly for the north of France, in Belgium, Germany and The Netherlands, where the North Sea has in modern history always served as a bustling highway rather than a barrier) this political divorce meant navigating the complex dismantling of integrated markets, forcing to maintain a disciplined, unified stance under EU Commission Special Brexit Negotiator Michel Barnier while managing the intricate redistribution of European agency seats and regulatory power. Leaving the European Union meant the loss of automatic EU membership benefits and rights - such as free movement for citizens, financial passporting for operators, and unrestricted integration across transport, trade, and regulatory frameworks, transforming the UK into a third country subject to border controls and customs formalities.

Beyond the political rhetoric, the practical fallout of Brexit directly targeted the operational pillars of our trade: customs rules, excise duties, and strict veterinary controls.

For ship suppliers operating on a strict just-in-time delivery schedule, the sudden re-introduction of a hard customs border meant managing complex clearance declarations for thousands of individual micro-consignments rather than enjoying seamless, paperless EU trade.

Furthermore, maintaining our strict exemptions from VAT and excise duties became vastly more complicated when dealing with a newly minted third country across the North Sea, risking severe cost distortions between ports.

Compounding this, the mandatory enforcement of veterinary checks on provisions of animal origin introduced layers of health documentation, transit certificates, and border inspections that threatened to delay perishable stores and render time-critical maritime logistics entirely unviable.

I vividly remember that throughout the agonising negotiation years from 2016 to the end of 2020, the entire Brexit process was dogged by that classic British idiom about "wanting to have your cake and eat it too", as the pro-Brexit government continuously demanded all the lucrative privileges of the single market without bearing any of its regulatory responsibilities.

Trying to cherry-pick favourite benefits while severing deep institutional ties only created unnecessary administrative chaos for our supply chains, proving once and for all that you cannot discard the rules of the club and still expect to enjoy full access to its rewards.

Watching this self-inflicted political upheaval unfold from across the water, many of us back could only shake our heads and mutter that classic Dutch sentiment, 'een kat in de zak kopen', because trading the proven stability of the single market for an unverified illusion of total independence truly felt like buying 'a pig in a poke'.

By January 2019, sitting against a ticking countdown, our maritime community faced the stark prospect of a disruptive separation that threatened the very heartbeat of just-in-time logistics.

Make no mistake about it: Trade with the United Kingdom was the absolute lifeblood for the northern French, the German, the Belgian and the Dutch economies until Brexit, anchoring our position as Europe's gateway through vital hubs like Le Havre, Zeebrugge, Hamburg and Rotterdam, where bonded goods, perishables, and ship stores flow continuously across the Channel.

As John Davey, former OCEAN Vice Chair, underscored on behalf of our British partners and OCEAN, our profession relies utterly on frictionless borders and simple customs regimes to deliver thousands of mixed provisions around the clock, meaning that sudden veterinary documentation delays or hard border checks risk paralysing the deep commercial ties linking British harbours directly to EU ship supply warehouses.

Ultimately, the 2016 to 2020 transition laid bare the indispensable value of deep regulatory alignment, reminding us that European maritime commerce cannot thrive behind rigid tariff walls or heavy-handed border checks.

COVID-19 lurking

And of course, there was more trouble brewing ahead as we closed the decade. The COVID-19 pandemic began formally in late 2019, with the initial outbreak originating in Wuhan, China, in December 2019, before the World Health Organisation officially declared it a global pandemic in March 2020.

My friend Wolfgang Sump will have a lot to say about this in the next Chapter.

Key European Policy Issues Addressed by OCEAN in the 2010s

Ship Supply in the Union Customs Code

The 2010s marked a transformative period for OCEAN and the European ship supply industry. As the decade opened, the organisation found itself at the forefront of implementing the most significant customs reform in European history to date - the Union Customs Code (UCC).

The UCC is the successor to the Modernised Customs Code. This law was originally adopted in 2008 to overhaul the European Union's trade rules. Still, it quickly became unviable because its heavy reliance on a fully decentralised, paperless electronic IT infrastructure across all member states could not realistically be built within the strict deadlines set at the time.

Recognising that national customs administrations were struggling to synchronise their technological systems simultaneously, the European Union repealed it. Instead, it enacted the Union Customs Code in 2013 to establish a more practical, phased legal framework.

The Union Customs Code was ultimately introduced to streamline and completely digitalise customs procedures across all member states, eliminate fragmented national interpretations, and legally bind twenty-eight distinct customs authorities to a unified, modern, and paperless single market environment.

Throughout the evolution from the MCC to the UCC, OCEAN's Senior Policy Advisor Arne Mielken was a constant participant in the Trade Contact Group and working groups to assist the EU Commission in drafting the delegated and implementing acts, from policy participant to policy partner, culminating in unprecedented collaboration with EU institutions and the achievement of harmonised ship supply guidance across all member states.

Under the Union Customs Code, specifically through the crucial provisions of Article 269 and Article 270, ship supply is officially recognised as associated with export or re-export operations for goods intended for use on board vessels, such as provisions and equipment. Let's take a look:

Article 269 Export of Union goods

Union goods to be taken out of the customs territory of the Union shall be placed under the export procedure.

Paragraph 1 shall not apply to any of the following Union goods: [...]

(c) goods delivered, VAT or excise duty exempted, as aircraft or ship supplies, regardless of the destination of the aircraft or ship, for which a proof of such supply is required; [...]

The formalities concerning the export customs declaration laid down in the customs legislation shall apply in the cases referred to in points ([...]) (c) of paragraph 2.

However, a crucial question remains:

What does this bold sentence actually mean in practice?

It is so difficult to understand that neither practitioners nor customs authorities know how to implement it.

What's worse, there were no implementing provisions or delegated acts foreseen in the UCC for this article, meaning that further explanations and legal texts to help enact this provision were not provided.

That one article, as complicated and incomprehensible as it was, was all we got!

We hoped this would provide legal certainty that goods delivered to ships leaving EU ports can exit the customs territory under specific customs supervision, without unnecessary duties or conflicting national interpretations, ensuring uniform and streamlined treatment across all European ports. Yet confusion was ripe! And Member States interpreted the rules differently.

European Veterinary Rules changed again

Behind every crate of fresh provisions delivered to a ship lies a quiet, rigorous world of health and sanitary checks that keeps our entire industry safe.

During the second decade of this century, the European Union rolled out [Regulation \(EU\) 2017/625](#), completely overhauling the old Official Controls Regulation into a unified, risk-based framework for the entire agri-food chain.

This law, universally known as the [Official Controls Regulation](#), erected a supreme legislative umbrella over the entire agri-food chain, sweeping away a tangled web of older, fragmented directives governing food safety, animal health, and welfare into a single, rigorous framework.

Rather than relying on routine or arbitrary checks, this modern architecture anchored its strength in a smart, risk-based approach, directing enforcement resources where they mattered most while utilising advanced digital infrastructure like IMSOC and the TRACES platform to track goods seamlessly through electronic documents like the Common Health Entry Document.

The [Information Management System for Official Controls \(IMSOC\)](#) is the central digital architecture established by the European Union to connect, manage, and streamline all data related to official health and safety inspections across the agri-food chain. Think of it as the ultimate digital spine that links national authorities, border posts, and regulatory databases together so that information flows without friction.

Within this overarching digital ecosystem, **TRACES (TRAdE Control and Expert System)** serves as the indispensable operational tool that we interact with daily in the maritime and trade sectors.

Today, TRACES is the online management platform used to track the movement of animals, food, feed, and plants across borders, using standardised electronic certificates such as the [Common Health Entry Document \(CHED\)](#).

By replacing mountains of paperwork with real-time electronic tracking, TRACES allows customs and veterinary authorities to verify certificates instantly, monitor third-country goods entering European ports, and ensure that every single item destined for ship stores or provisions remains fully transparent, safe, and traceable from origin to vessel.

For our community of ship suppliers, this legislative shift was monumental.

Why EU veterinary policy matters to ship suppliers comes down to one fundamental reality: a vast share of our provisions, whether for hardworking crews or international passengers, consists of products of animal origin.

While domestic retail operates smoothly under standard EU market rules, our world of bonded, duty-unpaid goods is entirely different. Every single transit procedure demands precise veterinary oversight, from authenticated copies of the Common Veterinary Entry Document to stringent traceability measures that track goods from port entry through bonded storage right up to the vessel. Throughout my tenure and across the years, OCEAN has maintained a vital, continuous dialogue with the European Commission's Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE) to protect our industry's interests while upholding the highest standards of European food safety.

When we navigated transitions like the shift toward revised regulatory frameworks and submitted our April 2017 Position Paper, our goal was crystal clear: To ensure that lawmakers understand that cumbersome red tape cannot be allowed to choke the round-the-clock reliability of ship supply. If we successfully bridge the gap between rigorous EU sanitary rules and the lightning-fast demands of maritime logistics, we can ensure our members can keep global trade fed, fuelled, and moving forward without missing a beat.

Guiding our industry through these intricate health corridors was [Dick Peterse](#), a towering figure who led our [Veterinary Working Group](#) with unwavering dedication.

I still recall when Dick announced his retirement in early 2015, reflecting on more than forty-seven remarkable years dedicated to our trade. Stepping down from his responsibilities with the Dutch Association and OCEAN was far from easy, especially since Brussels was taking its deliberate time finalising the new veterinary statutes.

As Dick smiled and told us before hanging up his boots, working alongside this tight-knit community had always been the greatest perk of the job, turning routine compliance battles into shared camaraderie.

Remembering Dick Peterse

In 2018, then Chairman of the Veterinary Working Group Wolfgang Sump commented:

"I have been knowing Dick for nearly 25 years and he was one of the founding members of the OCEAN Veterinary Working Group in 1995.

Over the years we became personal friends, despite the fact, that our companies were competing hard in the market. For both of us the interests of the European shipsupply industry were always top priority and so we jointly fought to safeguard the specific veterinary rules for our industry in Europe. We succeeded in completing the Council Directive 97/78 in 1997, which has been our main legal frame until today.

For more than 20 years we co-operated very closely to monitor the developments in Brussels, together we visited the EU-Commission numerous times. One of our industry's assets was the trust Dick had built up with the EU-Officials and the superb relation to the official bodies.

We are now on a very good way bring the European veterinary legislation to the next generation and our success is to a great deal the result of Dick's dedication to the industry. Even after Dick had stepped back from the stage in 2015, I called him on regular basis and he always had good advice for me.

Our industry and myself have lost a fabulous expert and a superb personality. Dick Peterse has rendered outstanding services to the European shipsupply industry".

Organisational Developments in OCEAN in the 2010s

With Stefan Ericson's term coming to an end at the start of the decade in 2011, Alfredo Tosato of Italy took over OCEAN from 2011 to 2015, during which time I served as Vice-Chairman. I eventually took over from 2015 to 2019, while Wolfgang Sump of Germany took over from me as the decade concluded.

Operating from Brussels, our Brussels-based secretariat was expertly steered through the decade's turbulent regulatory waters by Jean-Luc Mériaux for most of the decade, in fact, until 2019, before Karsten Maier took over the mantle to guide us through the complex administrative realities of post-Brexit Europe. Bringing nearly 25 years of specialised experience in agronomy, economics, and professional food industry associations, Dr Maier's track record provided OCEAN with the strategic leadership needed to bridge the gap between EU agricultural policy and the gritty realities of the ship supply sector.

The decade opened with the steady hand of Alfredo Tosato, whose Italian maritime insight and natural diplomacy proved indispensable when we faced the labyrinth of Union Customs Code negotiations. Tosato brought the warmth of our Mediterranean roots to the fore, reminding everyone how vital Southern European shipping lanes are to our collective mission.

40th Anniversary in 2016: Celebrating Four Decades of OCEAN

Ten years ago, OCEAN marked its fortieth year with a twelve-month celebration. We rolled out a fresh anniversary logo to celebrate the milestone.

We also overhauled our digital home, building a responsive and sleek site designed specifically for modern smartphone browsing.

But before we could get going, disaster struck.

From the Ashes of Crisis: Our Resilience in Brussels

I remember staring at my phone screen in total disbelief as the news alerts flashed across it. A bomb had detonated in the Brussels metro system. For anyone who knew OCEAN's headquarters, the reality hit with a sickening thud.

The blast went off directly beneath the building where our OCEAN secretariat worked every single day. Panic gave way to profound relief when the message finally came through.

Our staff members were safe. Physically, they survived unharmed.

Yet, the shockwaves reached every corner of our European network.

On a personal note: sometimes luck is with you;

I remember crossing the Wetstraat through that very metro station 24 hours earlier (to the minute), on my way to a meeting on VAT with representatives of the European Commission.



OCEAN celebrated 40 years of successful interest representation all year long with a celebratory logo to remind stakeholders of OCEAN's legacy



Personal message from the OCEAN Secretary General Jean Luc Mériaux in the wake of the Merode Metro Station Terrorist Attacks in Brussels.

That dark week tested the true spirit of OCEAN.

Brussels is more than just a bureaucratic address for us.

It is the beating heart of European policymaking, where our industry meets the lawmakers who shape our trade. Seeing that heart-targeted brought home a sobering truth. The people who fight for our profession every day do so on the front lines of European unity.

We regrouped. We adjusted. We leaned on one another with the quiet strength that defines maritime communities across our continent. When the office doors finally reopened weeks later, the physical repairs took time, but our collective resolve never wavered.

We looked ahead. Just months after that tragedy, we pressed forward with our fortieth anniversary plans.

15 June 2016: OCEAN's Anniversary Lunch in Brussels

I often think back to 15 June 2016, when I stood in the heart of Brussels at the Hotel Leopold's Salon d'Anges to look out at a room full of old friends, dedicated board members, and dear colleagues.

As I welcomed distinguished guests like the Head of Unit for Customs, Suzanne Aigner, and the Head of the Unit of Customs IT Systems, Maria Manuela Cabral, both from DG TAXUD, alongside WCO Secretary General Kunio Mikuriya as the Guest of Honour, I felt an immense wave of pride.

We were there to celebrate forty years of OCEAN, but looking around that room, I knew we were celebrating something much deeper. We were celebrating as a family.

When World Customs Organisation Secretary General Dr Kunio Mikuriya took the floor to honour our milestone, he reminded us all of our unique role, noting that our sector's ability to navigate complex global standards with precision is what keeps international trade moving forward.

When I took over the chairman's seat from Alfredo Tosato in late 2015 alongside our brilliant British vice-chairman John Davey, I made a simple promise: We needed to get our house ready for the Union Customs Code.

We had to make certain that lawmakers in Brussels understood that ship supply is a race against the clock and that we needed harmonised, simple laws.

People always say that life starts at forty. When you look at a marriage, four decades mean weathering countless storms and celebrating wonderful milestones together.

But you cannot only look at the past, so I also spoke straight from the heart about the heavy political winds



OCEAN Chairman Dirk Cupido thanks the WCO Secretary General, Dr Kunio Mikuriya, for attending OCEAN's 40th anniversary in 2016.

blowing across Europe that year. I reminded everyone that we cannot take our shared European home for granted. By then, we had spent forty years tearing down national barriers, fighting for duty-free rules, fair agricultural standards, and smooth just-in-time logistics.

We did not do all that just to watch new walls go up.

Raising our glasses toward the horizon, I recall how I concluded my speech back in 2016 by looking ahead to this milestone. I asked the room:

"Have you thought about where we should meet to celebrate OCEAN's 50th in 10 years? I want to throw my proposal in the ring right now. Looking through the archives, I found the perfect location. I prefer not the date, but certainly the venue of the last OCEAN Board meeting of 1982. It took place on 31 December (!) in Monte Carlo (!)! What are the chances that we will hold it there at 50?"

While our path brought us to a different iconic destination rather than a New Year's Eve in Monaco, today we have reached our half-century mark in magnificent fashion.

We are celebrating OCEAN's 50th anniversary at the Netherlands' premier seaside retreat, Grand Hotel Huis ter Duin in Noordwijk.

It stands as a sublime venue marrying rich maritime tradition with tranquil coastal elegance, setting the ideal stage for our Jubilee.

Well played, OCEAN!



OCEAN Board members listen carefully as the WCO Secretary General outlines the role of global customs organisations and the relevance for OCEAN.

BREXIT, BASS and OCEAN

Ten years after that historic 2016 referendum, when the British public voted to leave the European Union, I often reflect on how we navigated those uncertain waters.

Stepping up as OCEAN Chair alongside our brilliant British vice-chairman John Davey, our immediate priority was never about the politics; it was about the operational essentials and ensuring that the vital work of ship supply remained uninterrupted.

We worked tirelessly with our esteemed colleagues at the British Association of Ship Suppliers (BASS) to advocate for frictionless trade and predictable borders.

While BASS ultimately charted a different course, and I have since stepped back from the daily landscape, looking back confirms that our industry's true strength has never lived in static rules.

It thrives because of our deep-seated relationships, mutual respect, and an unshakeable human dedication to keeping global trade moving, no matter how the political map changes.

When reflecting on our shared history, we must acknowledge the profound contribution of BASS, championed by leaders like Peter Hickson during his tenure as OCEAN Chair.

From iconic celebrations aboard the historic HMS Belfast to our final Board meeting in Windsor just opposite the Royal Palace, the footprint of our British colleagues is woven into the very fabric of our organisation.

We owe an immense debt of gratitude to the many British individuals who dedicated their time, expertise, and passion to OCEAN, including Geoffrey Marchant, Spencer Eade, and more recently, Sean Moloney and Yvonne Paul.

OCEAN remains deeply grateful to BASS for everything they have accomplished alongside us over the decades and wishes the association only the absolute best in its future endeavours.

Going East: OCEAN leaders visit the Capitals of the new EU

When we look back at the expansion of our European family, I always feel a deep sense of pride knowing our doors were wide open to the vibrant maritime communities of the east of the European Union.

We wanted to show that OCEAN is truly for every corner of Europe, reaching out directly to the ship suppliers who joined our network during those pivotal years. Travelling to their home turf while they held the Presidency of the Council of the European Union was our way of saying that we are in this together.

Our Baltic chapter unfolded in Riga on 29 May 2015, at the warm invitation of Mr Butenko and the Latvian Ship Suppliers Association.

The Baltic Sea serves as a vital, bustling maritime gateway, with over 3,100 ports handling substantial freight and passenger traffic. Regional ship suppliers continuously adapt to these demanding trade routes by delivering top-tier provisions and embracing innovative refuelling models, especially in Riga.

Stepping into the city while Latvia held its EU Presidency marked a historic first for our board in the Baltic States. Meeting our local colleagues against the backdrop of a bustling Baltic port brought home the reality of our single market.

As our Secretary General, Mr Mériaux, noted to our hosts, the gathering opened a wonderful window to rich cultural awareness. At the time, our chair, Alfredo Tosato, rightly emphasised how crucial that presidency was for linking Baltic suppliers directly into the wider European grid.

That eastward momentum carried us onward to Sofia in April 2018, where the Bulgarian Ship Suppliers Association hosted us during Bulgaria's inaugural EU Presidency.



OCEAN's Customs Working Group meets with Senior Bulgarian Customs Officials on the EU Customs Reform and on how the ship supply guidance is implemented at the national level in Sofia, Bulgaria, on 26 April 2018.

Gathered where the Danube meets the Black Sea, we felt the living spirit of the national motto, United We Stand. It mirrored our own industry ethos, proving that resilience and professional dedication are what keep vital trade routes moving smoothly across an interconnected continent.

By standing shoulder to shoulder with our members in their capital cities during their moments of European leadership, we proved that OCEAN is not just an office in Brussels. Still, a living partnership stretching from the North Sea to the Black Sea.

Dutch-German Leadership

During our board meeting in Brussels on 27 November 2015, my fellow members placed their trust in me to guide OCEAN as Chairman for the 2016 and 2017 terms, taking over the mantle from Alfredo Tosato. Stepping into that role alongside our British vice-chairman John Davey, I knew exactly what mission lay ahead of us. We had to prepare our sector for the incoming Union Customs Code, making certain that lawmakers understood that ship supply operates on a strict race against the clock.

Years later, in October 2019, our board gathered once more in Brussels to pass the torch forward, electing Wolfgang Sump from the German association as our new Chairman. I stepped into the role of vice-chairman once again as John Davey had "brexited", proving that teamwork and institutional continuity remain our greatest strengths – even in turbulent times.

Meanwhile, J. Olsen maintained his stellar stewardship as our treasurer, and Fernando Alves Pinto stepped up to lead our crucial Customs and Taxation Working Group, succeeding Peter de Haas Jr., who had guided the team with immense dedication for over a decade.

Alves Pinto understood the high stakes immediately.

In our line of work, where deliveries happen round the clock, a single paperwork error can stall a delivery truck, leave a vessel stranded without provisions, and cost thousands of euros.

As we crossed the threshold into a new era, Wolfgang Sump captured our shared ambition perfectly by reminding everyone that our specialised industry must remain ready twenty-four hours a day, and European legislation must support that promise. Available, set, go.

Highlight of the Decade

Picture the quiet focus of a warehouse floor just before sunrise, where boxes of provisions sit stacked, ready for a waiting vessel, and you will understand why our fight for specific ship supply guidance under the Union Customs Code mattered so much.

For decades, navigating customs across European ports felt like walking through a maze with twenty-eight different exits, each guarded by officials holding entirely separate rulebooks.

When we worked alongside our partners in the European Commission to bring Annex B to life, it felt like someone finally turned on the lights.

Looking back through our shared history, I feel compelled to highlight a moment of true collaboration that deserves a place in our story. It is the memory of a constructive meeting with Alfredo Tosato, which I arranged in Brussels, taking place from August to 27 November 2015.

We had the privilege of meeting with Mrs Susanne Aigner, then the Head of Unit for Customs Legislation at the Directorate-General for Taxation and Customs Union.

Her genuine engagement with our sector was evident when she joined an OCEAN Board Meeting to listen directly to our community. I remember how Chair Alfredo Tosato then presented a strong case for UCC guidelines on ship supplies, highlighting key sector challenges such as conflicting national interpretations, the absence of an EU-wide definition of ship supplies, and uncertainties surrounding re-export declarations and T1 documents.

Following a thorough and constructive dialogue about the realities of ship supply on the ground, she offered a fair and pragmatic path forward.

She invited our association to share technical input on the practical realities of ship supply. True to the European spirit of open consultation and shared expertise, those technical insights contributed to the clarity of the official ship supply guidance.

To me, these meetings stand as a proud reminder of how constructive dialogue and mutual understanding support the policymaking process, turning everyday operational perspectives into clear guidance for our entire trade network.

As I often told our members across the quays from Porto to Tallinn, and from Rotterdam to Piraeus, having identical rules meant we could finally work with speed and precision, delivering what ships need without getting tangled in bureaucratic red tape.

So, when European ship suppliers woke up on 1 May 2016, their professional world had fundamentally changed.

The Union Customs Code, or UCC, entered into force as a massive milestone toward modernising trade procedures across the European Union.

However, when turning to how ship supply would work under the new rules, our OCEAN members and customs authorities alike had many questions about what the UCC intended to describe in Article 269 and Article 270.

The publication of the so-called “Annex B” stood out as our most significant policy achievement since the vital VAT exemption battles back in the 1990s. This comprehensive guidance document finally clarified how ship supplies must be treated under European customs legislation, delivering the exact harmonisation our industry had sought for decades.

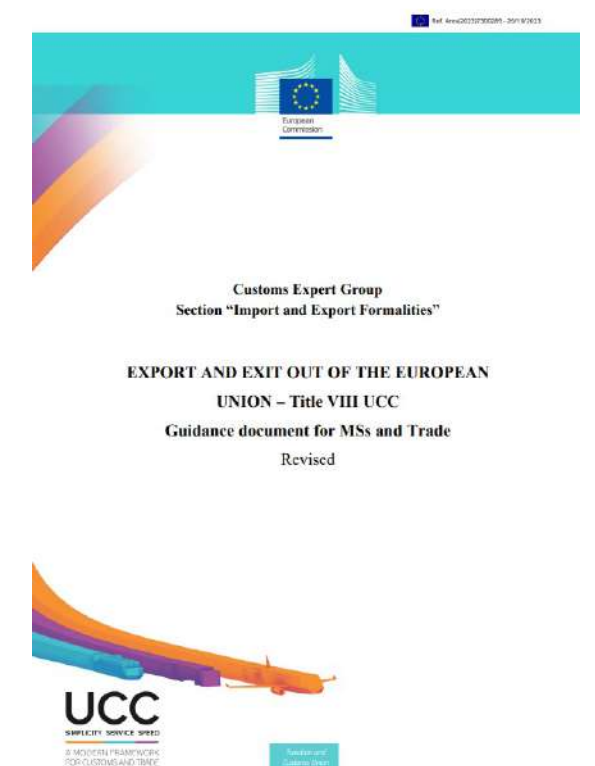
The guidance outlined in Annex B regarding ship supplies establishes a comprehensive framework for maritime logistics, beginning with the formal definition of ship supplies. It distinguished between supplies that hold the status of Union goods and those classified as non-Union goods under Article 270 of the Union Customs Code.

Furthermore, the document details specific regulatory simplifications for the delivery of these provisions and concludes with guidance on the precise commodity codes to be used for ship supplies.

According to the guidance, Articles 269 and 270 of the UCC dictate the applicable clearance regimes based on the goods' customs status:

Union Goods (Article 269 UCC): Ship supplies possessing Union status are exempt from the obligation to lodge a pre-departure declaration pursuant to Article 245(1)(o) of the UCC Delegated Act (UCC DA). Although they are not subject to a standard export procedure, an export declaration bearing the code EX must still be lodged and processed through the Automated Export System (AES) or Export Control System (ECS) to satisfy tax and duty exemption proof requirements. The movement is successfully closed once the goods are loaded on board, regardless of the vessel's ultimate destination.

Non-Union Goods (Article 270 UCC): Non-Union ship supplies (such as goods moving out of a customs



The ship supply guidance was eventually added as ANNEX B to the document “Export and Exit out of the European Union – Title VIII UCC, Guidance for MSs and Trade”

warehouse) are subject to standard re-export rules. They must be covered by a re-export declaration, or by a re-export notification if the goods are directly re-exported from temporary storage or transshipped within a free zone. These operations are similarly exempted from pre-departure safety and security data requirements under Article 245(1)(o) of the UCC DA.

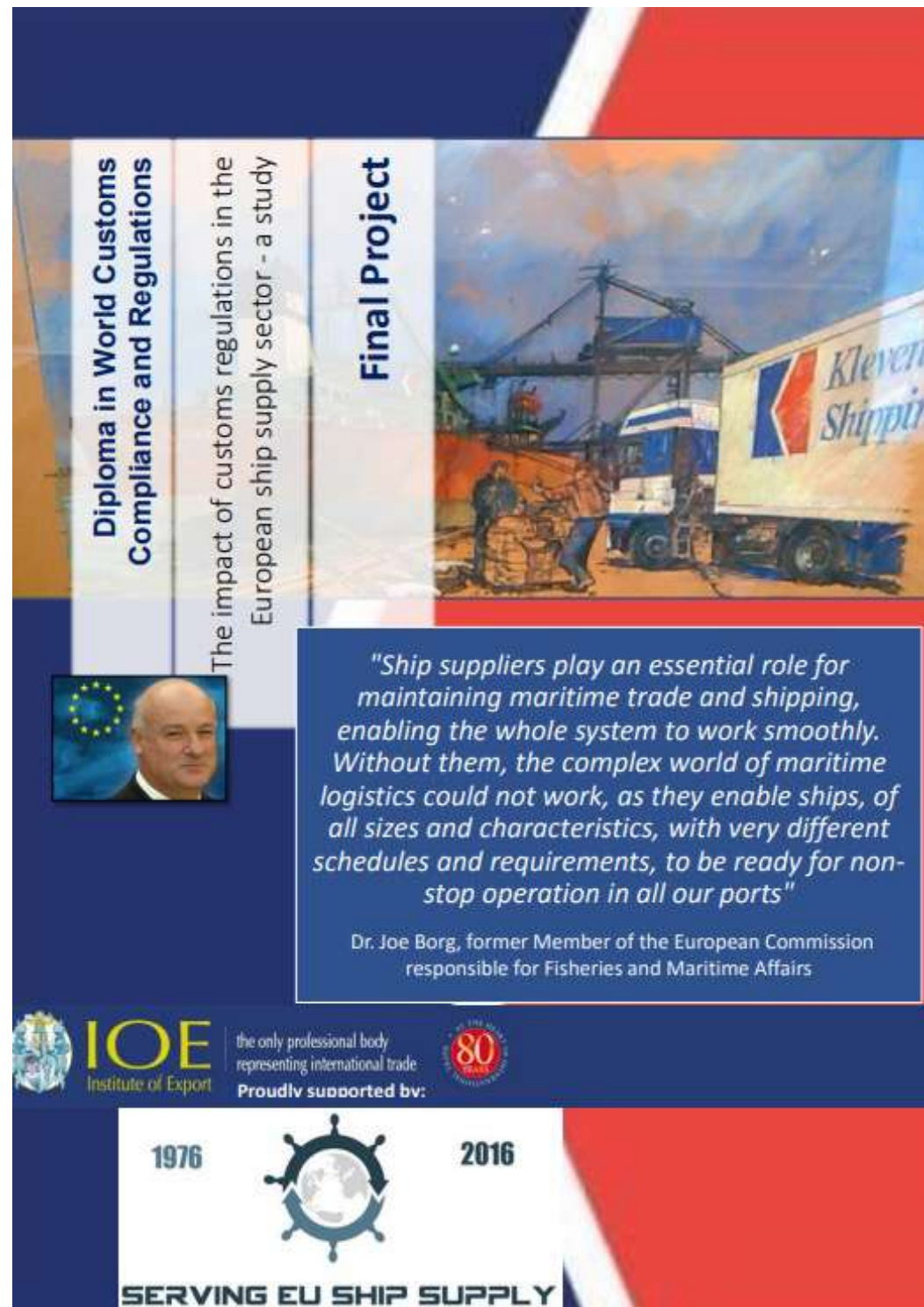
Additional provisions concerning ship supplies under the Union Customs Code (UCC) framework, such as:

Specialised Commodity Codes: When declaring ship supplies, specific tariff structures and commodity codes (such as CN chapter codes for foodstuffs, alcohol, tobacco, fuels, or general equipment) are provided to properly categorise victualling and bunkering goods.

Loading Permissions and Exit Confirmation: An accepted ship supply declaration functions as the official loading permit.

Once goods are physically delivered on board, the subsequent exit from the EU customs territory must be properly confirmed within the electronic customs systems.

I remember what Peter de Haas Jr, then Chairman of the OCEAN



The 50+ pages detailed analysis on customs procedures for the ship supply industry was awarded the course grade "Distinction" by the Institute of Export and International Trade in 2015.

Working Group on Customs, observed: *"The UCC should be seen as a natural evolution towards a modern customs environment for which the results and benefits will be grasped only when it is implemented in its full capacity by the end of 2020. The provisions for ship supply must be sufficiently explained."*

Speaking from Rotterdam, I emphasised our deep gratitude: *"We would like to thank the EU Member States, the EU Commission and our trade colleagues for recognising the importance of clarifying the provisions that govern ship supply in the guidance published by DG TAXUD. We greatly appreciate the publication of Annex B in time with the entry into force of the legislation, on 1 May 2016."*

Study: The impact of customs rules in the European ship supply sector

To make sure our voice and our rules were crystal clear to everyone in Brussels, OCEAN commissioned a landmark study in November 2015 titled *"The impact of customs rules in the European ship supply sector."*

Looking back, I always smile when I think about how we tackled something as dry as customs law.

We did not want a dusty legal document that would sit on a shelf gathering dust.

This landmark study was something extraordinary for our community. What made this study so brilliant was its sheer practicality.

We steered completely clear of abstract legal theory and instead walked straight onto the loading docks of the Dutch marine supplier Klevenberg Shipping Centre B.V.

By embedding ourselves in their daily operations, we brought to light the frantic, high-stakes reality of "just-in-time" port deliveries. It proved to EU lawmakers that a customs rule is never just a line on a page.

Our study captured that exact human pressure. It proved that a missing signature or a confused customs code is not just a paperwork headache.

It is a barrier to safety at sea and the smooth flow of global trade. By showing lawmakers the human side of logistics, we turned complex trade rules into a story everyone could finally grasp.

Legacy of the Decade

Thank you for taking the time to spend some time with me.

Looking back across the turbulent expanse of the 2010s, we pragmatists in the Netherlands know that water always finds a crack, and our decade gave us plenty of cracks to test.

From the heavy fog of the European sovereign debt crisis that threatened to fracture financial architectures to the political shock of Brexit and shifting transatlantic tides, our maritime community faced extraordinary pressure.

Yet we rolled up our sleeves instead of panicking, securing vital breakthroughs like the Union Customs Code Annex B to bring order to chaotic quays, navigating complex veterinary rules, and welcoming new members from the Baltic to the Black Sea with open arms.

The lesson to draw from this decade is simple and unshakeable: political maps will shift, economic storms will test our resolve, and bureaucratic hurdles will try to slow us down, but true strength lives in human adaptability and daily dedication.

As I noted then during our 40th anniversary in 2016 and firmly believe today, European ship suppliers remain a reliable, strong, and stable partner to all vessels, captains, shipowners, and ship managers calling at European ports.

CHAPTER 7: PANDEMIC, PRESSURE, PROGRESS (2020-2026) - BY WOLFGANG SUMP

Executive Summary

In this chapter, Wolfgang Sump, former Chair of OCEAN, details the turbulent and transformative period of the 2020s for the European ship supply industry.

The chapter chronicles how the sector confronted and adapted to monumental challenges, including the operational crises of the COVID-19 pandemic, shifting regulatory landscapes such as the European Green Deal and the modernisation of the Union Customs Code, and the geopolitical pressures sparked by the war in Ukraine.

Additionally, the text covers key organisational milestones, such as German-Italian and Italian-Swedish leadership transitions, a historic board meeting in Paris, and a fresh visual identity for OCEAN's 50th anniversary in 2026, while offering a forward-looking perspective on the profound promise and complex risks of the artificial intelligence revolution.

Introduction

Welcome to the final decade of our shared history.

My name is Wolfgang Sump. I had the tremendous honour of serving as the Chair of OCEAN from 2019 until 2023, before handing the helm to my good friend and Italian colleague, Costantino Zavoiani.

My chapter is simply the story so far.

A story that in only six years has seen unprecedented shifts.

Interestingly, my time in office began almost exactly when Ursula von der Leyen took her seat as President of the European Commission in December 2019. Both German, both from Northern Germany, in Brussels and on the docks, we were about to step into entirely uncharted waters.

As the new decade dawned, European ship supply felt immensely confident.

We were riding high on our successful negotiations shaping the Union Customs Code. We truly believed our association was ready to handle absolutely anything.

As we say here in northern Germany, Sturmfluten prüfen den Deich (storm surges test the dike).

The surge that hit us was unlike anything in our half-century history.



Wolfgang Sump, former OCEAN Chair, explains ship supply and the importance of maritime trade

Instead of smooth sailing, we walked straight into a brutal combination of historical forces.

A devastating global pandemic shut down the world.

Traditional trade borders fractured overnight.

At the same time, a massive wave of new environmental and digital regulations began sweeping across Europe, impacting the shipping supply chain.

Not to mention the devastating war that ravaged our Union at our doorstep.

This decade is not even finished yet, but it may just be the most impactful of them all.

Ready to deep-dive? Let's begin.

Regulatory Developments in Europe in the 2020s so far

When the World Locked Down

Fresh off the paper-heavy storms of Brexit, our industry walked straight into a hurricane. An invisible contagion swept across continents, shuttering international travel, locking billions behind closed doors, and pushing global commerce to the edge of an abyss.

That disruption was COVID-19.

A severe respiratory pathogen emerged in late 2019, spreading across borders during the early months of 2020, potentially life-threatening for every human on this planet. Governments responded with blunt instruments. Frontiers slammed shut, factories went dark, and populations sheltered in place.

In Hamburg, the streets emptied of cars and people.

The air carried an eerie quiet, broken only by the occasional wail of an ambulance.

We had no vaccine.

We had no magic cure.

Medical science had no weapons against a brand-new virus, leaving governments with only one old-fashioned way to slow it down: keeping people apart. Our German Chancellor Merkel addressed the nation on television, urging restraint and unity.

I remember how Germany entered its first hard lockdown.

Shops pulled down their shutters, schools closed their doors, and millions retreated to home offices. We were not allowed to meet friends, gather in public, or travel freely across state lines, let alone cross European borders.

For OCEAN, and for me personally as Chair and a company leader, this meant managing an unprecedented operational crisis while sitting behind a kitchen table or at an empty office desk.

The European Union faced a chaotic fragmentation of rules a

Individual member states panicked, throwing up unilateral border controls that choked the single market. Trucks carrying vital food and medical gear sat in monstrous multi-kilometre queues at internal EU borders.

Brussels had to step in quickly to establish "green lanes," ensuring that commercial transport could keep moving - somewhat.

Yet, for ship suppliers, the rules on the ground remained a daily battleground.

We were caught in a rigid paradox.

Governments declared that supply chains must keep moving, but local port authorities enforced draconian health bans.

In German ports such as Hamburg and Bremerhaven, health officers barred our delivery teams from boarding vessels. We were not allowed to climb the gangways. We could not access the accommodation blocks to secure signatures or assess a crew's specific needs.

To adapt, we invented new, awkward routines.

Our drivers had to drop provisions on the cold concrete of the quayside, step back twenty meters, and wait while exhausted crew members hauled the crates aboard themselves.

Handing over critical engine parts or fresh provisions felt like an arms-length transaction across an invisible minefield. Paperwork could not be handed over in person; instead, delivery notes were dropped into plastic buckets hoisted up by ropes from the ship's bridge, or scanned and emailed while standing on the dock in the rain.

Month after month ticked by with no vaccine in sight.

We wore masks continuously, washed our hands until our skin cracked, and lived with the constant anxiety that a single infected team member could shut down our entire warehouse operation.

Then, toward the end of 2020 and into 2021, a miracle of modern science arrived. Vaccines were developed, tested, and approved at historic speed through coordinated European efforts.

Slowly, inoculation centres opened across Germany. As our workforce received their jabs, a cautious sense of relief returned to the docks.

The vaccine gave us our shield back.

It allowed governments to ease restrictions, dismantle border checks, and permit our suppliers to return on ships, provided they followed proper safety protocols. Looking back, those dark months of isolation proved the resilience of our profession. We did not stop because stopping was never an option.

While everyday citizens experienced the pandemic from their living rooms, international trade faced an existential threat - roughly 80 per cent of global cargo travels by sea. When maritime routes choke, nations run out of food, power, and medical supplies within days.

During those tense months, our sector collided with two massive walls:

The Crew Change Crisis: Hundreds of thousands of seafarers remained trapped on steel hulls long past their contract limits, stranded because terrified port authorities barred them from stepping ashore.

The Just-in-Time Collapse: Harbours clogged completely, waiting times soared into weeks, and the fine-tuned machinery of maritime logistics broke down.

The Green Deal: Navigating Europe's Climate Laws

The European Green Deal changed our world by turning our shared dream of climate neutrality by 2050 into binding law, anchored by the Fit for 55 package, which aims to slash net greenhouse emissions by 55 per cent before the end of this decade.

For our industry, these rules reached straight into the docks. The European Union integrated maritime transport into its Emissions Trading System, while introducing the Carbon Border Adjustment

Mechanism (CBAM) and the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) to ensure that every crate of provisions and every raw material arriving at our ports meets strict environmental standards.

CBAM posed a significant challenge for ship supply, as legacy ship stores would permanently lack traceable carbon emission records and origin data.

Following extensive discussions with the EU Commission, negotiators agreed on a fifty-tonne threshold for CBAM goods, exempting smaller qualifying import consignments from reporting obligations and shielding ship suppliers from disproportionate administrative burdens.

For the EUDR, the legal puzzle over ship supply hinged on how EU customs law defines an export. Under Article 269 of the Union Customs Code, standard export procedures exclude duty-free ship supplies.

Because these deliveries are for consumption on vessels leaving EU ports, European Commission guidance confirms they fall outside standard export declarations and, therefore, EUDR obligations.

For our sector, this distinction brought vital relief. It means our daily work of provisioning ships with essential stores does not trigger unnecessary regulatory hurdles under the deforestation or CBAM rules. Yet we know that there is more on the horizon.

The Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation aims to curb environmental clutter across our continent. Delivering provisions to vessels requires robust packaging to withstand rough seas, meaning our warehouses rely heavily on protective materials that must comply with new circular economy standards.

The European Union's forced labour regulation bans products made under abusive conditions from entering our single market, protecting ethical commerce across our ports. The impact of this is still to be evaluated by OCEAN.

True to our German proverb Handel ist Wandel (trade is change), we embrace this green evolution, proving that protecting our planet and sustaining our maritime economy go hand in hand.

The Digital Revolution: Overhauling the Union Customs Code

When global shipping lanes choked under pandemic pressure while online parcel volumes exploded, hidden weaknesses in our trade architecture cracked wide open. The European Union responded with the most ambitious modernisation of customs rules since 1968, fundamentally reshaping the Union Customs Code.

In the near future, our modernised architecture, I understand, should rest upon three vital pillars:

First is the centralised **EU Customs Data Hub**, a digital leap with an automated, data-driven architecture. For our ship suppliers in Hamburg and across European ports, this intelligent digital shift has the potential to cut out redundant bureaucracy and ensure swift, seamless deliveries when vessels need provisions most. Instead of retyping identical papers into fragmented national systems, our teams can, hopefully, enter ship supply records once into a shared, transparent platform.

Second stands the newly established European Union Customs Authority, proudly headquartered in Lille, France. I think of Lille as the central control tower for our continent's trade lanes. For decades, our suppliers faced the frustration of different ports interpreting rules in slightly varying ways. I trust that this new institution would act as our guardian of consistency, coordinating risk management so that electronic clearances are enforced uniformly whether a ship berths in Rotterdam, Genoa, or Antwerp.

Third is the evolution of compliance through the Trust and Check Trader model. Building upon the legacy of traditional Authorised Economic Operators, this advanced gold standard allows compliant companies to grant customs authorities real-time electronic visibility into their commercial systems. In return, our trusted operators move goods through digital green lanes, releasing essential provisions into circulation with minimal active delay.

As we watched these revolutionary concepts transition from legislative proposals into binding law, our path became clear. By pairing digital efficiency with institutional trust, Europe proved once again that smart legislation can match the rapid heartbeat of global maritime trade.

I can understand this vision: We have traded endless queues and stamped paper forms for smart, unified data flows. As we embrace this paperless future, Europe proves once again that smart legislation can match the rapid heartbeat of global maritime trade.

Europe at War: The role of ship supply in crisis preparedness and defence readiness

When the calendar turned to that bleak day on that infamous 24 February morning in 2022, the peaceful rhythm we trusted along our European waters fractured instantly.

News alerts flashed across my phone with the harsh reality of the invasion of Ukraine, sending a cold shiver straight through my chest.

Decades of post-Cold War confidence evaporated, replaced by an unsettling era marked by hybrid threats, blocked supply routes, and sudden instability right at our borders.

For our community of ship suppliers, this was an urgent wake-up call.

We realised immediately that safeguarding our maritime corridors was no longer just a theoretical debate in Brussels meeting rooms. It became our daily, pressing obligation on the docks.

The European Union responded with remarkable resolve over the first half of the decade, enacting more than 20 strict sanction packages to defend our shared values.

At the time of writing this, EU sanction law specifies that more than 700 vessels (comprising the global "shadow fleet" used to circumvent oil and energy sanctions) are actively targeted by restrictive measures and tracked, or blocked by coordinated international measures, including targeted designations by the UK, the EU, and Ukraine.

A massive undertaking.

My ship supply colleagues and I found ourselves conducting exhausting background checks, tracing ultimate beneficial ownership, and carefully scrutinising vessel networks to stop any prohibited ship from receiving bunker or maritime services.

Yet our contribution to keeping Europe secure goes far beyond mere compliance.

The true heartbeat of our security lies in the quiet, dependable work of daily provisioning to our military fleet.

Supplying specialised naval vessels demands absolute precision, ensuring that vital food, fresh beverages, medical kits, and technical engine components reach military contingents and deployed forces even in the most remote corners of the globe.

When allied fleets dock at our quays, they rely entirely on our members for the essential gear that keeps them operational.

We serve as the frontline logistical anchor for European defence readiness. By urging lawmakers to fully integrate our profession into wider EU defence, mobility, and preparedness strategies, we achieve something much greater than commercial protection.

We stand as frontline guardians of European resilience, proving that our half-century dedication to global trade matches our unwavering courage to protect a free, strong, and peaceful continent.

The Key European Policy Issues addressed by OCEAN so far

Navigating the COVID Storm: Ship Supply is ESSENTIAL

Looking back from my office in Hamburg, I can still feel the cold uncertainty of those early spring weeks in 2020. Back then, we lived through days when the world seemed to grind to a sudden halt, our business went from 100% full power to a screeching halt, yet our mission remained absolute.

We are ship suppliers.

When the horizon darkened, our duty did not change.

We deliver fresh water, wholesome food, vital safety gear, and heavy engine components to vessels across the globe.

Especially all OCEAN members who supplied the cruise industry suffered dramatically: The business volume dropped by approximately 90% - a sheer disaster.

In German, we have a saying: Ordnung muss sein. There must be order. But during the pandemic, order vanished overnight.

Ports turned into fortresses overnight.

Local authorities grew terrified of the unseen virus, slamming iron gates shut and barring our delivery teams from stepping foot on decks.

Ships sat stranded at anchor.

Crews who had already spent months away from their families stared out at land, wondering if anyone was coming to help.

If our trucks could not reach the quayside, the lifeblood of maritime trade stopped. Seafarers would run out of food. Engines would die.

The operational nightmare was immense.

Our trade relies on intricate networks.

A single vessel requires thousands of distinct articles gathered from dozens of different sources.

If a small factory in northern Italy closed its doors due to local lockdowns, a ship waiting in a German harbour could not get the specific spare part it desperately needed. Rules mutated daily. One morning, a port demanded a specific health stamp; by afternoon, entry was banned entirely.

Standing in Hamburg, looking out at the bustling Elbe River, I knew we had to act. We could not let maritime supply chains fracture.

We raised our voice in Brussels, reminding the European Union of a simple truth: our work is unique and life-saving. We petitioned the European Commission and member states directly. We asked for a straightforward, vital designation. Our people needed to be classed as **essential workers**.

Negotiating through a screen brought its own frustration.

We watched as members struggled to secure signed paperwork from ship bridges while maintaining strict distance rules.

Documents had to be dropped on the quaysides from afar. Yet, through dialogue and steady persistence, we made our case heard. We reminded legislators that world trade cannot move if the people who sustain the crews are locked outside the gates.



Brussels, 19th March 2020
O/REF. 18286

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

we are living in unprecedented times. The latest COVID-19 developments continue to hit our industry fiercely with a speed and force that hardly anyone could have predicted only a few weeks ago. These are tough times. We all need to dedicate our efforts now to combating this disease at home and work.

I am writing to let you know how the work of OCEAN and its Secretariat will be organised.

First, in consultation with the Vice-Chair and the Treasurer, we have jointly decided not to hold the OCEAN Board meeting and the Working Group meeting in May 2020. We are currently exploring alternative ways to continue discussions, including, if possible, the use of video conferences. We will evaluate how the situation develops over the next couple of weeks and months, and propose ideas to this regard to the Board.

The work of the OCEAN Secretariat, both in Brussels and the UK, has already moved to "work from home." All staff members are contactable remotely via email and mobile phone, and will continue the vital OCEAN work. For example, we submitted the OCEAN letter to the EU Commission on tobacco Track & Trace this week. EU decision-makers have postponed or cancelled all non-essential meetings.

The OCEAN Secretariat is looking at ways on how they can support OCEAN members, for example, through sharing of information as regards business contingency operations. I have asked that these features be included in the April OCEAN Newsletter and, where useful, in other email communication.

My last message today to you is about the need for on-going solidarity and friendship. In these difficult times, you may experience unknown difficulties in carrying out your business. This is where the power of close collaboration, cooperation and understanding amongst OCEAN members is of most importance. Where you can, please support one another, and together we can get through this challenging time in our history.

Please know that we -the Secretariat and I myself- stand ready to help where we can.

Stay safe.

Yours sincerely,

W. Sump
Chair
OCEAN

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OCEAN – The European Ship Suppliers Organization –
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Organisational Developments in OCEAN in the 2020s so far

German – Italian Leadership

To preserve stability during a fragile post-pandemic recovery, my colleagues entrusted me to continue serving as Chairman in our remote meeting on 5 November 2021.

Having spent more than three decades navigating the labyrinth of EU veterinary rules, tax complexities, and institutional politics, I understood that our survival depended on keeping channels open with Brussels regulators.

Yet, the departure of our British colleagues from the European Union meant our internal balance had shifted. We needed to fortify our presence across vital Mediterranean trade corridors.

To spearhead that effort, we welcomed Costantino Zavoiani of ANPAN as our new Vice-Chairman. As the head of a prominent Italian maritime logistics enterprise, Costantino brought an intimate, everyday understanding of how border friction feels when trucks are idling and ships are waiting.

Our joint agenda for the term was uncompromising: modernise European ship supply, drive the adoption of digital customs, and shield our operators from a mounting tide of administrative costs. Together, the Sump-Zavoiani partnership sent an unmistakable signal across Europe.

2023: Bonjour, Pardon, Merci from Paris

Looking back, one particular chapter of our recent journey in Paris holds a very special place in my heart.



OCEAN Board members meet after the COVID-19 lockdown ends.
Mr Pinto still wears disposable protective face masks, reflecting collective survival, public health compliance, and the global disruption of everyday life.



The OCEAN Board meeting in Paris in Spring 2023. From left to right: Axel and Eric Barat of SNAN, Chair Wolfgang Sump, ISSA President Rafael Fernandez and Vice-Chair Costantino Zavoiani.

When our OCEAN Board gathered in Paris on 15 March 2023, it marked a truly historic milestone because our community had not held a formal meeting in France for over twenty years.

SNAN, our French association led warmly by Eric Barat for so many years, welcomed us back with open arms and true Gallic hospitality.

As I looked around that room, I could not help but remember that France gave our organisation its very second chair, Monsieur Georges Garguilo, a foundational pillar of our history.

We spent the day sharing ideas side by side with our French colleagues, blending our meetings with their annual gathering, and laughing over a wonderful collaborative lunch.

As evening fell, our journey took a magical turn along the Seine.

Since 1947, the Bateaux-Mouches have woven a romantic love story through the heart of Paris, carrying generations of poets, romantics, and curious travellers past the illuminated monuments of the City of Light.

Stepping aboard for our private dinner cruise with fifteen of our closest colleagues, we let the gentle rhythm of the river wash away the day's formal business.

As we floated beneath the sparkling bridges and dined against the backdrop of timeless Parisian architecture, this magnificent dinner cruise served as my official farewell gesture as my tenure as Chair drew to a close.

Asking for a gentle pardon as I stepped aside to hand over the reins ahead of schedule for personal retirement, I offered a heartfelt merci to our community for an unforgettable journey, while joyfully saying bonjour to the arrival of our new leadership team.

Passing the helm to Costantino Zavoiani as Chair and Carl Forsman as Vice-Chair, alongside our trusted Treasurer Jens Olsen, I disembarked at eleven that night, wrapped in the warmth of our shared maritime family and the sparkling lights of Paris, knowing deep down that our association was sailing into wonderfully capable hands.

2024: EU Commission visits Van Hulle Shippers N.V.

There is a particular kind of magic that happens when policymakers leave their Brussels desks and step directly onto the damp, salt-laden concrete of a working quayside.

Looking back at 2024, one gathering stands out as a true landmark for OCEAN.

We brought our board members and a dedicated delegation of European Commission officials together in Antwerp for three intense, rewarding days.

We did not sit behind closed doors arguing over abstract paragraphs of customs code or veterinary rules.

Instead, we walked the docks.



The EU Commission and the OCEAN Board visit Van Hulle Shippers N.V., 17 May 2024

We spent an unforgettable afternoon touring Van Hulle Shippers N.V., a stalwart family-run ship supply company.

For the officials who write the laws governing our sector, it was a rare chance to witness the frantic, precise reality of modern ship chandling.

They saw firsthand how a vessel must be provisioned within a strict window, how complex tax exemptions work in practice, and why a missing stamp on a customs form can halt a vital delivery.

That visit bridged the gap between Brussels and the berth. It reminded everyone in that room that behind every piece of European maritime legislation lies a breathing, fast-paced human enterprise keeping global trade afloat.

2025: Re-setting OCEAN

Every long journey eventually reaches a crossroads where stepping aside becomes the only way to honour the path ahead.

Administrative realities sometimes demand difficult partings, and our formal arrangement with UECBV came to an end in September 2025. While that specific chapter closed, our determination to sail forward with absolute independence burned brighter than ever.

Navigating such turbulent waters called for steady hands and seasoned vision.

I found immense comfort in knowing that Arne Mielken, celebrating two remarkable decades of dedication to OCEAN in 2025, stepped forward as our Secretary General.



OCEAN Secretary General Mr Arne Mielken (right) speaks at the European Summit of CLIA, the Cruise Lines International Association, in February 2026. With Kasper Sommes, Senior Vice President, Global Cruise Logistics at Horizon (left) and Emma Shillito, UK Senior Policy Officer at CLIA (middle).

As we celebrate fifty years of OCEAN, we look to leaders like Arne Mielken. He embodies the exact spirit of partnership, resilience, and forward-thinking vision needed to guide the European maritime community into the next half-century.

Arne has spent decades at the intersection of industry and legislation, working side by side with officials from the UK, Europe, and the United States, as well as with global institutions like the World Trade Organisation and the World Customs Organisation.

Today, our sector operates at the crossroads of relentless digital transformation, complex green mandates, and shifting international trade barriers. In this fast-moving environment, Arne has emerged as an indispensable voice.

His deep expertise in international trade compliance and his tireless advocacy for trade facilitation ensure that ship suppliers and maritime businesses can keep pace with constant regulatory shifts.

His guidance provides the exact stability we need during a period of profound transformation. Under his leadership, OCEAN is shedding old coats to emerge as a leaner, sharper, and far more flexible European advocate.

A new visual identity fit for the next half-century

Every milestone deserves a visual anchor that speaks both to where we have been and where we are heading.

As we celebrate our fiftieth anniversary in 2026, we unveiled a bold new logo that blends our rich maritime heritage with our unwavering commitment to European unity:



The European Ship Suppliers Organization

Our new visual identity is a declaration of intent.

Rendered in bold, dark, deep-sea blue capitals, the word OCEAN is encircled by the twelve yellow stars of the European flag, reminding us of unity through diversity.

The dynamic, moving wave brings the sea straight into the heart of our institutional mission towards the European Union: OCEAN at the centre of the European Union.

Can you better understand how that ship supply has never been merely about logistics?

It is the vital lifeline of Europe's maritime trade, where every vessel docking in our ports relies on a seamless network delivering engine parts, fresh provisions, medical supplies, and safety equipment.

Behind every successful voyage lies a human story of coordination, foresight, and deep-seated expertise.

From round-the-clock operations in Rotterdam to urgent engine part deliveries in Hamburg and the blend of tradition and technology in Mediterranean ports like Valencia, our profession thrives on adaptability.

This new emblem captures that exact spirit.

Highlights of the 2020s so far

Looking back at how our decade has unfolded so far, I often smile at the puzzle of trying to name a single defining highlight while the years are still rushing past us.

Much of our recent history has been tested by hardship, shifting geopolitical tides, and sudden trials that pushed our resilience to the limit.

But if I have to select a highlight of the 2020s so far, I want it to be our fiftieth celebration in 2026, the series of joined events that made you pick up a copy of this book in the first place.

When you first received it, you should be one of the selected few standing in the grand rooms of The Merode in Brussels or a scrumptious ballroom of the elegant Grand Hotel Huis ter Duin in beautiful Noordwijk aan Zee.

Fifty years after our community first put pen to paper and anchored our collective voice in the Netherlands, OCEAN returns to its roots to celebrate.

To me, the double anchor of our jubilee is what really makes this celebration special.

We are fulfilling our core mission and talking to the decision-makers in Brussels whilst taking OCEAN to the membership for celebration. To me, this is the European spirit.

Our anniversary unfolds across two distinct chapters this week, mirroring the dual soul of our trade.

First, we gather in the heart of the European Union, on 17 September 2026, for our commemorative conference.

Senior officials from Brussels will take the stage alongside industry veterans to dissect the heavy currents shaping our daily work.

We talk about modern European customs.

We ask hard questions about how a ship supplier can manage all manner of policy and regulatory challenges while keeping vessels stocked and moving.

We do it with our partners from the maritime world, members of the EU Trade Contact Group and our international friends from ISSA by our side.

Yet, policy is only half the story.

Two days later, on Saturday, 19 September 2026, we cross the border to the sweeping North Sea coast at Noordwijk aan Zee in the Netherlands.

Here, at the Grand Hotel Huis ter Duin, we join forces with our Dutch colleagues and the NVVS for a grand gala dinner dance.

It is fitting that we return to the Dutch shores where OCEAN was born half a century ago.

Gemütlichkeit captures this exact feeling of togetherness and warmth, blending professional respect with genuine human connection.

Across Europe, from the Mediterranean to the North Sea, our strength has always rested on this shared spirit.

We face mounting pressures, from supply chain volatility to new security requirements.

But looking out at the packed room in Brussels and the glittering coast of Noordwijk, my confidence remains absolute.

We have spent fifty years proving that when borders shift and rules evolve, our trade adapts, endures, and leads.

Legacy of the 2020s so far

Looking back across the tumultuous waters we have crossed since the dawn of this decade, I am filled with a profound sense of pride in our European ship supply community.

We began the 2020s battered by a global pandemic that locked down borders and turned our ports into fortresses, forcing us to invent new, distant ways of delivering vital provisions to stranded crews.

We weathered the complex regulatory storms of the European Green Deal, adapted to monumental overhauls of the Union Customs Code, and faced the chilling reality of war at our continent's doorstep.

Through every crisis, every blocked quayside, and every shifting geopolitical tide, our profession proved an unchanging truth:

Ship supply is not merely logistics; it is the essential lifeblood of international maritime trade.

As we stand on the threshold of our fiftieth anniversary in 2026, my parting message to our members and future leaders is one of unshakeable confidence!

We have proven that our bonds run far deeper than any administrative challenge or sudden disruption.

Whether navigating the digital revolution, embracing artificial intelligence with cautious wisdom, or upholding the values of a united Europe, we must continue to sail forward with courage, flexibility, and absolute independence.

Backed by a proud half-century of history and a renewed spirit of freedom, our association is in wonderfully capable hands, ready to meet every horizon that lies ahead.

CHAPTER 8: CHARTING OUR OWN PATH INTO THE FUTURE - BY CARL FORSMAN

Executive Summary

This chapter explores the future trajectory of European ship supply from the perspective of Vice Chair Carl Forsman. The chapter highlights the vital role of the European Union as a single market and friction-remover that provides independent family businesses with the stability needed to invest in long-term innovation. As it reaches its golden jubilee, OCEAN serves as a collective anchor and essential voice for ship suppliers, helping the industry navigate modern challenges such as post-Brexit borders, regulatory shifts, and generational renewal.

While digital customs hubs, artificial intelligence, and automated logistics are rapidly reshaping port operations, physical ship supply will always rely on specialised human expertise and hands-on quayside labour.

The author argues that to thrive in an unpredictable world, the ship supply industry must prioritise environmental leadership through circular economies, cultivate next-generation talent via mentorship and training, embrace digital customs excellence, and build anti-fragile supply chains. OCEAN remains vital in ensuring a stable legislative environment in the European Union, allowing European ship supply companies to operate.

Furthermore, OCEAN should continue to extend its influence globally by collaborating with international bodies such as the World Customs Organisation and the International Ship Supply & Services Association (ISSA) to protect and align industry standards worldwide.

Introduction

My name is Carl Forsman, and I have served as Vice Chair of OCEAN since 2023. Outside of OCEAN, I work as the Head of Supply Chain for a Swedish ship supplier, so the issues discussed within this association are also the issues I deal with every day in my professional life.

Some might look at my tenure and wonder why a relative newcomer to the board is writing a forward-looking chapter for our 50th anniversary book. After all, compared to the people who built this association over the past five decades, I have only recently become part of its leadership. Yet that is precisely why this milestone means so much to me.



Vice-Chair Carl Forsman greeting OCEAN Board members in Piraeus, Greece, in Spring 2025

The equation is simple. When OCEAN succeeds, European ship supply becomes stronger. When independent ship suppliers like the one I work for succeed, it creates opportunities for our employees, supports our customers, and provides stability for my own family. OCEAN is therefore much more than a trade association to me; it is an organisation that helps shape the future of our industry.

We are already seeing a new generation step forward across Europe.

Take my French colleague and friend, Axel Barat, for example. He recently took over his family business from his father while also assuming the chairmanship of the French association, SNAN.

Following in those footsteps is no small responsibility, but it demonstrates that a new generation is ready to take ownership of our industry's future.

The responsibility now rests with us. We are the ones who will decide what OCEAN becomes over the next fifty years. If you would like to read where I believe our priorities should lie, please continue.

Why the European Union Matters in the Future

There is a well-known Swedish proverb: Tillsammans är vi starka - together we are stronger. When I look toward the future of European ship supply, those words capture exactly why the European Union matters.

Imagine a typical morning a few years from now. A ship supplier in Sweden needs to source specialised zero-emission fuel components from a manufacturer in Germany, exchange customs data through systems hosted in Denmark, and deliver the final items to a vessel in the Netherlands. If every member state operated under entirely different rules and procedures, even routine transactions would become slower, more expensive, and significantly more complicated.

Our industry is entering a period of increasing complexity. Environmental legislation is evolving rapidly, digital customs processes are becoming the norm, and geopolitical developments continue to reshape global trade. No single European country can address these challenges as effectively on its own.

This is where the European Union provides real value.

A common market, harmonised customs legislation, and shared regulatory frameworks give companies like ours the predictability needed to invest, innovate, and plan for the future.

When the EU introduces ambitious environmental legislation, it does more than create new obligations. It establishes a stable framework across one of the world's largest markets. That gives businesses, large and small, the confidence to invest in new technologies and sustainable solutions, knowing the rules are consistent across borders.

Critics often describe Brussels as a source of bureaucracy. While EU rules may inevitably introduce genuine compliance costs for businesses navigating complex new frameworks, from the perspective of ship supply, however, common European rules often reduce complexity rather than create it.

A harmonised framework helps ensure that companies in Italy, Belgium, Sweden, and every other member state compete under the same conditions while contributing to shared environmental objectives.

The European project is far more than a political idea.

It is one of the foundations that enables our industry to operate efficiently across borders and remain globally competitive. By combining knowledge, coordinating policy, and creating common standards, Europe can influence international shipping far beyond its borders.

That collective strength will be one of our greatest advantages in the decades ahead, and it is one of the reasons why I believe OCEAN should continue to engage constructively with the European Union.

Why OCEAN Matters in the Future

Reaching OCEAN's 50th anniversary is an important milestone. It is an opportunity to look back at what has been achieved over the past five decades and to reflect on what lies ahead.

The last few years have not been easy for our industry. We experienced the COVID-19 pandemic, adapted to the consequences of Brexit, and dealt with major disruptions to global supply chains. Those events challenged every ship supplier in Europe, but they also demonstrated the resilience of our members and the importance of working together.

It has been a privilege to serve as Vice Chair during this period alongside our Chairman, Costantino Zavoianini, and our Secretary General, Arne Mielken. Together with the Board, I believe we have continued to strengthen OCEAN's role as the voice of European ship supply.

I also hope this book reaches the next generation entering our industry.

Whether you are joining a family business or starting your career with a ship supplier, I hope these pages give you a better understanding of where our industry comes from and why organisations like OCEAN matter.

The industry you are entering will look different from the one many of us entered. Digitalisation is changing the way we work. Environmental legislation is accelerating the transition to more sustainable shipping. Customs procedures are becoming increasingly digital, and international trade is growing more complex.

These developments are not abstract policy discussions. They influence how we serve our customers every day, whether that means delivering provisions to a vessel, supplying technical equipment, or ensuring customs formalities are completed correctly and efficiently. This is one of the reasons I believe the European Union remains so important to our sector.

European legislation is not always simple, and businesses are often critical of new regulatory requirements. At the same time, common rules, harmonised customs procedures, and a functioning single market provide the stability that allows companies to operate across borders and compete on equal terms.

That is also where OCEAN plays an essential role.

When new customs legislation, environmental requirements, or other regulations are being developed, our industry deserves to have a seat at the table. OCEAN helps ensure that policymakers understand how their decisions affect ship suppliers in practice and works to create practical, proportionate solutions that support both competitiveness and sustainability.

For me, OCEAN represents something very simple: businesses achieve more when they work together than when they work alone.

That has been true for the past fifty years, and I believe it will be even more important over the next fifty.

Why Ship Supply Matters in the Future

When people talk about the future of shipping, the conversation often revolves around automation, artificial intelligence, digitalisation, and alternative fuels. Listening to those discussions, it is easy to wonder whether there will still be a place for the traditional ship supplier in twenty or thirty years.

I believe there will be.

Our industry is changing rapidly. Environmental ambitions are driving the transition to new fuels such as methanol and ammonia. Digital customs procedures are becoming increasingly important.

Ships themselves are becoming more advanced, and expectations for safety, compliance, and documentation continue to grow.

None of these developments reduces the need for ship suppliers. If anything, they increase it.

Technology can optimise a voyage, monitor equipment, or automate administrative processes. It cannot deliver critical spare parts to a vessel, ensure provisions meet the required quality, or solve unexpected problems when a ship's schedule changes at short notice. Those responsibilities still depend on experienced people who understand both the operational reality onboard and the practical challenges ashore.

As our industry becomes more regulated, that practical expertise becomes even more valuable.

The transition also depends on a predictable regulatory framework. Common European legislation on customs, environmental requirements, and the single market gives businesses the confidence to invest in new capabilities, train employees, and prepare for the future.

At the same time, we cannot simply assume that our current way of working will be enough. OCEAN's members must continue to challenge themselves, test new ideas, and prepare for situations that may seem unlikely today. How do we respond if digital systems become unavailable? How do we manage sudden changes in global trade or disruptions to transport networks? These are the kinds of questions we should be asking before they become real problems.

One thing, however, is unlikely to change.

As long as ships continue to trade internationally, they will need reliable partners ashore who can solve practical problems quickly, safely, and professionally. That is the role European ship suppliers have played for generations, and I am convinced it will remain just as important over the next fifty years.

Future priorities for OCEAN & European Ship Supply

The modern global landscape bears little resemblance to the world in which our predecessors established OCEAN.

Looking back at the first half of this decade, it is difficult to find a better word than uncertainty. We experienced the COVID-19 pandemic, adapted to the consequences of Brexit, and saw global supply chains disrupted in ways few of us had anticipated.

Those events reminded us that our ability to predict the future has become increasingly limited.

But uncertainty is not an argument for standing still. If anything, it is a reason to become more adaptable, more resilient, and more willing to evolve. If we want our industry to continue to thrive, we must actively shape its future rather than simply react to change.

That is why I believe modernisation must go beyond incremental improvements.

It is not enough to optimise existing processes or make small adjustments. We need to think differently about how our industry develops over the coming decades and ensure that OCEAN evolves alongside it.

In my view, that means focusing our collective efforts on a number of strategic priorities: sustainability, attracting and developing the next generation of talent, accelerating digitalisation, and strengthening our preparedness for an increasingly uncertain world.

Environmental Leadership

Sustainability is no longer a niche topic within shipping. It is becoming one of the defining factors shaping our industry's future.

Regardless of where individual companies stand on the pace of change, one thing is clear: our customers are investing heavily in reducing emissions, improving efficiency, and complying with increasingly ambitious environmental requirements. As service providers, we need to evolve alongside them.

The European Green Deal and other EU initiatives have accelerated this transition by creating common objectives and a more predictable regulatory framework. That certainty is important. It allows businesses to invest in new technologies, new services, and new skills with greater confidence.

Across Europe, many ship suppliers have already started that journey.

Digital documentation is reducing paper consumption. Companies are reviewing packaging solutions, increasing the use of reusable materials where possible, and sourcing more products locally when it makes operational and environmental sense. Repair, refurbishment, and recycling are becoming increasingly important parts of the value chain, reducing waste while creating new business opportunities.

The transition to alternative fuels represents another significant change.

Methanol, ammonia, hydrogen, and other low-carbon fuels will require new knowledge, new infrastructure, and new safety procedures. Ship suppliers will play an important role in supporting that transition by developing the expertise needed to handle these products safely and efficiently.

OCEAN also has an important responsibility.

Through our engagement with European institutions, including the EU Trade Contact Group, we should continue to advocate for legislation that supports the green transition while remaining practical for the companies responsible for implementing it. Good environmental policy should encourage innovation without creating unnecessary administrative burdens.

For me, environmental leadership is not about choosing between sustainability and commercial success.

The companies that adapt early will be better positioned to support their customers, remain competitive, and identify new opportunities as the industry evolves.

That is why I believe sustainability should remain one of OCEAN's strategic priorities in the years ahead, not simply because regulation requires it, but because it represents good business, responsible leadership, and the future of European ship supply.

Looking toward the future, our mission is clear. We keep our vessels moving, our waters clean, and our standards high. Together, we are building a maritime Europe that our grandchildren will be proud to inherit.

Cultivating the Future: Talent, Training, and Tomorrow's Leaders

One of the greatest strengths of the European ship supply industry has always been its people.

Across our member companies, there is a wealth of experience and practical knowledge. Many of the people who built this industry have spent decades developing relationships, solving problems, and understanding the realities of serving ships around the clock.

At the same time, many of those experienced professionals are approaching retirement.

That creates both a challenge and an opportunity. We cannot assume that the next generation will naturally find its way into our industry. We need to explain what ship supply is, demonstrate the opportunities it offers, and make it an attractive career for talented young people.

I believe OCEAN has a vital responsibility to play in that effort.

One area where we can make a real difference is knowledge sharing.

Our members face many of the same challenges, and there is significant value in exchanging best practices, practical experience, and new ideas across Europe.

We should also explore closer cooperation with universities, vocational schools, and research institutions to increase awareness of our industry and strengthen the connection between education and working life.

The skills our industry requires are also evolving.

Digital customs procedures, increasing automation, data analysis, cybersecurity, and environmental legislation are becoming part of everyday business.

Future ship supply professionals will need to combine traditional operational knowledge with new digital and regulatory competencies.

That makes continuous learning more important than ever.

OCEAN can help by encouraging training initiatives, facilitating the exchange of expertise between members, and supporting opportunities for experienced professionals to mentor the next generation.

For me, investing in people is one of the most important investments we can make.

Buildings, vehicles, and digital systems can all be replaced. Experience, commitment, and professional competence take years to develop.

If we succeed in attracting, developing, and supporting the next generation, we will also strengthen the future of European ship supply.

Digital Customs Excellence

Digitalisation will be one of the defining changes for European ship supply over the coming decades.

It is already transforming the way we work, from warehouse operations and inventory management to documentation, customs procedures, and customer communication. The companies that embrace these developments will be better positioned to compete in an increasingly connected and data-driven market.

One of the most significant developments is the EU Customs Reform.

The ambition to create a more harmonised and digital customs environment has the potential to simplify cross-border trade and reduce unnecessary complexity for businesses operating throughout Europe. For an industry like ship supply, where speed and efficiency are essential, this represents a significant opportunity.

At the same time, successful digitalisation is about more than introducing new systems.

The practical realities of ship supply must be understood when designing and implementing these systems. That is why OCEAN's engagement with European institutions remains so important. We need to ensure that future customs solutions support efficient operations while remaining practical for the companies responsible for delivering goods to vessels every day.

Digitalisation also extends well beyond customs.

Data, automation, artificial intelligence, and cybersecurity will increasingly influence how our businesses operate. These technologies should not replace experience and practical knowledge; they should strengthen them by helping us work more efficiently, make better decisions, and provide an even higher level of service to our customers.

For me, the conclusion is straightforward.

If European ship suppliers want to remain competitive, we cannot simply adapt to digitalisation; we must actively participate in shaping it. That should remain one of OCEAN's key priorities in the years ahead.

Automation Management

Artificial intelligence and automation deserve particular attention.

They have the potential to transform our industry just as significantly as digital customs procedures or the transition to alternative fuels.

AI will help businesses analyse larger volumes of data, improve forecasting, optimise inventory, and reduce administrative work. Automation and robotics will increasingly support warehouse operations and other repetitive tasks.

These developments should not be viewed as a threat to our industry.

They are tools that can make our businesses more efficient, improve service quality, and allow our employees to focus on the work where human judgement, experience, and customer relationships create the greatest value.

At the same time, this transition will require leadership.

Companies will need to invest in new skills, help employees adapt to new ways of working, and ensure that technology is implemented responsibly and securely.

OCEAN can play an important role by encouraging knowledge sharing, highlighting best practices, and helping members understand both the opportunities and the challenges that AI and automation will bring.

The question is not whether these technologies will become part of our industry; they already are. The real question is whether we choose to lead that development or simply react to it.

A World Dictated by Data

The ship supply industry has changed significantly over the past few decades.

Relationships, experience, and practical knowledge remain just as important as they have always been, but today they are increasingly supported by something else: data.

Used correctly, data helps us make better decisions, respond more quickly, and plan more effectively. In an industry where conditions can change rapidly, that is becoming a competitive advantage.

For me, the value of data can be summarised in three areas.

First, it improves our ability to plan ahead.

Shipping is influenced by weather, global events, port congestion, and constantly changing schedules. Better data and improved analysis allow us to identify trends earlier, anticipate disruptions, and respond before small problems become major ones.

Second, it strengthens cooperation throughout the supply chain.

As customs procedures become increasingly digital and regulatory requirements continue to evolve, reliable data helps businesses operate more efficiently while meeting the expectations of customers and authorities.

High-quality information reduces unnecessary administration, improves transparency, and supports smoother cross-border operations.

Finally, data helps us use one of our most valuable resources more effectively: people's time.

The objective is not to collect as much information as possible. The objective is to have the right information available when it is needed. When routine tasks are automated, and decision-makers have access to accurate, relevant data, employees can spend less time on administration and more time supporting customers, solving problems, and creating value.

Data will never replace experience, professional judgement, or strong customer relationships.

It should strengthen them.

OCEAN can play an important role by encouraging knowledge sharing, highlighting best practices, and helping members understand how better use of data can strengthen both individual businesses and the European ship supply industry as a whole.

Anti-Fragile Supply Lines & Crisis Preparedness

The past few years have reminded us that efficiency alone is not enough.

The COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit, geopolitical tensions, and repeated disruptions to global supply chains demonstrated how quickly established ways of working can be challenged. For our industry, preparedness has become just as important as efficiency.

Instead of relying too heavily on individual suppliers, transport routes, or systems, we need to build businesses that are resilient enough to continue operating when circumstances change. Diversified supply chains, strong local and regional partnerships, and well-developed contingency plans are no longer optional; they are becoming essential.

Better visibility throughout the supply chain, real-time information, and reliable data allow businesses to identify problems earlier and respond more quickly. Technology cannot prevent every disruption, but it can help us make better decisions when they occur.

Preparedness is also about knowledge. Regulatory requirements, sanctions, customs procedures, and international trade rules are becoming increasingly complex. One area where OCEAN could create additional value in the future is by providing members with practical guidance, timely information, and tools to help them navigate a rapidly changing regulatory environment.

The objective should not simply be to recover from disruptions. It should be to learn from them and emerge better prepared for the next challenge.

That is one of the greatest lessons our industry has learned over the past decade, and I believe it should remain one of OCEAN's strategic priorities in the years ahead.

OCEAN on the Global Stage

Although OCEAN represents European ship suppliers, our industry operates in a global environment.

Ships trade internationally, supply chains span continents, and many of the regulations affecting our members are influenced by discussions taking place well beyond Europe. That is why OCEAN's engagement cannot stop at the borders of the European Union.

We need to ensure that the practical perspective of ship suppliers is represented wherever international standards and regulations are developed.

Whether discussions take place within the World Customs Organisation (WCO), the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), or other international forums, it is important that policymakers

understand how their decisions affect the day-to-day operations of companies serving ships around the world.

Our close cooperation with the International Shippers & Services Association (ISSA) is an important part of that work.

Through ISSA, we exchange knowledge, share best practices, and strengthen cooperation with colleagues from every region of the world. It also gives us a stronger collective voice when addressing issues that affect the global shipping industry, from customs and trade facilitation to sustainability and digitalisation.

No single organisation has all the answers.

But by working together internationally, sharing experience, and learning from one another, we are better equipped to respond to new challenges and help shape a stronger future for our industry.

For me, international engagement is therefore not an ambition in itself. It is a necessity if OCEAN is to continue representing European ship supply effectively in an increasingly interconnected world.

Final Thought

Looking ahead, I am optimistic about the future of European ship supply.

The challenges we face are significant. Sustainability, digitalisation, artificial intelligence, geopolitical uncertainty, and an increasingly complex regulatory environment will all shape our industry in the decades ahead. At the same time, they also present opportunities for those who are prepared to adapt.

The past few years have shown what our industry is capable of. We have overcome the pandemic, adapted to Brexit, responded to supply chain disruptions, and continued to support our customers under exceptionally challenging circumstances. Those experiences have made us more resilient and better prepared for what comes next.

Technology will continue to transform the way we work, but it will not remove the need for knowledgeable people, trusted relationships, and practical experience. Those qualities have always defined successful ship suppliers, and I believe they will remain just as important in the future.

The European Union will continue to provide an important framework for our industry, while OCEAN's role as the collective voice of European ship supply will become even more important as new legislation, technologies, and business models emerge.

As Vice Chair, I feel both privileged and responsible to help shape that future. But I also know that no single person, company, or organisation can do it alone.

Everything OCEAN has achieved over the past fifty years has been built through collaboration, trust, and a willingness to work towards something larger than ourselves.

For me, OCEAN has never been just another industry association. It is a community of people who genuinely care about this profession and who understand that our greatest strength has always been our ability to work together.

I hope that when someone reads this book again in another fifty years, they will be able to say that our generation recognised the challenges ahead, embraced change with confidence, and left European ship supply stronger than we found it.

If we can achieve that, I believe we will have honoured the legacy of those who came before us while creating new opportunities for those who follow.

EPILOGUE

As we reach the final pages of this book, we can look back on fifty years of OCEAN through the experiences and memories of many of the people who have contributed to its development.

Their testimonies add an important personal perspective to the Association's history.

Beyond official documents, meetings and decisions, they provide a direct account of how OCEAN has evolved over the years and through the commitment of those who have dedicated their time, knowledge and experience to its activities.

This book was created to preserve that heritage and to recognise the contribution of the Presidents, Board members, representatives of the National Associations and all those who have played a part in OCEAN's first fifty years.

Looking ahead, the environment in which marine suppliers operate will continue to change significantly. Digitalisation, sustainability requirements, evolving EU regulatory frameworks, and the transformation of international trade and logistics will continue to influence how our companies operate.

In this changing environment, OCEAN's role as the voice of European marine suppliers will become even more important. Through its National Associations, OCEAN must continue to bring the experience and practical needs of our sector to the attention of national and European institutions, contributing to a better understanding of the particular characteristics of our business and of the impact that regulatory decisions can have on its daily operations.

But OCEAN represents something more than the interests of a business sector.

It is also the voice of a European community of people who share the remarkable experience of working in a unique and fascinating profession. Marine supply requires flexibility, speed, expertise, and an extraordinary ability to find solutions. Every day, our companies operate in an international environment where commercial pressures, complex logistics, regulatory requirements and unexpected situations are simply part of the job.

Perhaps this is also what creates such a strong sense of belonging among those who work in our sector. Different countries, languages and business cultures are united by the same understanding of what it means to supply a vessel: being there when and where you are needed, finding solutions and delivering, often against the clock.

OCEAN has the opportunity to strengthen this sense of community in the years ahead by encouraging closer connections between its National Associations, greater exchange of experiences and best practices, and the involvement of a new generation of entrepreneurs and professionals.

The future will certainly bring new challenges, but also new opportunities. OCEAN must continue to evolve with its members while preserving what has made the Association valuable for fifty years: the ability to bring people together, to turn their experience into a common European voice and to ensure that this voice is heard by the institutions that influence the future of our sector.

We can be proud not only of what OCEAN represents but also of the extraordinary profession and community that OCEAN has the privilege of representing.

Costantino Zavoiani

Chair, OCEAN

European Ship Suppliers Organisation

ANNEX 1: OCEAN LEADERSHIP IN 50 YEARS

OCEAN Chairmen

Olaf Boldreel (Denmark) – 1976–1989
Georges Garguilo (France) – 1989–1995
Peter Hickson (UK) – 1995–1997
Jens Olsen (Denmark) – 1997–2003
Michel van Hulle (Belgium) – 2003–2007
Stefan Ericson (Sweden) – 2007–2011
Alfredo Tosato (Italy) – 2011–2015
Dirk Cupido (Netherlands) – 2015–2019
Wolfgang Sump (Germany) – 2019–2023
Costantino Zavoiani (Italy) – 2023–Present

OCEAN General Secretary / Secretariat

Dr J. Buter (Netherlands) – 1976–1987
Dr A. J. M. Th. de Groot (Netherlands) – 1987
Laurens van der Ziel (Netherlands) – 1987–1998
Dr. Karsten Seidel (Brussels) – 1998–2003
Baastian Zwijnenburg (Netherlands) – 2003–2004
UECBV / Jean-Luc Mériaux (Brussels) – 2005–2019
UECBV / Karsten Maier (Brussels) – 2019–2025
UECBV / Dr Zeev Noga (Brussels) – 2025
Arne Mielken (London) – 2025–Present

OCEAN Administrative Secretary / Secretariat

ISSA / Spencer Eade (UK) – 1998–2020
ISSA / Sean Molony / Yvonne Paul (UK) – 2020–Present

OCEAN Rules of Organisation

1976: Original rules of organisation established.
1998: Completely revamped OCEAN Rules I.
2001: Updating of Rules II.
2009: Updating of Rules III.
2019: Updating of Rules IV.

European Integration

1958: European Economic Community (EEC): Established by the Treaty of Rome to create a broader common market.
1967: European Communities (EC): The Merger Treaty unified the ECSC, EEC, and Euratom under shared institutions.
1993: European Union (EU): Formally established on November 1 by the Treaty of Maastricht, expanding cooperation into foreign policy and justice.
2009: Treaty of Lisbon: Abolished the pillar structure on December 1, modernising institutions and granting the EU a single legal personality.
2020: Brexit: The United Kingdom completed its withdrawal on January 31 under Article 50.

ANNEX 2: KEY OCEAN MILESTONES & TIMELINE

Foundation Era: Draft Ship Supply Law and Butterfahrten

1976: Foundation Meeting in Schiphol, The Netherlands. Olaf Boldreel from Denmark is elected Chairman (29 June 1976)
18 October: Official letter to European Commission President François-Xavier Ortoli
December: First working group on ship supply draft regulation

1980s – Customs, Transport and Agriculture

1981: Greece joins the European Communities (EC).
1983: O.C.E.A.N Secretary transition from Dr J. Buter to Dr Norbert Traub
1986: Spain and Portugal join the EC.
1987: Dr A. J. M. Th. de Groot, followed by Laurens van der Ziel, took the OCEAN Secretariat to the Netherlands.
1989: Georg Garguilo from France takes over the OCEAN Chairmanship
Late 1980s: Early VAT exemption advocacy campaigns begin

1990s – The Campaign for the Tax-Free Status of Ship Supply

1991: Seville World Export Gathering - pivotal VAT campaign event
1992: VAT exemption success confirmed
1992: Community Customs Code established (12 October)
1993: EU Single Market launch - simplified procedures introduced
1995: EU expansion brings in Finnish, Austrian, and Swedish associations
1995: Peter Hickson becomes the first and only OCEAN Chairman from the UK.
1997: Jens Olsen from Denmark assumes the OCEAN Chairmanship.
1998: Dr Karsten Seidel takes the OCEAN Secretariat to Brussels

2000s – Security Amendment & AEO

2001: Post-9/11 security measures addressed
2003: Michel Van Hulle from Belgium elected OCEAN Chair
2003: Baastian Zwijnenburg takes over the OCEAN Secretariat
2004: EU enlargement adds Maltese and Cypriot associations
2005: Jean-Luc Mériaux becomes Brussels-based Secretary General
2007: Stefan Ericson from Sweden becomes OCEAN Chair.
2009: Historic Porto meeting with the EU Commission
2009: Genoa working sessions on Modernised Customs Code

2010s – Ship Supply Guidance & Brexit

2011: Alfredo Toasato becomes OCEAN Chairman
2013: Union Customs Code adopted
2015: Riga meeting during Latvian EU Presidency
2015: Dirk Cupido from the Netherlands elected Chairman
2016: UCC Annex B on ship supply published as UCC enters into force
2016: OCEAN's 40th anniversary celebrations
2016: UK votes to leave the European Union
2018: OCEAN Board meeting in Sofia, Bulgaria, during the Bulgarian EU Presidency

2020s - Crisis and Renewal

2019: Wolfgang Sump becomes the first German Chairman of OCEAN.
2019: Dr Karsten Maier becomes OCEAN Secretary General
2020: COVID-19 pandemic response
2021: The UK leaves the European Union
2022: Beginning of full-scale military aggression by Russia against Ukraine
2023: Costantino Zavoianni from Italy elected Chairman
2024: OCEAN Board meeting in Antwerp includes a visit by the EU Commission to Van Hulle Shippsuppliers N.V.
2026: Arne Mielken becomes Secretary General
2026: 50th Anniversary Celebratory Afternoon Conference & Drinks Reception, Brussels, Belgium
2026: Gala Dinner Dance, Grand Hotel Huis ter Duin, Noordwijk aan Zee, The Netherlands, to celebrate 50 years of EU ship supply

Current Member Associations (2026)

Full Members:

Belgium: KBBS - Koninklijke Belgische Beroepsvereniging der Scheepsbevoorraders
Bulgaria: Bulgarian Ship Suppliers Association
Cyprus: Cyprus Ship Suppliers Association
Denmark: Dansk Skibshandlerforening (DSF)
Finland: Finnish Ship Supply Association
France: Syndicat National des Approvisionneurs de Navires (SNAN)
Germany: Verband Deutscher Schiffsausrüster e.V. (VDS)
Greece: Greek Ship Suppliers Association (GSA)
Italy: Associazione Nazionale Provveditori Appaltatori Navali (ANPAN)
Latvia: Latvian Ship Suppliers Association
Malta: Malta Ship Suppliers Association
Netherlands: Nederlandse Vereniging van Scheepsleveranciers (NVS)
Portugal: Associação Portuguesa de Fornecedores de Navios (ASP)
Spain: Asociación Española de Suministradores Marítimos (AESMAR)
Sweden: Swedish Ship Supply Association

Observer Members:

Turkey: TURSSA (Turkey Ship Suppliers Association)

ANNEX 3: GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

Here is the updated and expanded **Glossary of Key Terms** used in the book, organised alphabetically **from A to Z** with the requested additions and detailed explanations:

Annex B: A crucial section of EU customs legislation that sets out the standardised data requirements, formats, and codes for customs declarations, notifications, and proofs of status across all member states.

Authorised Economic Operator (AEO): An official EU customs certification awarded to trusted ship suppliers that confirms high compliance, security, and financial reliability, granting streamlined cross-border procedures.

BREXIT: The withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union on 31 January 2020, which created a major structural shift in maritime logistics, requiring European ship suppliers to adjust to new customs borders, transit controls, and regulatory requirements for UK-bound trade.

COVID-19: The global coronavirus pandemic that caused unprecedented disruptions to global supply chains, crew changes, and port access, during which European ship suppliers played a critical role as essential workers, keeping vessels supplied and maritime trade moving.

Community Customs Code (CCC): The original codified customs regulations established in 1992 (Regulation (EEC) No 2913/92) that unified rules across the European Community and served as the historical foundation for modern EU customs law.

DG TAXUD (Directorate-General for Taxation and Customs Union): The department of the European Commission responsible for managing, defending, and developing EU policy on customs and taxation, serving as a primary regulatory counterpart for OCEAN.

European Economic Community (EEC): Established in 1958 by the Treaty of Rome, this expanded integration beyond coal and steel into a broader common market.

European Communities (EC): The collective term, from 1976, for the ECSC, EEC, and Euratom under a single set of institutions following the Merger Treaty.

European Union (EU): Established on November 1, 1993, by the Treaty of Maastricht, expanding cooperation into foreign policy, security, and justice.

EU Commission (European Commission): The executive branch of the European Union responsible for proposing legislation, enforcing EU law, and managing the daily business of the Union, including oversight of customs policy and single market trade rules.

Excise Directive: The EU legislative framework (Council Directive 2020/262) that sets out the general arrangements for excise duty on goods like alcohol, tobacco, and energy products, governing how these goods are stored, moved, and exempted during ship supply operations.

Excise Movement and Control System (EMCS): A computerised system used across the EU to track the real-time movement of excise goods - such as alcohol and tobacco - under duty suspension.

Export: The legal procedure of moving domestic goods (goods that have Union status or have been cleared for free circulation) out of the EU customs territory to a non-EU destination or onto an international vessel, releasing them from domestic tax jurisdiction.

Hugo Grotius: A famous 17th-century Dutch lawyer and philosopher who authored Mare Liberum in 1609 to challenge trading monopolies and establish open oceans for global commerce.

International Shippers & Services Association (ISSA): The global trade body representing the ship supply industry worldwide, representing over 1,800 ship suppliers across 50 countries and working closely with OCEAN on international maritime standards.

Mare Liberum: Latin for "free sea," a legal doctrine establishing that international oceans are open to all nations and cannot be claimed, owned, or controlled by any single state.

Modernised Customs Code (MCC): Adopted in 2008 as Regulation (EC) No 450/2008 to replace the CCC, this interim reform introduced paperless customs processing and paved the way for today's fully digital Union Customs Code (UCC).

New Computerised Transit System (NCTS): A European digital system that manages and tracks customs transit movements across EU member states and common transit countries.

OCEAN (European Ship Suppliers Organisation): The official representative body for national ship supply associations across the European Union, advocating for the industry in Brussels since 1976.

OCEAN Administrative Secretariat: The administrative engine of the organisation responsible for day-to-day organisational management, member communication, logistics, and supporting the operations of the Board and Working Groups.

OCEAN Board: The executive leadership body of OCEAN, comprised of elected representatives from national associations who set the strategic direction, oversee policy positions, and govern the organisation's activities.

OCEAN EU Secretariat: The specialised Brussels-focused diplomatic and policy arm of OCEAN, responsible for monitoring European legislative developments, engaging with EU institutions, and representing ship suppliers in the Trade Contact Group (TCG).

OCEAN Rules of Organisation: The governing framework and bylaws of OCEAN that define membership criteria, voting procedures, leadership roles, and internal decision-making processes.

OCEAN Working Group: A team of senior customs managers, tax professionals, and business owners within the European ship supply industry who analyse proposed EU trade rules, identify risks, and advise the board.

Provisioning: The act of stocking a vessel with food, fresh ingredients, drinking water, and dry stores required to sustain the crew and passengers for the duration of a voyage.

Re-export: The customs procedure applied to non-Union goods (goods originating outside the EU held in bonded warehouses or under transit) that are being shipped back out of the EU customs territory, such as delivering non-EU technical equipment to a foreign-flagged ship.

Ship Supply: The specialised sector of maritime logistics responsible for delivering essential goods - including fresh provisions, technical equipment, engine spares, safety gear, and bonded stores - directly to vessels at port or anchor, keeping ships operational, safe, and seaworthy.

Ship Supply Article (Article 269, UCC): A specific provision within EU customs regulations designed to ensure every member state interprets ship supply rules identically to maintain a level playing field across the Single Market.

Tax-Free and Duty-Free Status: A critical legal exemption where goods consumed on the high seas are exempt from domestic retail taxes (such as VAT) and import tariffs because international waters lie outside national jurisdiction.

Territorial Waters: A belt of coastal waters extending up to 12 nautical miles (approximately 22.2 kilometres) from a country's baseline, over which the coastal state exercises full sovereign authority, including jurisdiction over customs, fiscal, and immigration laws.

The High Seas: All parts of the ocean that are not included in the exclusive economic zone, the territorial sea, or the internal or archipelagic waters of any state, are governed by the principle of Mare Liberum.

Tobacco Traceability: Stringent EU security, tracking, and anti-smuggling rules for tobacco products delivered to international vessels.

Trade Contact Group (TCG): A consultative body hosted by the European Commission where OCEAN holds a permanent seat to discuss trade and customs policy with EU decision-makers directly.

Union Customs Code (UCC): The comprehensive legal framework governing customs rules, procedures, and duty calculations across all EU member states.

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS): The modern international treaty that codifies maritime zones, environmental standards, and the freedom of the high seas.

VAT Directive: The principal EU law governing value-added tax (Council Directive 2006/112/EC), which includes crucial provisions and exemptions for goods and services supplied to international maritime vessels operating on the high seas.

Victualling: The historical and technical term for providing food, beverages, and essential dietary supplies for a ship's crew and passengers during a sea voyage.

WCO (World Customs Organisation): An independent intergovernmental body based in Brussels that develops global customs standards, simplifies trade procedures, and provides international guidance on customs enforcement and security.

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