

THE LOBBYIST OF THE SEAS

“Shipping is a world where you can’t improvise, a world with age-old maritime traditions and continuous daily change. Today we move in a more articulated, partly ‘demaritimised’ administrative context, where as many as eight ministries have a voice and competences, and where lobbying certainly requires flexibility and multidisciplinary approaches”.

Telos: What is Confitarma and what does it do?

Luca Sisto: The Italian Confederation of Shipowners (Confitarma) is the home of the Italian shipowners since 1901. It has a long history between Genoa and Naples, where the first shipowners’ associations (the Free Shipowners’ and Neapolitan Shipowners’ Associations) structurally united in the ‘70s in Rome to strengthen and centralise union activity and represent the interests of the national shipping industry.

The association, which is a member of Confindustria (The General Confederation of Italian Industry), represents Italian businesses operating in every sector of passenger and cargo transport, in the cruise ship sector and in auxiliary transport services. We’re talking about 140 associations, including institutions and realities connected to maritime transport, with a fleet of about 800 ships, 12 million in gross tonnage and more than 51,000 jobs on board and on the ground. In addition to Confindustria, Confitarma is also part of the National Council for Economics and Labour, the Federazione del Mare (the Sea Federation, which it founded) and the Italian Navigation Institute.

Over the Alps and ... across the seas, Confitarma is a member of a number of important representational bodies: starting with ECSA, which represents the European naval industry, and ICS, the International Chamber of Shipping, which includes national shipowners’ associations from all over the world (chaired by Emanuele Grimaldi).

But that’s not all. There’s even BIMCO, the Baltic and International Maritime Consortium which gives a voice to the merchant shipping industry, INTERTANKO, the international organisation of independent tanker owners (whose President is Paolo d’Amico), INTERCARGO and IMEC, respectively the international association for dry bulk sea shipping and the body point of reference for employers in the shipping sector. It also collaborates and provides technical support to institutional representatives through the IMO and the ILO, the International Maritime Organization and the International Labour Organisation at the UN.

You have been Director General since 2018 but you joined Confitarma way back in 1989 when you held various offices. How has Confitarma changed for better or for worse in all these years?

Today I’m the head of an organisation that I joined as an intern with a Degree in International Law from the Political Science Faculty of La Sapienza in 1989. It’s been 33 years since, as a student at the Italian Society for International Organizations (SIOI), I spent the morning in the faculty of my professor, Luigi Ferrari Bravo, then rushed over to Via dei Sabini on my scooter (actually, then it was a moped...) as a young employee at the Transport Policy Service directed by the *legendary* Dr. Fiore.

So, like today at our stunning headquarters in Palazzo Colonna in Rome, Confitarma was dedicated to promoting the development of the Italian merchant marine by liaising with the Ministry of the same name, representing the interests of the *mobile industry* in all its relations with the institutions, the administrations and the economic, political, social and union organisations at the national, EU and international level.

Just like today, we would negotiate the Collective Contract of the Italian Shipping Industry. But unlike in the past, today the administrative context is much more complex, and partially ‘demaritimised’, seeing as eight ministries have a voice and competence, and where lobbying requires flexibility and a multidisciplinary approach.

If I close my eyes and think back over my career, I can hear the voices, recall the looks and teachings of my bosses and colleagues, all more or less young, who I learned a lot from on what was indeed a shared journey.

Shipping is a world where you can’t improvise, a world with age-old maritime traditions and continuous daily change. Even if you’re just navigating the paperwork (today the email), it’s impossible to get bored, immersed as we are every day in the seas of the world.

Confitarma hasn’t changed since then, yet it’s different, faithful to its mission and open to the urges of an even more fluid and closer world, globalised and more and more dependent, maybe not always consciously, on the sea. Ours is a world of highly competitive economic challenges that cannot be won alone. As President Mattioli often says, we go farther together.

Institutional relations and the representation of interests are central to the activities of any industrial association, and we can imagine how they were even more important during the pandemic. What were the main requests that you brought before the government and what were the results?

The pandemic probably showed everyone how important, no, how fundamental maritime transport is. Blinkered by the last mile, almost always on wheels, the country found itself immersed in a sort of sea blindness, ‘an inability to see the sea’.

During the pandemic, all the facemasks, medicine and even energy, food and raw materials that arrived via the sea (like in 90% of the cases) put the sea at the centre again. Shipping never stopped and allowed us to continue to live, even though we were isolated. Then we were on everyone's lips when a large ship got lodged in the Suez Canal, creating a logistical crisis and a challenge to the delivery of ground supplies. Therefore, our association has the mission to provide visibility – hence the right political attention – to an extraordinary and silent normalcy. Extraordinary in terms of numbers (23,000 containers on a container ship, 8,000 vehicles on a car carrier, 100,000 tonnes of energy on a tanker, just as an example) and silent due to its apparent distance from our cities.

An essential mobile industry of transport... that is invisible to most. I'm sorry I still haven't been able to allow our crews, the women and men of the sea, to express their right/duty to vote. As I write this, I am thinking of all the people working on the sea that were unable to vote in the administrative elections of the cities they keep alive by providing, via the sea, everything they need! On an industrial level, to date, we still haven't received any real aid, unlike other sectors. But I trust that in the coming weeks we will finally be able to take advantage of the efforts of our administration to help at least some of the shipping sectors that were hardest hit by the pandemic. Likewise, our lobbying efforts are mostly concentrated on two fronts: extending the International Register (we will be able to register our ships in other EU Countries and still maintain the benefits provided today only for ships sailing under the Italian flag) and the green transition (inevitable but complex for our hard-to-abate, fossil-fuel dependent sector). In my opinion, in order to face both of these challenges, the Administrations involved must listen to the needs of our Association. In the first case, we risk not protecting the national interest and, in the second, setting goals that are hard to achieve if we don't put industry at the centre.

You are also the president of the Italian Navigation Institute, a historic institution that doesn't just address the issues of the sea and water. Would you tell us something about this Institute?

We saved Private Ryan, like in the movie, by allowing a small but important Institute to survive! I'm talking about the Italian Navigation Institute, founded in 1959 and recognised in 1964 by the President of the Republic Giuseppe Saragat. It hadn't received any public financing in over a decade and today the only Italian Institute that spreads knowledge, the scientific and industrial application of 'navigation', in all its forms, is experiencing a season of change and reflection on its future.

I dream of relaunching this institute, where institutional, academic and industrial interests thrive and are shared among young students, born to cultivate a culture of technical navigation, which includes any movement of men and objects in space, in the skies, on the sea and on land.

I take it as an example of all that is useful and beautiful that we must not dissipate, of all that we can revitalise with little effort, in the general interest.

Marco Sonsini

Editorial

We need to build a dream of the sea in order to "*put the sea back in the centre for Italy*", and Luca Sisto is a concrete dreamer and inspires his lobbying activities by constantly blending them with family life and friendships.

According to Sisto, being simple, smiling and transparent is the best weapon and will get you a long way, beyond what we just perceive and what is tangible, and help "*breathe life into the dream*." Who is this Sisto anyway? PRIMOPIANOSCALA's July guest is the general director of Confitarma, the Italian Shipowners' Confederation, founded, as he explains, 120 years ago.

It's odd to think that, in a Country like ours, which *boasts* more than 8,000 km of coastline and a history of maritime republics, the so-called "blue economy" has never had any real, tangible political support. Maybe our politicians just don't know how to swim? Yet in the current hot geopolitical climate, with competition over access to resources, the sea should be central to economic, energetic and (why not?) even food development.

What Sisto has to say about the sea reminds us of Fernand Braudel and his *pianure liquide* that "*il faut la voir, la revoir*" [we need to look at it, and look at it again]. This French historian, archaeologist and leading scholar of the civilisations of the Mediterranean Basin was sure that everything transited through and returned to the sea, without ever repeating itself.

Our Country is a natural pier extending into the Mediterranean, which is almost like a lake servicing three continents. So, we shouldn't underestimate the sea, like during Fenici's time, as a place of exchange: because over 80% of goods are transported via water.

China knows how important the Mediterranean and ports are. Through its Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI), a part of the Belt and Road Initiative, it has launched a long-term project with the goal of improving its global connectivity by creating a network of ports and infrastructure. Italy also has a history of excellence in shipbuilding, especially passenger ships. Italian-made yachts are among the best in the world, especially when it comes to super-yachts, where once again Italian shipbuilding is a cut above the rest thanks to its ancient knowledge and unparalleled lifestyle.

Sisto tells us how his initiatives to defend and develop the shipping sector are becoming increasingly complex in an institutional system he defines as "demaritimised", a particularly apt neologism. He also adds that the sea is a "*world where you can't improvise, a world with age-old maritime traditions and continuous daily change*."

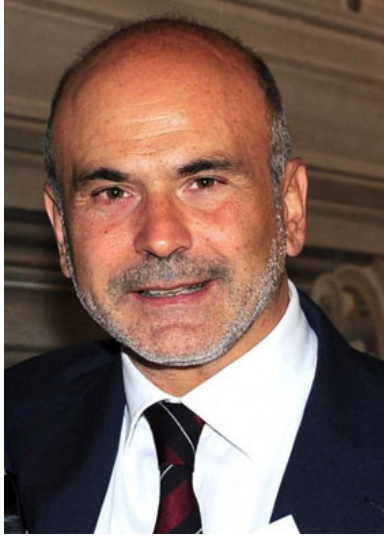
He goes on to remind us that, before Covid, Italy was "*blinkered by the last mile, almost always on wheels*," and suffering from "*sea blindness*". Then with the pandemic, we learned first-hand how, thanks to shipping, which "*never stopped*", we received all the supplies we needed to live, *literally*, and the sea became *central* again. Braudel was right, we need to look at the sea, and look at it again. But we also kind of need to dream about it, like Luca Sisto does.

The cover of the July issue of PRIMOPIANOSCALA featuring Luca Sisto has the same *pop, oneiric* style as our previous covers. It features Sisto's face and a collage of juxtaposed, unelaborated images that are symbols of his work, role and life arranged around his head like a hat. For Sisto, the romantic *dreamer*, we first chose Palazzo Colonna, where the offices of his Confitarma are located (*incidentally, not too shabby as an office*), a few iconic monuments in Rome, his hometown, a footballer and some Brittany Spaniels for his beloved dogs.

Of course, there's also the Gran Mogol and the Junior Woodchucks that represent his long involvement with the scouts. Then,

for a wonderful ending: the sea, fish, ships and the cover of *Rivista Marittima*, which he often writes for.

Mariella Palazzolo



Luca Sisto has been the General Director of Confitarma, the Italian Shipowners' Confederation, since 1 January 2018. He earned a Degree in Political Science from the Sapienza University of Rome in 1989 and that same year joined Confitarma. Over the following years, he has had positions with increasing responsibility in the Confederation, and in 2001 he became the Head of Transport Services Policy. During that time, he held various positions with Confitarma: from secretary of the Short Sea Shipping Commission and the Ocean Shipping Commission to secretary of the Technical Working Group on Bunkering from 2004-2005. In 2016 he was appointed Vice General Director. He is the promoter of the "Seamaster" programme, a first level Master's Degree in maritime transport and logistics. He has had many roles, including Vice President in charge of the sea for the Italian Navigation Institute. He is a member of the Interministerial Committee for Maritime Transport and Port Safety (CISM) and an advisor for the Mediterranean Transport Community (CO.ME.TRA.). He teaches at various universities and higher education institutes and has spoken at many international conventions. He has written a number of publications and articles on maritime policies.

The culture of sharing is a constant source of inspiration for Sisto. His many years of experience as a scout and in team sports (especially football, his true passion!), have taught him to see *others* as a resource and a part that completes the whole, never as a

threat.

He was born in Rome, is 58 years old and married to Cristina. And his secret passions? His small stone house in the Viterbo countryside where he loves to play the "weekend farmer and gardener". He can clearly see the sea on the horizon, like a distant yet reachable goal, alive and tangible. And his two Brittany Spaniels – saved and adopted by his wife Cristina at an animal shelter in Taranto, South Italy – they almost seem tucked between *"their South Tyrolean pampering and their Puglia roots. Non longer clinging to the Alps with their backs to the sea..."*

Marco Sonsini

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