

EN

E-001518/2025

Answer given by Mr Tzitzikostas
on behalf of the European Commission
(16.6.2025)

1. Regulation (EEC) No 3577/92¹ (the Regulation) opens the EU internal market to competition in domestic maritime transport (cabotage), ensuring equal access for EU shipowners. Under normal circumstances, domestic fares are typically set by private operators themselves. However, under the Regulation, Member States may derogate from the freedom to provide services by imposing public service obligations and/or concluding public service contracts to ensure adequate (notably affordable) transport services. It is for each Member State to decide whether to impose public service obligations or introduce social tariff schemes for specific groups (such as students, pensioners, or persons with disabilities), if the public authorities deem that commercial prices are not adequate to ensure connectivity, such as in this case between Sicilian Islands and mainland Italy/Sicily.

2. State aid rules for services of general economic interest (such as the maritime services at hand) impose transparency requirements at various levels. First, the entrustment act governing the provisions of the services must clearly foresee the compensation mechanism and the parameters for establishing the compensation, that may include a reasonable profit. Second, for large contracts (exceeding EUR 15 million), the entrustment act as well as the annual compensation amounts must be published². Finally, concerns about unjustified compensation can be reported to the Commission as potential incompatible State aid.

¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/1992/3577/oj/eng>.

² Commission Decision 2012/21/EU of 20 December 2011 on the application of Article 106(2) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to State aid in the form of public service compensation granted to certain undertakings entrusted with the operation of services of general economic interest.