

Ms Adina Vălean
Commissioner for Transport
Berlaymont
Wetstraat 200
Brussels, Belgium

Brussels, 14 April 2020

Facilitation of crew changes – Social partners' call for coordinated EU action

Dear Ms Vălean, dear Adina,

The outbreak of the corona virus (COVID-19) has developed into a catastrophic event affecting many countries and its citizens around the globe.

ECSA and ETF consider it crucial that the EU shipping industry remains able to perform its crucial function for the European economy and its citizens. 76% of EU's external trade is moved by sea, and 32% of intra EU transport of goods. It has to be ensured that essential goods, energy, food, medicines and many other products from outside the EU can be delivered to EU's internal market to serve citizens and vital industries in all Member States and be transported as smoothly as possible between EU Member States. Without this many supply chains would be severely impacted or come to a complete stagnation, making the economic impact of the crisis even bigger than already is the case.

Therefore, ECSA and ETF are calling upon the EU institutions and Member States to support the industry and its workforce with the challenges they are facing. Special measures and actions have to be taken with the greatest urgency to ensure that the shipping industry and the maritime transport workers can play their role in supporting the EU economy to the fullest extent possible, and the social, operational and economic impacts are reduced as much as possible.

Commission's Communication of 8 April very much welcomed

The measures being taken by Member States to restrict the movement of people and close their borders, in order to minimise the infection risks, whilst fully understandable, are having serious consequences for the movement of the essential workforce in the shipping industry. As a consequence, workers, both at sea and onshore, are experiencing several issues which require immediate action.

We therefore very much welcome the Commission's communication of 8 April 2020 'Guidelines on protection of health, repatriation and travel arrangements for seafarers, passengers and other persons on board ships'.



We have over the past weeks engaged with the various Commission services to explain that in order for the whole supply chain and industry to continue to function, exemptions from travel bans were needed not solely for maritime transport workers whose engagement was essential for the haulage of goods but to a broader group of maritime workers working at sea and on board ships performing work in the operation and maintenance of essential infrastructure and supply chains in order to keep society running as normally as possible.

We are very pleased to notice that this need for a broad definition of maritime workers was recognised and included in the guidelines of 8 April 2020.

Current restrictive measures by Member States cause severe problems

We sincerely hope that the guidelines will solve current problems stemming from measures imposed unilaterally by different Member States and prevent new problems to develop. Current restrictive measures not in line with the new guidelines are severely impeding the movement of maritime transport workers, including seafarers, to join their ships, exercise their right to shore leave and be repatriated at the end of their tours of duty, whilst their colleagues are forced to wait at home, unable to take their places on board. This has serious negative implications for the health and wellbeing of those working on ships beyond their tours of duty as set out in their employment agreements – as well as potentially the safety of the ship – and on the economic wellbeing of those prevented from joining their ships.

Obstructing movement of these essential maritime transport workers will also cause breakdowns in supply chains, which should be prevented at all times.

It can be expected that a significant proportion of the seafarer population in Europe will be incapacitated by Coronavirus – either because they have become infected or are otherwise required to self-isolate. This further underlines the correct and uniform implementation by Member States of the guidelines of 8 April to ensure at all times the health and safety of seafarers and port workers

We have the full trust that the guidelines stimulate co-ordinated action by Member States' transport, foreign affairs and public health authorities. We will closely monitor the developments and report back to you and your team in case restrictive measures are still being applied.

Political agreement on key points of the 8 April Communication is needed

Along the lines of the 8 April 2020 Communication, we request that a concrete proposal is put forth to the Council for political agreement regarding designated ports for crew disembarkation and crew changes, in line with the conditions set by you in your message on the 8th of April (inter alia geographical spread, capacity, proximity to health facilities and international airports).



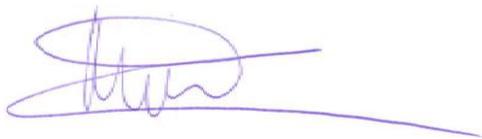
Assistance of EEAS urgently needed to repatriate EU seafarers

We would also like to draw attention to a further important call made in the aforementioned communication concerning the need to ensure the expeditious repatriation of European seafarers who are currently stranded in third countries or on vessels that have been unable to obtain permission to dock. We urge the European External Action Service (EEAS) to assist in the expeditious repatriation of these seafarers. Designating a specific email address for private operators to report directly specific cases, can help to ensure that cases can be dealt with collectively wherever possible.

Likewise, we urge the EEAS' assistance, through diplomatic representations with third countries, for the repatriation of third country seafarers stranded in the EU due to closure of the borders of their home countries.

Finally, we would like to express our gratitude and appreciation for the support you and your team are giving to the EU shipping industry and the Seafarers, in these very challenging times.

Yours sincerely,



Martin Dorsman
ECSA Secretary General



Livia Spera
ETF Acting General Secretary

