



President of the European Commission
Ursula Von der Leyen
European Commission
Wetstraat 200
1049 Brussels

Brussels, 06.07.2020

Subject: Crew changes in Covid-19 times – leadership European Commission is urgently needed to ensure that crew changes are able to take place without further delays

Dear President Von der Leyen,

We, the European and International social partners for maritime transport (ECSA, ETF, ICS, ITF) together with our maritime partners CLIA, WSC, IMEC, INTERTANKO and INTERMANAGER, would like to call on you, as President of the European Commission, to show political leadership and commitment to the welfare of seafarers by committing to do all to promote the facilitation of crew changes by EU Member States and third countries.

Seafarers are playing an essential role in maintaining the global flow of energy, food, medicines and medical supplies by ship. Unfortunately, many seafarers have been away from home for months, unable to leave their ships and return home because of travel restrictions imposed by governments. Meanwhile seafarers who have been rostered to replace them are being prevented from doing so by the absence of facilities for them to obtain visas to travel to the places where they are scheduled to join their ships – including in the Schengen area. Over 250,000 seafarers currently need to be relieved and this number rises with every week that passes. Some of these seafarers have now spent 15 months or more continuously on board.

These problems, if not addressed immediately, are likely to have severe consequences for the safety and physical and mental health of seafarers, in addition to the safety of ship operations and the functioning of global supply chains. The importance of crew relief to the maintenance of supply lines and resumption of transport links between European and other parts of the world and the health, safety and welfare of seafarers cannot be emphasised enough.

Ensuring crew changes are able to take place in EU ports without any impediment should also be seen strategically as part of the broader recovery plan for European

industries – not only in shipping but the other sectors that are needed in the chain of measures required to ensure crew changes (aviation, accommodation, land transport etc.).

All stakeholders in the industry have been working incessantly over the past months to ensure crew changes are able to happen. Guidance on measures to be taken by operators and other authorities so that seafarers are designated 'key' workers and their travel facilitated have been worked upon and also incorporated in IMO protocols. We have called upon the European Commission to press for the implementation of these protocols by coordinating efforts of EU Member States and also using the EU diplomatic service to urge implementation by third countries.

While we commend the efforts by the European Commission's services over the past months, the situation is far from satisfactory both in the EU and in third countries. There is no more time to lose – the seafarers need to see clear results now so that they are able to have their rights upheld without further delay.

The current situation now merits attention at the highest political level and needs your support. We therefore ask you to shoulder political responsibility and leadership by calling upon all governments to, without further delay:

- i. Designate all seafarers, regardless of nationality, as key workers and facilitate their movement under conditions that safeguard their health and minimize the risks of COVID-19 infection. For example: exempt them from travel restrictions including quarantine requirements provided the correct protocols are followed.
- ii. Ensure that seafarers are able to join and leave their ships for repatriation, crew changes, shore leave and medical attention without impediment. For example: temporary visa waivers for on/off-signers in all EU Schengen States would be essential to deal with the backlog of crew changes and high demand for visas expected over the coming months given the current logistical complexities for visas in EU missions and at the border.
- iii. create the necessary conditions for seafarer air corridors from the EU Member States and key labour supply countries.

The EU is uniquely placed to make a difference. We therefore respectfully call on you to raise this matter at the highest level in meetings both with EU Member States and with governments around the world. We consider the upcoming informal Council meetings of Home Affairs and Health Ministers, the plenary session of the European Parliament and the special session of the European Council would be important occasions to raise the matter within the EU.

We trust you will use your position to show the political leadership necessary to make a difference in practice both in the EU and in the global stage. This will be an important signal to show to the hundreds of thousands of seafarers still waiting for crew changes - that the EU is with them fully and is doing its utmost to ensure they can be relieved at the earliest opportunity.

Yours respectfully,



Claes Berglund
President ECSA



Frank Moreels
President ETF



Guy Platten
Secretary General ICS



Stephen Cotton
Secretary General ITF



Tom Boardley
Secretary General CLIA
Europe



John W. Butler
President and CEO
World Shipping Council



Francesco Gargiulo
Chief Executive Officer
International Maritime
Employers' Council



Capt. Kuba Szymanski
Secretary General
INTERMANAGER



Katharina Stanzel
Managing Director
INTERTANKO

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