



Frau Bundeskanzlerin  
Dr Angela Merkel  
Bundeskanzleramt  
Willy-Brandt-Straße 1  
10557 Berlin

Brussels, 03.08.2020

To: The Chancellor of Germany  
President of the Council of the European Union

**Subject: Crew changes in Covid-19 times – Save our Seafarers, call for action**

Sehr geehrte Frau Bundeskanzlerin,

We, the European and international social partners for maritime transport together with our maritime partners, would like to thank you for all the efforts Germany is making to facilitate crew changes. We also very much welcome Germany's announcement that, in its role as current Presidency of the Council of EU, it would take this matter up urgently with EU Member States.

Over a quarter of a million 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. An equal number are awaiting to join ships.

This is a humanitarian crisis that must be solved in order to protect seafarers that have been on ships for far too long. We are also concerned that any interruption to the flow of trade could have devastating consequences for the recovery phase.

We acknowledge that all stakeholders in the industry have been working ceaselessly over the past months to ensure crew changes are able to happen. While we welcome all these actions, we consider it is now time for the immediate involvement of Heads of States and Governments. More needs to be done to relieve seafarers and facilitate crew changes, which are currently happening at a rate of only 30% of what is needed.

We are therefore writing to EU Member States at the highest political level in order to call for urgent action nationally and in partnership with other countries.

Germany is well placed to make a substantial difference, as it controls one of the biggest fleet in the world and is home to several large ports and airports and an

important airline. Germany is also an IMO Council member, a G7 member and currently holds the Presidency of the Council of the EU and is a co-signatory of the 9th July ministerial statement on crew changes. We respectfully call on Germany to lead by example by taking the necessary urgent measures to implement the commitments in the 9 July ministerial statement at a national level and to use all its means to increase efforts to bring about an end to this growing problem.

The smooth facilitation of crew changes in the EU is still being prevented by, amongst other things, the difficulties in obtaining Schengen visas in the seafarers' countries of origin or at the border. We therefore respectfully request that you undertake the following further actions:

- Visa waiver: introduce temporary visa waivers allowing visa-free entry and transit through Germany for the purposes of crew changes. EU Regulation 2018/1806 allows for such a waiver to be implemented nationally for seafarers holding a seafarer's identity document issued in accordance with the ILO Conventions No 108 or No 185 or the IMO Convention on Facilitation of International Maritime Traffic. Given the territorial limitation of such a waiver we also respectfully encourage you to seek a cooperation agreement amongst Schengen countries. A visa-free transit area in the EU will signal that the EU wishes to effectively contribute to substantially facilitating crew changes. A waiver will be very effective also given the fact that limited flight connections require last minute arrangements. Moreover, the current practice of issuing visas in the embassies and on arrival in sea and airports, will not cope with the forecasted two-threefold increase in demand for visas per month in the next weeks, in view of the backlog of crew changes.
- As long as a temporary visa waiver is not implemented:
  - increase the visa processing capacity in German embassies in all labour supplying states and at the border points in airports and ports and prioritise visas for seafarers;
  - Issue visas on arrival: it is crucially important that Germany issues visas on arrival to seafarers arriving at a German border to sign on or off any vessel in a German port as well as to seafarers transiting Germany to join a vessel in another EU Member State or on a stopover to a third country when connecting flights and/or times require entry into Schengen area;
- Allow seafarers to stay in Germany for up to 10 days for the purposes of off/on-signing and repatriating, albeit restricting seafarer movement in order to protect local communities. Restrictive times makes it very difficult to align embarkation, disembarkation and transit flights with the arrival and departure of the vessel.
- Create, in consultation with the aviation industry and other EU Member states, the necessary conditions for seafarer air corridors from the EU Member States and key labour supply countries so as to increase access, as soon as possible, to commercial flights to and from the principal countries of origin of seafarers.

We trust you will use your current Presidency position to make a difference in practice both through concrete measures in Germany and by using your diplomatic influence to raise this matter at the highest level in meetings you are hosting as President, as well as in meetings with EU Member States and governments around the world. This will be extremely important to ensure seafarers can be relieved without any further delay.

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  
CEO  
IMEC



Capt. Kuba Szymanski  
Secretary General  
INTERMANAGER



Katharina Stanzel  
Managing Director  
INTERTANCO



Kostas Gkonis  
Secretary General  
INTERCARGO



Janet Strode  
General Manager  
IPTA



David Loosley  
Secretary General & CEO  
BIMCO



Mr. Yuichi Sonoda  
Secretary General  
ASA



Jonathan C. Williams FICS  
General Manager  
FONASBA



Margaret Fitzgerald  
Head of Policy & Regulatory  
Affairs  
IMCA

Copied to: Federal Minister of the Interior, Building and Community, Mr Horst  
Seehofer

Federal Minister of Transport and Digital Infrastructure, Mr Andreas  
Scheuer

Federal Minister of Health, Mr Jens Spahn

Federal Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Mr Hubertus Heil