

EU Ministers responsible for
Home Affairs and Maritime
Transport
Permanent Representations of
EU Member States

Brussels, 25 May 2020

Dear Ministers,
Dear Ambassadors,

EU Schengen visas not being processed so as to facilitate crew changes in EU ports: European Social partners' call for urgent temporary measures by the EU to ensure seafarers are admitted into the EU Schengen territory for the purpose of joining their ships or to be repatriated

We the European Social Partners for Maritime Transport call upon the Commission's services and the Member States to take urgent action to ensure that shipping is able to benefit from the re-establishment of transport links between Europe and other parts of the world and effect crew changes in European ports. We have continually stressed the importance of crew relief to the maintenance of supply lines and the health, safety and welfare of seafarers.

We applaud the efforts of the Commission in promoting the safe movement of seafarers within the Union and those arriving from elsewhere. We are also encouraged by the support by Transport Ministers for the Commission's recommendations in this regard.. However, these efforts are at risk of being nullified by the inability of third country seafarers to obtain the visas that they require in order temporarily to enter the Schengen territory.

We are aware that diplomatic missions of Member States in key seafarer supply countries have been forced to close temporarily, or at best are only able to offer a minimum level of service. We also note that, whilst visas on arrival are an option in principle, in practice the issuing services at entry points are overwhelmed by unprecedented demand. For example, whilst the imminent re-establishment of commercial flights between Manila and Amsterdam is most welcome, the limited


number of visas on arrival that Amsterdam airport is able to process per day (65/day vs estimated need of 300 p/day) highlights the need for imaginative solutions to overcome the immediate problem concerning visas.

We strongly believe that extraordinary temporary measures are required to ensure that crew members who have been unable to obtain a valid visa are nevertheless admitted into the Schengen territory for the purpose of joining their ships, at least until consular services are fully re-established and the current backlog of visa applications has been cleared. Such measures may primarily address seafarers travelling from home to join a ship (so called on-signers) but should also take account of seafarers leaving a ship to return home (so called off-signers). Crew changes can only be realised if both on-signers and off-signers are able to travel. We appreciate that this may include extraordinary steps. However, without such measures, the efforts that have been made, by international and European partners, to facilitate the crew changes that are so vital to the proper functioning of seaborne supply lines – and the wellbeing of the persons working on ships – will be seriously undermined.

Due to the impossibility of crew changes over the past months, seafarers have had their contracts extended awaiting the possibility to be repatriated. The international and European stakeholders are doing their utmost to ensure crews can be changed and seafarers can be repatriated at the earliest. We count on your support to ensure such crew changes can be effected without any further delays.

This letter is also being sent to the Commissioners responsible for Home Affairs, Ylva Johansson, the Commissioner responsible for Transport, Adina Valean and Vice-President Margaritis Schinas.

Yours sincerely,



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Livia Spera
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