



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

Brussels, 12 May 2020

RE : Request for coordination on EU level implementing Framework of Protocols for ensuring safe ship crew changes and travel during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

Dear Commissioner Vălean, dear Adina,

We thank you for your letter of 5 May and the assurance of the importance you attach to the shipping industry.

We remain committed to continued engagement with you and your services to provide you with information about the situation on the ground so that issues can be addressed and solutions implemented.

We would like to draw your attention to a number of topics that need action from the Commission.

A. Barriers to free travel of maritime transport workers

We thank the European Commission for the cooperation in coordinating Member States' efforts in implementing the Guidance of 8 April and for its assistance in helping to solve individual cases.

However, national measures vary considerably between Member States leading to many differences and uncertainties relating to how different ports or airports are operating and the information they require. Moreover, unfortunately not all Member States have to date declared maritime transport workers as key workers able to travel both internally and cross border/into the EU and to be exempt from quarantine rules¹. In addition, there is a lack of information from and co-ordination with border police/control officers requesting different documents and procedures at different points of entry.

¹ Therefore they are not exempt of travel restrictions and are undergoing cumbersome procedures to move in and out the EU and also face restrictions to move within Member States and in EU internal borders. Some Member States are not covering all the maritime transport personnel.



Therefore, social partners are still receiving numerous reports of difficulties experienced with travel and (dis)embarkations of maritime transport workers in EU Member States. Clearly more needs to be done.

Stronger communication, clarification and implementation on the 8 April guidance is needed

We therefore call on the Commission to enhance its efforts to promulgate the guidance at all levels in Member States (to different ministries and authorities), clarify it further and secure its implementation, in its spirit and practice, in a unified manner by all Member States. While of course the COVID-19 situation progresses in different stages in different Member States, which understandably makes it difficult to have the same kind of restrictions for the general public, a more unified approach and more clarity about Member States' measures and procedures in respect of the movement of seafarers and other maritime workers is needed.

We also think the use of the [templates](#) prepared by the ICS and ITF (published by the IMO) and the Commission as Annex 3 of the Green Lanes Communication may be of assistance to attest to such essential worker status.

B. Crew changes

Facilitation of (dis)embarkation, access to medical health and shore leave – including repatriation of seafarers to their home countries – are of major importance in ensuring seafarers' health and safety and prevention of fatigue-related accidents. The current global pandemic has severely disrupted this process. In order to ensure the continuation of maritime operations supplying essential goods to the European continent, we also need to urgently facilitate crew reliefs. Crews on many ships have already had their stays on board prolonged once (to 15 May) and for reasons related to the health and welfare of the crews concerned and the safe operation of the ships, it would be quite unacceptable if they continued to be prevented from disembarking and claiming their long overdue repatriation.

As you rightly point out, 'the problems are not limited to ports. The largest challenges are travel restrictions in the workers' countries of origin and limited transport connections both within the EU and globally.' Therefore in order to ensure the resumption of crew changes, more efforts are needed both within the EU/EU Member States and also with third countries to ensure this coordination.

The Framework of Protocols for ensuring safe ship crew changes and travel during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic (IMO Circular Letter No.4204/Add.14), will be key to achieving this. This was developed by a wide range of industry stakeholders including the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS), the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) and received input from the International Air Transport Association (IATA). We strongly encourage the Commission and the EU Member States to use these protocols as a basis for the European and national measures.



Enhanced efforts by the Commission needed to coordinate EU Member States' actions

The EU is uniquely placed to lead these efforts and set an example for other regions to follow. We therefore strongly urge the Commission to be active in coordinating efforts by EU Member States so as to ensure that all the necessary services are put in place in Member States. Close coordination within the Commission between the different services responsible for maritime, aviation, land transport, health, accommodation facilities (in cases of overnight stays), police and border controls, visa and external affairs is crucial and therefore an action plan to ensure their coordination action is necessary. These services are not yet in place in EU Member States and thus coordination efforts led by the European Commission would be very much needed and would ensure homogeneity in approach. It would be important to ensure a coordination between Member States on ports and international airports that can be available for crew changes.

We strongly suggest to the European Commission to ensure this is considered strategically as part of a broader recovery plan for European industries - not only the shipping sector but also these other sectors (like aviation, accommodation, land transport etc) that will need to be involved in such plan.

Close cooperation between IMO and EU institutions is required

The global nature of the industry and the pandemic means that any EU/EU Member States' action to facilitate crew changes requires the facilitation of seafarer travel in third countries. Joint efforts at international level and EU level are required to facilitate seafarer travel, crew changes and to better address existing restrictions introduced by many countries. The EU again is well placed to make a difference here and its EU's diplomatic service and EU Member States' delegations in third countries that should also be mobilized in pursuing these efforts. Hence we very much welcome the Commission's efforts in working closely with the International Maritime Organization. We therefore call upon the EU's External Action Service and EU Member States' diplomatic missions to promulgate the calls by the EU and UN bodies (IMO, ILO, WHO) and establish seafarer corridors between Europe and the other key regions in the world.

Pre-boarding requirements in third countries

Moreover, so as to ensure on-signing third country seafarers are able to travel to the EU, it is necessary to ensure that pre-boarding requirements can be carried out in the third countries, including medical tests and visa applications. It is imperative that third country seafarers are able to obtain Schengen Visas in their home countries – the facility for issuing visas at the EU borders should be kept for exceptional situations only. Unfortunately, to date, despite the EC guidance of 30 March and 8 April, very few Member States are processing visa applications in third countries – and even then in very limited quantities. Moreover, many Member States still have not adapted their procedures to allow, temporarily, for more visas to be issued at their borders. Therefore, enhanced coordination is required by the Commission Services (between DG MOVE, DG HOME and EEAS) and the respective ministries in Member States to ensure that the processing of Schengen visas and their extension, where necessary, happens smoothly and does not create further obstacles.



To conclude, we appreciate the important coordinating role the Commission has been playing in efforts to ensure the safe and secure continuation of shipping operations within the EU Member States. It is now essential to ensure the EU Member States follow a unitary approach and that EU leads by example in doing all it can to ensure crew changes can take place. Given the complicated nature of the procedures involved, only with joint efforts of all concerned and strong leadership and coordination can we manage. There is no further time to wait - our efforts are urgently needed for the health and well-being of seafarers. Persisting with the current restrictions risk to ultimately bring the seafarers and shipping operations to an halt.

The publication this week of the recovery package for Europe provides an opportunity to put forth a strong message in this regard.

We remain available to work closely with all the Commission services in this important joint effort and are available for video conference meetings at your convenience.

Best regards,

Martin Dorsman
ECSA Secretary General

Livia Spera
ETF Acting General Secretary

Copied to: DG MOVE: Henrik Hololej; Magda Kopczynska; Filip Cornelis