



Brussels, 06.07.2020

To: Mr. Charles Michel, President of the European Council

**Subject: Crew changes in Covid-19 times – leadership urgently needed to ensure that crew changes are able to take place**

Dear Mr. Michel,

We, the European and International social partners for maritime transport (ECSA, ETW, ICS, ITF) together with our maritime partners CLIA, WSC, IMEC, INTERTANKO and INTERMANAGER, would like to call upon you, as President of the European Council 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, amongst other things, the absence of facilities for obtaining visas to travel to the places where they are scheduled to join their ships – including 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.

The importance of crew relief and resumption of transport links between European and other parts of the world to the maintenance of supply lines and the health, safety and welfare of seafarers cannot be emphasized enough. At a time of considerable stress for global and national economies we are concerned that any interruption to the flow of trade could have devastating consequences for the recovery phase.

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 enable 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 incorporated in IMO protocols. We have called upon the 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. There is no time to lose – seafarers need to see clear results now.

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

- 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.
- ensure that seafarers are able to join and leave their ships for repatriations, crew changes, shore leave and medical attention without impediment. For example: temporary visa waivers for on/offsigners 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.
- 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 would like to 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 special European Council of 17-18 July 2020 would be an important occasion to raise the matter within the EU since political leadership and decision making is what is needed to make a difference now.

We trust you will use your position to make a difference in practice. 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 sincerely,



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  
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Francesco Gargiulo  
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Capt. Kuba Szymanski  
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President of the European Parliament  
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