



Brussels, 7 September 2020

Dear Vice President Schinas,
Dear Commissioner Johansson,

Subject: EU leadership needed in coordinating talks to ensure the urgent disembarkation of persons rescued by the Maersk Etienne on 4 August

We are writing to express the profound concern of the shipping industry over the ongoing plight of the Maersk Etienne, which rescued 27 persons found in distress at sea on 4 August and one month on still remains outside Malta awaiting a safe port at which to disembark them. This has caused a humanitarian crisis onboard for the rescued people and crew alike.

The rescued people, who include one child and a pregnant woman, have been onboard the ship for nearly a month. The crew has provided them with water, food and blankets and given them the support they can. However, the crew is not trained to provide the medical treatment needed nor to manage the prolonged situation with vulnerable people on board.

The ship does not have the capacity to provide a safe environment for the rescued people and is not sufficiently provisioned to ensure their safety and welfare onboard, nor that of its crew members.

It is of great concern that merchant ships are being directed to respond to SAR incidents by States, but are then becoming entangled in legal and diplomatic disputes that imperil the crew and rescued persons for extended periods of time.

The shipping industry takes its legal, moral and humanitarian obligations to render assistance to persons in distress at sea extremely seriously and has worked with the IMO to ensure that ships are as prepared as they can be when presented with the prospect of large-scale rescues at sea. However, merchant vessels are not designed nor equipped for this purpose.

The safety of life at sea is a higher principle that must be respected in all circumstances. It is imperative therefore for States to play their part in facilitating the swift resolution of these distressing and dangerous situations by ensuring that arrangements are in place for those rescued to be disembarked to a place of safety as soon as possible. A breakdown in the balance of trust between States and rescuing merchant vessels in such SAR incidents is likely to be profound and its consequences tragic.

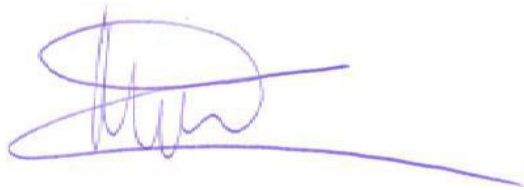
While the extra pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic are fully acknowledged, we consider it vital that all the States involved fulfil their obligations to cooperate in

the disembarkation and relocation of the rescued persons. Finding pragmatic, swift and solidary solutions is crucial so that, in this particular instance, the Maersk Etienne is provided with a safe port without further delay.

We call on the Commission to show political leadership by urgently coordinating talks amongst the countries involved in order to ensure the disembarkation takes effect without further delay.

The shipping industry needs assurances that merchant ships conducting rescues will continue to be afforded prompt and predictable disembarkation, in locations where the risks to the safety and security of ships, masters, crews and the distressed people they have rescued will be minimised, consistent with the requirements of SOLAS.

Yours faithfully,



Martin Dorsman
ECSA Secretary General



Livia Spera
ETF Acting General Secretary