

Brussels, 4-12-2020

OPEN LETTER

To: Ministers of Transport of EU Member States
Copied to: Commissioner for Health, Stella Kyriakidou
Commissioner for Transport, Adina Vălean
Permanent Representations of the EU

Subject: Crucial role of the EU Member States to ensure that crew changes are able to take place without further delays and seafarers are prioritised for vaccination

Dear Ministers,

On the occasion of the Informal Videoconference of the Ministers of Transport on 8 December 2020 and the agenda item on crew changes, we, the European Social partners for maritime transport, would like to thank you for your commitment over the past months to enable crew changes to happen in EU Member States. We also call on you to support the call of the European Commission and the industry for seafarers as key workers to be considered one of the priority categories for Covid-19 vaccination. Moreover, we call on you to continue to acknowledge the needs of seafarers by ensuring that national measures continue to facilitate – and not stifle – crew changes, repatriations and medical assistance for seafarers.

Seafarers to be considered as one of the priority categories for vaccination

As recommended by the European Commission in its communication of 15 October on preparedness for COVID-19 vaccination strategies and vaccine deployment, we strongly urge Member States to designate seafarers as a category of persons to be prioritized within their national vaccination strategies. Our national members are ready to engage with each Member State in order to work out the best approach and logistics for this to happen. Moreover, as shipping is a global industry, we would urge global solutions and mechanisms for the recognition of vaccinations.

Seafarers to be considered as key workers

We wish to thank all the European Transport Ministers who have supported the industry calls and engaged with their colleagues in Health and Home Affairs ministries to ensure seafarers are given key worker status and their travel facilitated so that repatriations, shore leave and crew changes are enabled. It is however worrying that recent IMO data shows that not all EU Member States have designated seafarers as key workers – despite clear recommendations from the EU Commission and the international organisations and as provided in the Protocols recently approved in the IMO MSC 102 meeting. We, therefore, urge that *all* Member States designate seafarers as key workers and implement the protocols without further delay. We also call on EU Transport Ministers to explore means of their Member States' exerting

diplomatic influence with third countries to achieve international recognition for seafarers as key workers. We know that some Member States are already doing this, for which we thank them. We urge all others to also do the same.

Issuing of visas and introduction of a visa waiver

The smooth facilitation of crew changes in the EU is still being obstructed by, amongst other things, difficulties seafarers are facing in obtaining visas. The industry has called on States to use the flexibilities available under EU rules to introduce visa waivers for crew changes. EU Regulation 2018/1806 allows 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, and to allow seafarers to transit their territory to board a flight/vessel in another Member State. Moreover, the difficulties in aligning the limited flight availabilities with embarkation and disembarkation times requires flexibility on the part of Member States to allow seafarers to stay in their country for longer than usual, until the arrival of the flight or ship on which they will depart. It is accepted that restrictions on seafarer movement may be necessary because of health precautions.

Medical attention for seafarers

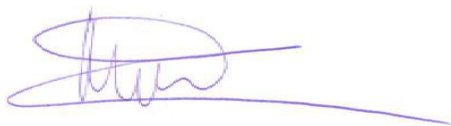
In this second wave and beyond, we have seen the reinstatement of certain restrictions and a lack of medical attention for seafarers who have tested positive for Covid-19. We urge transport ministers to continue to call on colleagues responsible for health and home affairs to ensure seafarers' travel to and from vessels and their right to medical attention. Flag states have a particularly important role to play here in leading by example in facilitating crew changes in their ports and supporting their flagged vessels in efforts to undertake crew changes and repatriations around the world.

Seafarers Delivering Christmas campaign

Before concluding, we wish to end by informing you that the international shipping community is working on a campaign to support seafarers still stranded at sea over the Christmas period (#seafarersdeliveringchristmas) and we urge EU Ministers to also support this cause.

Seafarers have served the world throughout this pandemic in extremely difficult circumstances. A strong message of support coming out of this Council meeting will send an important signal to the hundreds of thousands of seafarers still waiting for crew changes that the EU is with them all the way and is doing its utmost to ensure they can be relieved at the earliest opportunity.

Yours sincerely,



Martin Dorsman
Secretary General ECSA



Livia Spera
Acting Secretary General ETF