

Enhancing the Attractiveness of the Maritime Professions

Economic and Social Committee

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Commission's Task Force on Maritime Employment and Competitiveness

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Membership and mandate of the Task Force

The Task Force will be made up of individuals having a very broad range of maritime backgrounds: shipping companies, labour organisations, on-shore stakeholders, education, training and research. They will not be sitting as representatives of any interest group but in their personal capacities and not subject to any mandate on positions to be taken. In brief, the idea is to have experienced individuals express their own views without regard to the positions of the organisations with which they have been associated.

The mandate is to carry out an open-ended enquiry into how to improve the attractiveness of the maritime professions in Europe while ensuring the continued competitiveness and environmental performance of the EU flagged or owned fleet. Its work will take about a year.

It is asked to look into the nature and causes of current problems and suggest possible responses that the main actors might consider (Commission and other EU institutions, Member States, both sides of industry and other stakeholders).

It is not designed to conduct its own research nor to function as part of the social dialogue.

In sum, it is to provide informed in-put that will be useful to the main actors in their different areas of responsibility.

Initial approach: the facts

As chairman, I will suggest to the group an approach fully respecting the mandate, namely an open-ended enquiry without preconceptions and without specific proposals to be discussed at the outset.

Instead the group should begin by addressing the nature and probable causes of the problems, current and likely in the future. With the help of the Commission, information needs to be brought together to give a largely agreed presentation of the difficulties that we are now facing and will be likely to encounter in the future, as well as the probable reasons for them.

The current picture is confusing. There is a wealth of detailed information but it is fragmented, not collected in a consistent way and difficult to summarise and use for developing policy. It also can be read and used selectively to support conclusions that are not necessarily justified.

The group would make a significant contribution simply by giving a clear picture of current and future trends, and their probable causes, as a largely agreed basis for a constructive examination of possible initiatives.

Possible approaches

Then, in a second phase, the group would survey possible approaches in an entirely open way, at that stage not striving for convergence or consensus. It should simply inventory the possibilities: in all domains of possible action, for all levels of decision making, and for different trades and ship types.

It should take into account developments throughout the Union and beyond, especially in other OECD countries, and not be afraid to be imaginative nor shy to pirate ruthlessly interesting ideas from elsewhere.

After the inventory should come the common sense assessment of strengths and weaknesses, costs and benefits and political risks of the different possibilities. Out of that process should come convergence, even possibly consensus, as to what actions might be most effective and feasible. But it will not be necessary to be fixated on consensus in the sense of unanimous support. A high or low degree of support, if properly explained, will be enough for the main actors to use in the next phase of policy making.

Proof of the pudding

Of course, Chairmen's preferences do not always survive the first meeting of a new group, so I too have to be prepared to be flexible, But I will try to convince the group that this working method will have the best chances of making a significant contribution to future policy development.