

European Economic and Social Committee
Conference held on 11 March 2010
"Enhancing the attractiveness of the maritime professions"

Panel 2 - moderator: Marc Fouliard

"Maritime education and training: raising the skills of crews for global career opportunities"

Seafaring activities are becoming increasingly safe and oriented towards environmental protection. Much progress has been made in this area.

The sea is of key importance in sustainable development, whether at the level of transport, energy extracted from the sea or marine life, or of its diversity and management of its resources. Thus seafaring activities can be expected to expand. But this bright future will be increasingly bound by more acute environmental constraints.

In response to this, the European Commission's communication of 21 January 2009 (COM(2009) 8 final) sets out strategic goals and recommendations on EU maritime transport policy up to 2018. Two key points made are that:

- Europe should maintain core human and technological know-how to support the sustainability and competitiveness of current and future shipping operations;
- with the growing shortage of maritime professionals, officers and seamen, there is a risk of losing the critical mass of human resources that sustains the competitiveness of the European maritime industries in general.

In view of this context and outlook, and faced with an apparent paradox, how should teaching and training in seafaring develop and how can the skills of crews and prospects for international careers be enhanced?

To answer these questions, experts from different countries came together so that each could contribute their own particular viewpoint and we could draw conclusions that will in the future serve as guidelines.

The members of Panel 2 were:

- Captain Marc Nuytemans, Managing Director/CEO of Exmar Ship Management;
- Rowan Van Schaeren, lecturer at Antwerp Maritime Academy;
- Dr Shuo Ma, vice-president (academic) and lecturer at the World Maritime University in Malmö;
- Martin Fyrst Jakobsen, campaign director for the Danish Shipowners' Association;

- Michael Hunter, Head of the "Safety Assessments and Inspections" Unit at the European Maritime Safety Agency.

The Panel 2 discussions focused on the European level, since we were at the heart of the EU, while keeping the broader international context in mind, as well as the support that Europe has to provide for other countries, since the challenge is global.

After the presentations, debates and issues addressed, also by the other panels, the following conclusions can be presented:

1. Ensuring that training reflects employment opportunities both quantitatively and qualitatively:
 - quantitatively: there must be a European overview of employment and employment trends (collation of data and statistics at European level) in order to manage the market;
 - qualitatively: skills must be adapted to technological, social and economic developments, based on the STCW convention.
2. Ensuring the best calibre of candidates for entry to the profession. Prior to entry, this means familiarising people inland with the sea, e.g. by:
 - using the internet to inform people about our careers and their advantages;
 - opening our training establishments and their facilities to the public;
 - making the educational resources of maritime training schools available to the general public.
3. Ensuring that there are enough positions on board ships to provide candidates with adequate on-board training as apprentices, and allow them to find satisfactory employment conditions and prospects. The skills of seafarers are dependent on proper training, which means instruction and experience on board ships. It is this experience that qualifies candidates to take on management jobs on ships or to switch, if they decide to, to a second career on land. The attractive conditions, including salaries, for seafaring jobs must be maintained.
4. Promoting cooperation between European maritime training establishments in order to maintain the necessary peer pressure to ensure a high level of training, research and innovation. To this end an Erasmus-type system should be promoted to train officers, offering exchanges between maritime training institutions in the Member States.

This conference organised by the European Economic and Social Committee must be the starting point for effective cooperation between all European maritime training establishments.

5. Encouraging better use of information and communication technologies to improve quality of life at sea, and to develop a training system that is better adapted to modern resources and technologies.

EMSA inspectors have noted that training methods vary widely. To promote effective use of resources these methods must be used flexibly. At the same time, techniques and harmonisation of

evaluation processes must be developed in order to monitor the skills of seafarers regardless of training methods. It is important to resist a conservative approach; the risk must be taken to innovate, which in the long run will bring success and efficiency.

6. Supporting exit, and therefore entry, from and into the profession with a view to offering quality employment prospects to experienced officers who wish to take up a second maritime career on land. To be attractive, the maritime professions must enjoy a high social status.

Experience acquired at sea is an essential asset for officers' future, especially for those seeking an alternative career. Mobility, openness and the existence of pathways to other sectors are three key attractive features.

However, initial training for officers must focus on developing the skills that they will need on board ship. It is crucial that seafarers should be professionals who are highly qualified in their maritime career. Once they have those qualifications, they can consider further training for a second career¹.

7. Developing the social advancement of seafarers and creating bridges between different sectors of activity (fishing, commerce, professional yachting, etc.).

Officers must be recruited at senior level who will contribute to the prime activities of current and future maritime transport. It is just as important to maintain recruitment at all levels and develop social advancement tracks as well as bridges between activity sectors. Many seafarers who have entered by the "back door" develop social and technical skills that are needed by the maritime sector. The diversity of profiles and recruitment creates wealth and social cohesion, and helps to promote the flow of candidates into the profession.

Each of these measures could revive the image of maritime transport. The world is becoming aware of the resources provided by its seas and of the importance of preserving them. The maritime sector has considerable potential for sustainable development and deserves to recruit high-quality staff, with our continued commitment.

¹ Further training should be introduced to produce good professionals, along the lines of the MBA in Maritime Transport and Logistics set up by the Normandy School of Management in Le Havre, which will start in the academic year 2010, or the Maritime and Transport masters degree being prepared jointly by the National Merchant Navy School and Le Havre University for 2011.