

(As delivered)

**European Economic and Social Committee Conference  
“Enhancing the Attractiveness of the Maritime Professions”  
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Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to be here today and I am delighted to be able to participate in this forum on a subject that is crucial for the future of shipping and very close to my heart. As a former seafarer myself and someone who has spent his entire professional life involved, in one way or another, with all matters maritime, I speak as one for whom the attractiveness of the maritime and ancillary professions needs no enhancement.

However, I like to think I am a realist, and I do recognize that not everyone may share my enthusiasm. So, anything I can do to help shed light on this matter and to encourage positive discussions on it is, I think, a very worthwhile use of my time – and yours.

Let me begin by looking at a few facts – at the risk of reiterating what you may already have heard earlier this morning. In today’s global economy, hundreds of millions of people all over the world rely on ships to transport the great multitude of commodities, fuel, foodstuffs, goods and products on which we all depend. Yet, for most of them, shipping, and the huge range of related maritime activities that, together, go to make up what is loosely termed “the shipping industry”, do not register a particularly strong echo on their personal radar. The very nature of shipping makes it something of a “background” industry. For most people, most of the time, ships are simply “out of sight and out of mind”.

Shipping usually only comes to greater prominence when, as inevitably happens from time to time, the bleaker side of the industry rears its head, when an accident or pollution occurs. This, obviously, tends to sway public perception negatively. Yet the truth is that, over many decades, shipping has actually become safer and cleaner, not to mention more cost-effective. Indeed, you could argue that it is something of a testimony to the ever-improving safety and environmental record of the industry that it is able to go about its business so quietly, largely untrumpeted and unsung and generally unheralded.

But, considering its achievements and its success in accomplishing its objectives, I believe that shipping is an industry to be proud of and that not a single opportunity should be missed to emphasize this. As the title of this seminar suggests, we need to explore ways in which the attractiveness of the industry can be enhanced.

Shipping is able to boast a history and a tradition that few others can match. And yet it remains as relevant to the modern world as it ever has been – perhaps even more so because, without it, today’s global economy simply could not exist and be sustained. The legacy that seafarers hand down to one another is one of pride in a job well done, of attention to detail, of skills diligently learned and painstakingly applied; in short, of **seamanship**.

Despite this, however, it is widely predicted that, unless something is done rapidly, shipping will soon face a **manpower crisis**; there simply will not be enough properly qualified officers to run a world fleet that continues to increase in size. The evidence clearly suggests that, today, not enough young people, particularly in the western hemisphere, seem to find seafaring an attractive and appealing career and the industry cannot afford to ignore the current shortage of good entrants.

No doubt the unique hazards confronting seafarers – pirate attacks, unwarranted detention and abandonment, denial of shore leave, to mention a few – serve to exacerbate this trend. But, despite the numerical decline in officer-level entrants, nothing, I believe, can take away from shipping what an exciting, rewarding and fulfilling career it is – a career that can take people almost anywhere, both in geographical terms and in terms of the sort of work they may finally find themselves doing.

Seafaring is not only a satisfying and worthwhile career choice in itself, it is also a passport to a huge variety of related jobs ashore for which experience at sea will make one eminently qualified. It is certainly a cause for encouragement that there now seems to be a greater awareness that, after a seagoing career in a responsible and demanding job, there are many opportunities ashore in related industries that rely on the skills and knowledge of those with seafaring expertise. This is something the industry and its supporters need to stress.

The many dedicated professional seafarers who, having served their early years at sea, now hold positions as managers and superintendents in shipping companies, maritime pilots, VTS and rescue coordination centres' operators, advisers to Ministers and executives in shipping-related activities (such as insurance companies and classification societies, professors and teachers at maritime academies and colleges), scattered throughout all parts of the industry, are shining examples of what can be achieved – not to mention those shipmasters and engineers who have become shipowners themselves.

The importance of sustaining and developing a high-quality manpower resource for the industry's future cannot be overestimated and, in this context, it is worth reflecting, for a moment, on some of the fundamental changes that have taken place over the last 30 years and which have led to the current situation. For there can be no doubt that, culturally and socially, shipping today is a world apart from the industry of the 1970s and those changes must be acknowledged and understood if shipping is to strengthen and maintain its ability to recruit new people of the right calibre.

In the 1970s, the multi-national crew was the exception rather than the rule. Very often, a ship's officers would come from one of the traditional shipping nations, while the crew might come from developing regions – usually from south-east Asia.

Before containers came to dominate general cargo shipping and large tankers were forced to use offshore terminals, life for seafarers centred much more around time spent in port. A general cargo ship might call at ten or more European ports before setting off for, say, the Far East. Each port call might last two or three days, perhaps even a week (or more in the case of bulk carriers), depending on the cargo to be loaded and the facilities available. And without regular, daily communication at sea via satellite, the port became the focus for receiving and sending mail, for contact with home and family as well as with the company and its management ashore.

It was a challenging, exciting and slightly exotic life, in which individuality and an independent spirit were important elements. It was relatively well rewarded too; and it was, all in all, a more sociable existence. With as many as 30 to 35 people on board a ship and fairly normal regular working hours, at least while in port, there was plenty of opportunity for seafarers to enjoy a diverse and interesting life – albeit at a cost to their pockets!...

Life for seafarers today is more pressurized in almost every way. With crew numbers pared down to perhaps twelve or fifteen persons, the sheer demands of work are immense. And, with so few people on board, a ship can be a lonely place during the off-duty hours. Port stays are periods of intense activity and, for commercial reasons, the pressure is always on to turn around as quickly as possible. And today, seafarers generally work for manning agencies rather than shipping companies, so there is very little time to settle into the

comfort of a routine and to establish the sort of working relationships that most people are entitled to develop and enjoy.

And yet, many of the advantages that a career at sea has always offered remain the same – and, with changing global economic patterns, their appeal has gradually shifted steadily to the developing nations. Good wages, early advancement to posts of responsibility, opportunities to travel, good long-term prospects, long holidays and the sense of doing something very different from just working in an office have a universal and timeless appeal to many young people setting out on a career. It is certainly true that developing countries have broken through the old officer/crew barrier now, and today it is by no means unusual to find competent and experienced officers from outside the traditional shipping nations in charge of the most modern vessels. As the industry looks to enhance its attractiveness, it is in these newer markets that its efforts are most likely to bear fruit. This, however, should not be interpreted as meaning that efforts to attract young seafarers of the right calibre from the traditional maritime countries should cease. On the contrary, given the potential (both qualitatively and quantitatively) of the respective markets, every possible effort should be made to persuade youngsters from such countries to join the ranks.

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Ladies and gentlemen, it would be remiss of me to finish without making mention of initiatives currently underway at IMO that we hope will serve to improve the visibility of shipping globally and to focus on the valuable work carried out by seafarers and the extent to which we are all in their debt.

As you may know, at IMO, we lead an annual celebration of World Maritime Day and, each year, a different theme is selected, giving us the opportunity to highlight one particular facet of the diverse and varied maritime world. This year, our focus is on the unsung heroes of the unsung industry we serve – the seafarers. Indeed, we have designated 2010 as the “**Year of the Seafarer**”, to coincide with the conference we will convene in Manila in June to extensively revise the STCW Convention and Code.

The theme, which has received global acclaim, is providing an excellent opportunity to convey to the 1.5 million seafarers of the world the message that the entire shipping community appreciates them and their indispensable services; is aware of the conditions under which they operate; shows compassion for the sacrifices they make; and really does care for them. It will, we hope, also add impetus to the “**Go to Sea!**” campaign, which we launched in November 2008, in association with the International Labour Organization, the “Round Table” of shipping industry organizations and ITF, to help stimulate initiatives for recruitment into the industry. And I look forward to receiving, later in the year, the ISF/BIMCO Manpower Update.

In conclusion, let me reiterate my firmly held view that, despite the challenges it presents – or perhaps because of them – shipping, as a career, offers a series of enticing advantages and unique opportunities for many young people embarking on their professional future. They can turn to it with confidence that they, and their families, will secure a certain and well rewarded life.

As for the industry itself, it would, I believe, help to accept that, in any effort to improve public perception and raise positive awareness, the most important element is not the image but the reality. I believe that shipping has a good track record and a very good story to tell – about how it carries more than 90 per cent of world trade safely, securely, efficiently and at a fraction of the environmental impact and cost of any other mode of bulk transportation – and, therefore, we must spare no effort to ensure that, through the media, national and international, such everyday realities are always given their due prominence. I hope that meetings such as this will serve the purposes I outlined to you here today.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you.



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