E- MARITIME

Thank you for giving EU shipmasters the opportunity to express the opinion on the e-Maritime concept. During our participation in former EU projects such as EMBARC and MARNIS, the concept of e-Maritime is not unfamiliar to shipmasters, united in CESMA.

When we consider a new approach to maritime developments, our prime concern is the consideration whether the concept takes sufficient notice of the safety and security of the crew, vessel, cargo and eventual passengers. The advantages, as well spelled out and acknowledged, should not work against the already mentioned parameters. Electronic data as assimilated in the concept, cannot be ruled out any longer from cargo documentation and ship reporting systems. It should be counterproductive not to accept the advantages and the possibilities to standardize procedures. In the somewhat conservative shipping world, this will not be easy to achieve, especially in small ports in the far corners of the European Union. When some areas are not compatible with the system, the application of e-Maritime could appear to be unworkable.

One of the main concerns is the way and method in which the data are entered in the system. If errors are not being observed at an early stage, they could work very negatively on safety standards on board ships. We can mention gross weights of containers which in many ports are being reported incorrect, bringing the stability and the seaworthiness of the vessel in danger. There are a number of examples which can confirm this theory.

Another issue is the reporting of hazardous cargo, the correct IMDG class and quantities. If not correctly reported and entered in the system, this could lead to serious accidents, especially when the vessel is on fire by whatever cause. Many accidents and incidents confirm this point of view.
Searching for discrepancies in a fully automated system looks like a difficult mission. This is the reason why we advocate for a proper back-up and fault-finding system which should also be available on board the vessel so that it can be consulted in the event of an emergency. Contents of regular containers of general cargo are unknown to the ship’s staff, making them very vulnerable in the event that contraband or drugs are found inside the container after discharging. When the e-Maritime system would be in operation, the ship’s staff should have a complete overview of all the cargo on board which in fact is according to the law.

A very important issue which affects the shipmaster in particular, is the stipulation of the Expected Time of Arrival or ETA. It is true that not all shipmasters realize the importance of a correct ETA which is properly updated the days and hours before arrival. This correct ETA is a major component of a proper operation in a port. In fact the e-Maritime concept depends for a large part on the information which the vessel provides. With the assistance of the reporting systems, as soon as the vessel enters European waters, it can be closely monitored, reducing incorrect information to a minimum. Important information in this respect are the weather forecasts provided by Coastal Stations. Weather conditions can influence the speed of a vessel considerably. Headwind force 8 can reduce the speed of a medium size vessel to about half speed, this in contrast with a train or a roadlorry.

One of the most interesting aspects of e-Maritime is the single window concept. The vessel has to send its messages once and all other parties are duly informed. Reducing the paperwork on board will contribute greatly to maritime safety as mariners will have more time to dedicate themselves to safe navigation. Moreover the problem of fatigue, for watchkeepers in particular, will be reduced as off duty hours can be used to rest in stead of spending hours on useless paperwork.
If we are well informed, e-Navigation will be an integral part of e-Maritime. All discussions on e-Navigation have not been concluded yet, but there is a possibility that the total division of tasks on board and on the bridge will be amended. This includes also the role of the shipmaster and part of his responsibilities. As the STCW95 Convention has recently been adapted and nothing is changed with regard to the responsibility of the shipmaster, we would like clear answers in this respect, before we can fully support the concept.

We understand that e-Maritime is a concept for the future and that it is an example of what the European Union considers best practice in conducting the maritime industry and the transport of goods by sea. Many issues have to be settled before we have reached the goal of a worldwide e-Maritime concept. If we limit the concept to Europe, it will show itself useless in the future as the maritime industry is a global industry.

We appreciate the initiative of the Commission to integrate into the e-Maritime concept the element to make the seafaring profession more attractive. e-Learning and broadband connection to the internet could prove to be an important contribution.

CESMA is positive about the concept and will follow proceedings closely. It is also willing to give any practical assistance if asked for by the initiators and the Commission.

Capt. Fredrik J. van Wijnen
CESMA

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