

**INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF
THE MARITIME LABOUR CONVENTION, 2006
ATHENS, 30 AND 31 MAY 2013**

Excellency, Minister of Shipping and Aegean, Vice-President and Transport Commissioner of EU, Representative of ILO, Secretary-General ISF, General-Secretary ITF, Chairman Hellenic Chamber of Shipping, Chairman of the Union of Greek Shipowners, Chairman Greek Shipping Co-operation Committee, General Secretary Panhellenic Seamens' Federation, Founder Maria Takos Foundation and of course Secretary-General emeritus IMO who is now also the President of Maria Takos Foundation.

On behalf of the Secretary-General of IMO, Mr. Koji Sekimizu, who is unable to be here due to other commitments, let me thank you for providing me the opportunity to be with you today and participate in this important event.

It is significant that this event is discussing the implementation of the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006. Significant - because this convention along with the SOLAS, MARPOL and STCW conventions has been described, by no less than the then Secretary-General and now Secretary-General emeritus of IMO, as the four pillars of Maritime Conventions.

While SOLAS deals with safety and security issues, MARPOL deals with issues related to protection of the environment and STCW deals with standards of training and watchkeeping of seafarers. MLC deals with social issues and is often described as the Bill of Rights of seafarers. Speaking as an ex-seafarer, the various forms of protection set out in MLC was not there when I was at sea and has taken a long time to come. But nonetheless, I say better late than never.

To this end, it gives me great comfort that I had been involved with it from the beginning.

In assembling my thoughts for my address today, I was fascinated by the results of my inquiries and research concerning your country as a formidable maritime State, and your maritime history and achievements. Greece's maritime history seems inextricately linked to its political, economic and social progression towards development as an independent modern State. I was quite fascinated to come across mention of dynasties, trade in various commodities – all these bring back poignant memories of history lessons suffered as a child in school which today, now that I am actually in this land of rich history, has come richly come to life!

Although my research could not identify the exact timeline of the start of your maritime history with certainty, Greece have been a maritime nation since ancient times, as the mountainous landscape of the mainland, and the limited farming area and the extended coastline of Greece led people to occupy with shipping. The geographical position of the region on the crossroads of ancient sea lanes in the eastern Mediterranean, the multiplicity of islands and the proximity to other advanced civilizations helped shape the maritime nature of the Greek nation at an early stage. Thus, the Greeks soon came to dominate the maritime trade in the region, gradually expanding it along the shores of the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea.

As it stands today Greeks, who more than any other people in the world, have remained mariners without interruption throughout history; they have loved the sea, they have thought of it as a beautiful element, they have been happy at sea, a friendly environment for them - an extension of themselves. They enjoyed the feeling of independence, and the optimistic outlook it gave them. They enjoyed its freedom and the freedom of the spirit. This is not history alone, but about a love affair between the Greeks and the sea, an inseparable couple, two inseparable elements of life.

Having said that, I am sure, that Greek shipping would not have developed and flourished, if they had apart from looking after the safety aspects, not also ensured the social well-being of those who manned and operated their ships.

Now coming to the issue at hand, regulatory aspects dealing with social issues had been covered through various ILO conventions, which due to a variety of reasons had not kept up with the changing times and also had not been ratified by all maritime States. MLC 2006 has now consolidated these small pillars into one strong pillar with the provision of keeping it fit for purpose as time progresses through a simplified amendment procedure similar to those of IMO instruments.

I am sure that today as we approach the historic moment in Maritime history, Greece would once again lead from the fore-front as they have done in the past.

I once again thank the organizers for inviting me to this Conference and am sure that everyone will benefit from the deliberations and make the Conference a success.

Thank you