

Minister Your Excellences Ladies and Gentlemen,

First I would like to thank and congratulate the Maria Tsakos Foundation – International Center of Maritime Research and Tradition for organising this seminar and the Greek Ministry for Shipping and the Aegean for placing it under its aegis.

The August 2013 entry into force of the Maritime Labour Convention (MLC), is indeed a most significant event in maritime history.

An achievement, since instead of some 70 conventions, instruments and recommendations that have up to now constituted international maritime labour law, there will be “a single, coherent instrument” that will provide the fundamental rights and freedoms that constitute decent conditions of work for some one and a quarter million seafarers, but also a big challenge, for flag and port states and shipping companies who have to prepare timely for its implementation.

It is therefore most welcome that we, seafarers, states and shipping companies, are given today the opportunity, to gain a better understanding of its requirements and the means for its effective, timely and global implementation.

It should not be forgotten that the MLC has rightly been described as “the most ambitious convention ever, covering the modern realities of working conditions aboard a 21st century ship” and aims to become, along with the SOLAS, MARPOL and the STCW conventions, the “fourth pillar” in a maritime regulatory regime that is global in scope and ambition, providing a level playing field in which all parts of the international shipping industry can operate and flourish.

In addition to constituting a seafarers’ bill of rights”, it actually protects all parties, with a strong emphasis on fairness and equity. There are obvious benefits for good shipping companies, who hopefully will no longer be undercut by those operating poor quality shipping and it has been designed for a

uniformity of enforcement, so that the globe-girdling merchant ship will not encounter different standards and ambiguous interpretations as it moves from port to port and between jurisdictions. Also, the rights and responsibilities of governments, competent authorities and recognised organisations are detailed.

However, welcome as it is, and although its requirements are mostly already complied with in practice by responsible shipping companies, there is no denying that the MLC will increase their work, since they will have to go through the hurdle of certification, surveys, etc.

For this reason and to avoid teething problems, it is very important that flag states issue in time detailed national requirements and set in place and efficient certification process.

It is also very important that PSC states do not get overzealous or precipitate enforcement controls.

Provided that consideration is given to the above, the implementation and enforcement of the MLC will ensure that the shipping industry is a modern one where social provisions for the workforce are central, setting minimum standards, addressing conditions of employment, accommodation, recreational facilities, food and catering, health protection medical care, welfare and social security protection.