

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR
ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
ILO MARITIME LABOUR CONVENTION, 2006
EUGENIDES FOUNDATION
ATHENS 30-31 MAY 2013

Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me first thank the organisers of the International Seminar on the Implementation of the ILO MLC for the invitation extended to the PNO to participate at this event.

It is well known that the MLC otherwise known as “Bill of Rights for Seafarers”, since it introduces international accepted minimum labour standards, so that a level-playing-field exists in shipping, irrespective of flag and at the same time industrial and social security rights for seafarers are safeguarded, primarily those on fundamental rights and principles, laid down in Article III of the Convention.

Allow me to say by way of introduction that the above-mentioned Convention was unanimously adopted by the International Labour Conference in February 2006 with no vote against, a fact that signifies the will of international shipping community – states, seafarers and shipowners – for regulating world shipping.

Allow me also to say that the highest seafaring union in Greece, the Pan-Hellenic Seamens’ Federation (PNO), had actively participated for more than five years in the preparatory work that led to the adoption of the Convention by the Conference.

As it was mentioned by previous speakers the MLC incorporates and builds on sixty-eight existing maritime labour conventions and recommendations, as well as more general fundamental principles, to ensure decent working and living conditions for all seafarers.

The MLC is designed to sit alongside regulations such as the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) standards on ship safety, security and quality ship management (SOLAS, STCW and MARPOL).

I would like to underline the provisions of Article III and in particular those on freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining on the one hand and the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour, on the other.

In relation to the latter, I take this opportunity to recall that Greek seafarers continue to be under civil mobilisation status, imposed on 6 February 2013, for the fourth time in the long history of Greek seafaring movement, the ones before were in 2002, 2006 and 2010.

The imposition of civil mobilisation order on Greek seafarers constitutes a clear and flagrant violation by the Greek Government of the Maritime Labour Convention as well as the ILO core conventions Nos. 87, 98 and 105 and a stigma for a European Union country.

Having said that, let me now turn on how the PNO approaches the MLC. I said at the beginning that the Convention introduces international accepted minimum standards in maritime labour, which in plain words means that under no circumstances higher standards, enjoyed by Greek seafarers, could be downgraded to MLC standards.

Besides, relevant to the above, is the provision in the Preamble to the MLC which “recalls paragraph 8 of article 19 of the Constitution of the International Labour Organisation which provides that in no case shall the adoption of any Convention or Recommendation by the Conference or the ratification of any Convention by any Member be deemed to affect any law, award, custom or agreement which ensures more favorable conditions to the workers concerned than those provided in the Convention or Recommendation.

It is therefore self-evident that the standards set by the MLC aim at achieving the obvious, the level-playing-field for all ships, irrespective of flag, so that the underprivileged seafarers, particularly those from labour supplying countries, who are often exploited by shipowners, are guaranteed decent minimum living and working conditions applied across the board in global shipping.

The PNO is ready to take active part again in the post MLC era through the Special Tripartite Committee, responsible for keeping the working of this Convention under continuous review.

We are aware that the first meeting of the above Committee is planned to be convened in early 2014 to discuss, amongst other things, proposed amendments to the Code of the Convention to address the issue of financial security for seafarers and their dependants with regard to compensation in cases of personal injury, death and abandonment, based on the Recommendations of the joint IMO/ILO Ad Hoc Expert Working Group on Liability and Compensation regarding Claims for Death, Personal Injury and Abandonment of Seafarers which were adopted in March 2009.

We are encouraged by the fact that the MLC enters into force internationally in August 2013 and look forward to its implementation for the benefit of seafarers worldwide.

Flag and port states have duties and obligations, clearly specified in the relevant Guidelines developed for this purpose. They also have a responsibility to ensure proper implementation of this new Convention. Time will tell.

Thank you for your attention.

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