Maritime transport: training and recruitment of seafarers

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PURPOSE : to present a Communication on the training and recruitment of seafarers. CONTENT : with the present Communication, the European Commission wishes to provide an update on the decline in the number of EU seafarers and an analysis of the reasons behind it, the possible implications for the EU shipping community and the measures necessary to reverse it. The Commission is aware that any measure affecting the human element has an impact on the competitive situation of shipowners, but considers that the evaluation of alternative solutions can no longer wait if we want to improve the present worrying situation. Employment and training are two issues for which the Member States have prime responsibility. The Commission does not intend to replace the Member States in this field. However, it wishes to stimulate an urgent and productive discussion on this matter. The Commission has already started to address the problem of the shortfall in the number of EU seafarers. It believes this action needs to be pursued and enhanced through joint action by all the actors concerned, in order to remedy the current worrying situation. It is for this reason that the Commission recommends that the priority actions listed below be addressed. - Proper application of existing Community and international law on living and working conditions and the quality of shipboard operations is a fundamental tool not only for improving safety at sea and preventing pollution, but also for tackling the decline of the seafarer professions. Member States are invited to ensure that such legislation is properly applied; the Commission, for its part, will monitor this process and ensure transparency through Equasis. - Scheduled passenger ferry services within the European Union are labour-intensive, and are served mainly by EU-flagged vessels crewed predominantly by EU nationals. EU seafarers in this sector face increasing competition from cheaper non-EU labour. The Commission proposed a solution to this problem in its Communication of 1998. While discussions on the Commission·s proposals continue in the competent fora, different solutions to the same problem might be found in parallel by the social partners by way of a voluntary agreement. - The Commission recommends that the Member States and the social partners organise coordinated awareness campaigns at national and European level to re-launch the image of the shipping industry. - A few simple arrangements, with the support of modern technologies, can significantly improve the living and working conditions on board ship. - Preserving a high-quality system of maritime training in the EU is vital for the survival of EU seafarers, the competitiveness of the European maritime industry and the enhancement of safety and environmental protection. - Community instruments are available for the financial support of maritime training, as are Community initiatives in the field of human resources. The Commission recommends that the Member States and the social partners explore and take advantage of the opportunities offered by these instruments. - The Community may support the industry's effort to reverse the present shortfall of EU seafarers by sponsoring a number of ad hoc research projects through the forthcoming Sixth Framework Programme.