

WIDENING HORIZONTS FOR THE SHIP OFFICERS. TOWARDS A NEW CONCEPT OF THE MARITIME TRANSPORT CAREER IN EUROPE

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The number of students choosing the nautical and marine engine studies is steadily decreasing in the European Union. The METHAR (1) project carried out by the European Commission confirmed the tendency through a statistic of the new Officer of Watch certificates delivered when the project was realised by the end of 1998: 73 Officers per year in Belgium, 74 in Ireland 76 in Portugal, 189 in Spain and 200 in Sweden. In the year 2000 the new officer certificates issued in Spain were 137 and in Portugal 28 only.

In the last years it has been referred to the ship officers as an "endangered" species (Dublin Conference December 1996: Is the EU seafarer an endangered species?). The good standard of life in Europe has an important impact in the lack of interest to work at sea, after a short time at sea most of the seafarers prefer to take a post on shore even if the work is not adapted to their qualifications until now almost exclusively focussed to work on board ships.

However, the METHAR project and the new Thematic Network METNET (2) have detected changes in the programmes of some maritime training Institutions in Europe. Such Institutions, generally having University level, are passing from a teaching designed to prepare the students to "sail" to a more wide scope that provides the access to knowledge adapted to take administrative and management posts on shore-based industries or the Administrations. In this new evolution of the maritime career, the navigation, handling of the cargo and controlling the ship engine are parts of the training that can be learned in the first level of the career (the first three years for Diploma and the last two years for the Bachelors of Science degree). This strategy is giving good results and many former ship officers are now carrying on their activities in managerial posts on shore. The experience has confirmed that the combination of business administration knowledge with operational work on board ships is very well appreciated by the shore part of the maritime transport sector.

This experience could be extended to other countries of the European Union because it has been realised that some of them are facing problems when they employ personnel from other careers in the shore-based shipping industry due to their lack of adequate operational training. Trying to solve the problem there is a proliferation of courses offering a Master degree with emphasis on maritime administration that are followed by graduated from other careers like engineering, economics, law, etc. In other cases the maritime industry offers specific training courses to supply the knowledge about ships but, in both cases, the results are not completely satisfactory due to the lack of "operational" experience.

The minimum levels of knowledge and competency required by the STCW convention, as amended in 1995, are widely over passed in the European Union. For this reason, the METHAR project defines as "European Concept" the extension and enrichment of the maritime education and training to provide the students with additional knowledge on economics, logistics, management, etc. very useful to take managerial posts in the maritime industry and the maritime administrations.

It is good to mention here that some countries of the European Union already follow the above mentioned European concept. The maritime education and training programmes include the possibility to get a Bachelor of Sciences degree and in some cases a PhD. Subjects as Psychology, Sociology, Ethics, Shipping Management and Personnel Management are included. The suggested new orientation of the traditional nautical studies towards a "Maritime Transport Career" addressed to cover the needs of the entire maritime industry and administration will make more attractive the studies at the maritime academies and will contribute to mitigate the lack of qualified personnel in the European maritime transport sector.

The EU project METHAR has continuity in a Thematic Network on Maritime Education, Training and Mobility of Seafarers (METNET). This new project includes the following activities related to this matter:

- Design of MET programmes applicable to the European Union countries in order to harmonize the teaching systems and facilitate the mobility of ship's Officers to take posts at sea or on shore in any country of the EU country.
- Design of courses and course materials for some subjects that will provide adequate level of preparation to take managerial and direction posts on the shore part of the maritime industry. Some of these courses are: Shipping Management, Port Operations and Marine Pollution.
- Design of courses for the training and improvement of professors with the objective of harmonizing the maritime education and training methods in the European Union.

The activities, findings, conclusions and recommendations of the METHAR and METNET projects are fully related to and supporting the initiatives carried out by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the European Commission in the fields of maritime safety and prevention of pollution. The improvement of maritime education and training have a direct influence in the human factor that is the key element to improve the maritime safety and is a matter of priority for IMO.

As it is well known, after the ERIKA accident, the European Commission jointly with the Parliament and the Council are developing very important actions to improve the maritime safety including the creation of the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA). It is expected that the results of the above mentioned EU projects METHAR and METNET will also contribute to the initiatives of the European Institutions to improve the maritime safety through the education and training of ship officers which is the basic pillar to reduce the human factor influence on maritime accidents.

The METNET project will be finished in March 2003 and then the results will be disseminated to all sectors concerned. If the responsible authorities and the maritime training institutions apply the recommendations, course programmes and the corresponding teaching material produced by the project, an important progress towards harmonization of maritime education and training in the European Union will be achieved.

Apart of the results and recommendations that the METNET project will offer, my personal suggestion is that the Universities and other maritime education and training institutions can initiate a process of modernization of the maritime career including in their programmes subjects like: shipping and port management, human resources, administration, Information technology, planning and others.

Things are moving very fast due to the exponential development of advanced technology. The European Union is adapting the research and development to the present tendency, one example is the ambitious Sixth Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration activities. The maritime education and training should also be adapted through updated teaching programmes to the evolution of the modern technology in alignment with the European Union policy.

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(1) http://europa.eu.int/comm/transport/extra/final_reports/waterborne/METHAR.pdf

(2) <http://www.metnet.info>

METNET

Thematic Network on Maritime Education, Training and Mobility of Seafarers

THE 4E CONCEPT

ESSENTIALS – EXTENSION – ENRICHMENT – ELEVATION

In the past ship officers leaving the sea were often not satisfactorily prepared for work in shore-based positions in the maritime sector as they had only been exposed to maritime education and training (MET) that was shipboard-confined. Today, most national MET systems and programmes offer opportunities for students to qualify themselves not only for work aboard ships but also, after some years at sea, for a career in the maritime sector ashore. This, although not appreciated by some ship operators, raises the attraction of seafaring in general and helps recruit young qualified people for seafaring careers, which normally do not end on board ships but in the maritime sector ashore.

The preceding research project METHAR has revealed that the scope and suggested purpose of such "additives" to shipboard-confined MET shows considerable differences. METNET has therefore developed the 4E concept of education and training for ship officers in order to facilitate international communication on and comparison of MET systems and programmes. This communication is necessary for providing a connection between national MET and the international labour market for maritime personnel. However, the main goal remains to attract more qualified young people to the sea and possibly keep them a bit longer on board for gaining the competence that is appreciated and needed in the maritime sector ashore.

- The first E of the 4E concept stands for **ESSENTIALS** and denotes MET programmes, which cover the minimum requirements of the STCW Convention.
- The second E stands for **EXTENSION**, the extension of MET programmes beyond STCW Convention requirements. Extension is confined to shipboard knowledge and competence and represents non-degree MET. Extension can have two basic forms: It can be an extension of a Convention topic or an extension to a non-Convention topic.
- The third E stands for **ENRICHMENT** to Essentials and Extension. Enrichment normally qualifies MET as degree MET and provides a basic qualification for employment in the shore-based maritime industry and a better appreciation of shore-based requirements which can also be of benefit for shipboard work.
- The fourth E stands for **ELEVATION**. An Elevation programme is offered to students with 3E MET. It leads to an MSc or MBA degree. An Elevation programme should be directed to a more specific qualification for work in the maritime industry ashore. It should be offered only by a few universities/MET institutions in Europe.

The majority of the 16 in the METNET Consortium and the Reference Groups participating countries offer 3E MET. Some countries with 3E MET also offer 2E MET and a few countries offer only 2E MET. Three countries offer also 4E MET.

With a view on the benefits for industry and individual, METNET recommends:

- to offer and promote 3E MET in all countries,
- to maintain 2E MET in the countries where it is today offered in order to increase the number of national applicants,
- to offer upgrading programmes from 2E to 3E MET,
- to offer graduates of 3E MET the opportunity of upgrading to 4E MET.