

## EMPA 60<sup>th</sup> GENERAL MEETING GHENT, BELGIUM

### Navigating the Past, Steering the Future

The meeting took place in NH Collection hotel in Ghent, Belgium on 14th – 15th April 2026. It began with the Council of Presidents of member associations where the organization of the general meeting was discussed in detail. The changes in EU Directives concerning ports and port operations had been presented by the president of EMPA. A profound discussion had been made on deep sea pilotage, EMPA position paper and the need for deep sea pilotage to be regulated and only qualified deep-sea pilots to be allowed to pilot the ships.

The actual meeting was opened by EMPA President Miguel Vieira de Castro. He mentioned that the first EMPA GM was in 1963, 5 associations attended, opened by Marseille pilot. Then he continued with the present challenges to EMPA - digitalization, changing maritime transport, safety, resilience, security – pilots have responsibility on those matters. Pilots stay close to other stakeholders in sharing the responsibility. The value of human capital is vital for pilotage. Technology cannot do the job of the pilots. The opening ceremony continued with the speeches of

- City of Ghent Vice Mayor Sofie Bracke – port of Ghent merged with Dutch ports of Vlissingen and Terneuse to form North Sea Port, new realities which pilots face on global port operations
- North Sea Port -Harbour Master Wim Van Bogaert –
- IMPA President Simon Pelletier- pilot safety, the core of IMPA work, 01.01.2028 the change of pilot boarding arrangement regulation. We pilots should report any non-compliances with pilot boarding arrangements. Every year more than 4 mln. pilot transfers are made. Pilotage is public service, not a commercial operation. Pilots act primary on the public. Pilotage have to be isolated from the commercial competition. The pilots must be properly trained; they have to be free from commercial pressure to do proper risk assessment. Competition and commercial pressure compromise safety. Present example in Argentina is showing that competition in pilotage impairs the safety. Denmark is another example. Chile privatized pilotage and allowed competition. In Romania the door of competition was opened, and we have to close that door today. Pilotage system should be free of competition to ensure safety of navigation. Digital transformation and AI change the environment of shipping. AI offers potential to predict risk and improve management, but it could not replace pilots. The focus should be on use of technology to improve our job. Foundation was established by IMPA in 2025 for improvement of training of pilots. The public is best served by well-prepared pilots.

Keynote speech EU port Strategy was delivered by Torsten Klimke, Head of Unit, Ports Security and Inland Navigation, (MOVE 3) EU Commission:

- EU ports handle 3.4 billion tonnes, 550 ports,
- EU Strategy has 5 pillars –
- (1) Strengthening competitiveness, innovation and digitalization –
- (2) Energy Transition, Sustainability and Clean Industries – integration between transport and energy sector, electrification of ports, use of green energy, use of alternative fuels
- (3) Protect and Secure Ports – ensure ports are safe of crime and drug traffic, increase of cyber security of the port management systems
- (4) Access to Finance and Investments
- (5) Social cohesion, Skills and Jobs – importance of small ports - EU will support them to keep workers reskilled in the transition

During the coffee break commercial presentation had been made by ABEKING & RASMUSSEN – Christoph Arndt, captain, navy ships, yachts, pilot boats and vessels. He presented the SWATH principle which reduces the pitching and rolling due to sea waves and that principle is used when building tender and pilot boats.

The meeting continued with the round tables:

(1) EU PORT STRATEGY INDUSTRIAL MARITIME STRATEGY CHALLENGES.

- ECSA Secretary General - Sotiris Raptis – proactiveness and investment to transition from EU
- ETA Secretary General - Anna Maria Darmanin
- ESPO Secretary General - Isabelle Ryckbost - World is changing very fast and ports and port infrastructures should adjust in the new challenging times. Port play role in tackling challenges in security
- FEPORT Secretary General - Lamia Kerdjoudj – ports are strategic asset, they need investment to be in line with the development
- RWS Specialist Advisor Shipping - Carien Droppers – wind farms and safety, extra monitoring what is going on around the wind farms, extra emergency towing ships, extra search and rescue facilities, etc. Human factor analysis – possible solution is use of deep sea pilots. The analysis shows that the stress in the crew is much less with deep sea pilot on board.

(2) HUMAN CAPITAL RESILIENCE, *moderator* - Gerhard Janßen

- MDK - PROJECT OLIVIA - CEO Nathalie Balcaen, CEO Maritime and Coastal Services – the project is about diversity in the maritime profession and to bring more women into it
- GREENPORT - Patrick Galvin – Green port alliance, training trainers, students and professionals in green technologies, digitalization in the port sector and behavior change to enhance safety
- EMSF-ETF Secretary General Livia Spera – European Maritime Skills Forum – criminalization, transport workers should be decriminalized when doing their job at sea, they have not to be prosecuted because of their professional activities
- President and CEO of Marine Partners Monaco - Marcello Pica – resilience and team work

The afternoon session of the meeting began with keynote speech from Anne Legregeois - Deputy Director of Fleets & Seafarers / Secretary-General of the superior Council of the Merchant Navy in Belgium and the round tables:

(3) PORT SECURITY IN A CHANGING GEOPOLITICAL ENVIRONMENT – Moderator José Antonio Perez Lorente

- Rear Admiral - Spanish Navy - Benigno González-Aller Gross – contribution of pilots protecting critical infrastructure and facilitating secure military mobility through ports
- EMSA Senior Project Officer for Maritime Security, Unit Safety and Security, Department Safety, security and Surveillance - Roberto San Martin – EMSA activities – awareness, guidance, training, IMO Cyber Guidelines technical support for improvement, MASS security paper and integration to Risk-Based Assessment Tool (RBAT), drones' security risk assessment methodology, EU MARSEC Handbook <http://www.emsa.europa/we-do/safety/maritime-security.html>, pilots are not inspectors to inspect security measures on board the ships but they are human sensor to monitor security and to interact with local authorities if there is security breach

- Managing Director Hartmann Reederei - Georg Haase – major problem for shipowners is criminalization of seafarers when drugs are discovered on board,
- Ukrainian Pilot Association presentation from Delta Pilot Branch – pilotage in Ukraine during war times, pilot boat damaged by drones and crew injured.

(4) THE ROLE OF PILOTS IN A CHANGING GEOPOLITICAL ENVIRONMENT - moderator - Kaj Hahtonen – critical entities, military integration of pilots, preparedness of pilots to work in crisis, electrical failures

- Polish Pilot - Tomasz Dobrzyński – jamming – GPS signal is weak or lost and there is no data for position, speed and course, spoofing – the position of the ship, speed and course are wrong, the position is shifted from actual position, the speed is different from the real one. How to handle the jamming and spoofing – use of antijamming antennas for PPU, use of local RTK signal to enhance positioning, use of RF electronic filters to suppress interference, the possibility to manually choose satellite systems such as GLONASS, GPS, cooperation between Gdynia Maritime University and Gdynia Pilots – pilots receive information about the GPS signal strength and availability of jamming and spoofing
- Dutch Pilot - Hans van Driel – Netherlands emergency law where pilots have special duties in a situation of crisis
- Norwegian Pilot - Johannes Sivertsen – all Norwegian pilots have access to NATO security system and they have special security communication system in case of war. The basic of pilot training should be analog. Use of technology is useful but the most important is visual maneuvering

At the end of the meeting new requirements for pilot transfer arrangements had been presented which will enter into force from January 01<sup>st</sup>, 2028 with the amendments of SOLAS. UK Maritime Pilots Association made interactive card presenting the new requirements <https://ukmpa.org/public-documents/interactive-pilot-transfer-arrangements/>.

The day ended with presentation of Harbour Pilots' Sailing World Cup, Marseille, France – The Pilot Cup 06-08<sup>th</sup> of May 2027, Marseille, France, regatta with 30 ft grand surprise boats, 6-7 crew on board.

The second day of EMPA GM started with deep sea committee chaired by Kaj Hahtonen – affiliated membership confirmed on a closed session of the CoP. EMPA has position paper on deep sea pilotage and is against use of advisers to the master who call themselves deep sea pilots but they have either no pilotage certificate or non recognized deep sea pilot certificate. With the increase of windmill farms deep sea pilots are more important nowadays. Deep sea pilotage has to be performed by former pilots or former ship masters after specific training. The proposal deep sea pilotage to be done by young officers just coming from the college is not reasonable. EMPA will be updated with list of licensed deep sea pilots in order shipowners to be able to know who they employ when they contract deep sea pilots.

TRAINING & TECHNICAL Committee was chaired by José Antonio Perez Lorente.

- diversity in doing the pilotage in different member states;
- resilience – stronger safety culture, faster collective learning, reduced systematic risk, future-proof pilotage
- EMP Safe project status - EMPAsafe - AMURA - Airam Rodriguez – some new developments in the application, easy share with colleagues not registered, all the data belongs to EMPA.
- EGNOS project presentation - Sergio Cabrera Bona – ESSP (European Satellite Service Provider), the owner of the system is EUSpace (EU Space program), EGNOS improves the

performance of GPS signal and Galileo signal, the service is open, EDAS (EGNOS Data access service), another tool to improve accuracy, RFI (radio frequency interference), [egnos-adoption@essp-sas.eu](mailto:egnos-adoption@essp-sas.eu)

- Legal impact / Liability EU pilots - Jan-Niklaas Brons – Germany – 40 cases had been found liable (up to 1984 no pilots had been kept liable)
- - three main models of employment of pilots:
  - (1) Civil servants (belonging to the government structures – Belgium (SP), Estonia, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Ukraine, UK;
  - (2) Employed by private institutions – Croatia, Belgium (HP), Georgia, Ireland
  - (3) Self Employed – France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Poland
- Contract for pilot services – via pilot association or with individual pilot
- Insurance cover – for private pilotage companies’ insurance is compulsory, limitation of liability – general exclusion of liability, liability limits regarding the amount, limitation of the liability depending upon the fault:
  - Belgium – gross negligence or intent – 12500 euro
  - Croatia - gross negligence or intent
  - Estonia – intend or incorrect advise
  - Finland - gross negligence or intent
  - France – 10000 euro
  - Italy – 1000000 euro
  - Malta
  - Norway
  - Poland – 20 times pilotage fee
  - Portugal – no limit
  - Spain – 20 euro / GT and max 1000000 euro
  - Sweden – no limitation
  - Ukraine – connected with the fund
  - UK – 1000 GBP plus the pilotage fee
  - Claims last 10 years – Italy 10, ...
  - Pilots deal on a daily basis with multimillion assets

The EMPA GM continued with closed session with internal matters – affiliated members deep sea pilots approved, minutes from previous GM approved, approval Delegates’ list (Effective Members) present at GM + proxies (AVR).

- CoP report – support to Romania, inconsistent national practices in deep sea pilotage,
- Resolutions approved
- (1) EMPA sounds the alarm – growing shortage of maritime pilots, call for action from EU institutions, maritime sector and organizations, seafarers are asset to the maritime sector
- (2) Pilots critical to national security
- President’s Report (MVC) – cooperation with EU institutions, representation of EMPA in the events of the maritime sector, role of pilots in sustainable shipping, EMPA engagement in EU Court of Justice case with Romanian pilots, added value of EMPA to its members,
- Secretary General’s Report (AVR) – DG Move EU Port Strategy – exchange of opinion and EU institutions cooperate with EMPA about the strategy, personal meetings with Fotini Ioanidu from EU Commission about Directive on Port regulations and its amendment
- Report Technical & Training Subcommittee meeting (JAP), presentation EMPAsafe update

- Report Deep Sea pilots Subcommittee meeting (KH) – satellite positioning problems and revising recommendations,
- Financial report
- Member Countries' reports
- Bulgarian Maritime Pilot Association – 100 years Varna Pilot Station
- Italy -
- Denmark – merge of the two pilot association into one

Capt. Dimitar Dimtirov, PHD, FNI,

CESMA President

