



**MINUTES OF THE 31ST ANNUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON 29TH MAY 2026,
AT ITSASMUSEUM IN BILBAO, SPAIN**

OPENING

The AGA itself ran during the afternoon of the 29th May, the morning, as usual, being dedicated to a seminar.

It should be noted that for Seminar and AGA, CESMA had the pleasure to welcome the Secretary General of IFSMA, Capt. Andrew COOK, as well as the newly elected President of Nautical Institute, Mr. Walter VERVLOESEM.

Capt. Dimitar DIMITROV, President of CESMA opened the AGA with following words:

In the present challenging geopolitical situation it is very nice to see all of You in person here in the beautiful city of Bilbao. For me personally it's even more exciting to come back after 39 years. For the first time I was here as apprentice on board the training general cargo ship m/v Nikola Vaptzarov when we wore uniforms of the naval academy, we used Spanish pesetas, the wine was about 1 euro per bottle and it was possible to stay in a bar for 2 – 3 euro, which was my apprentice salary at that time. I was fascinated at that time by Bilbao Maritime Museum, lovely atmosphere in Portugalete and Las Arenas.

I cannot forget my first meetings with captains from Asociacion Vizcaina de Capitanes de la Marina Mercante captain Francisco (Paco) Garay and captain Paguagua who used to sent me personally RECALADA magazine several years.

Now back to the reality, we are here to discuss the important issues to EU ship masters and EU seafarers. We face the wars in Ukraine and Arabian Gulf. Less than a month ago I was in Ghent, Belgium for EMPA General Meeting and I witnessed the report of Ukrainian colleagues working in war conditions with pilot boat damaged by drone and rocket and crew injured, fortunately survived. We see not more than 20,000 seafarers trapped in Arabian Gulf without normal food, water and fuel supplies and possibility to be repatriated when their contracts expire. UN and IMO are rising the matter but there are no any solutions of the problems at the moment.

Latest news from IMO about the matter:

- Resolution condemning attacks on commercial shipping and related risks of marine pollution (1 May);
- IMO Secretary-General remarks at the UN Security Council (27 April)
- No safe transit through Strait of Hormuz: IMO Secretary-General speaks to a seafarer (VIDEO) (24 April)

EU is directly involved in the actions from IMO and also diplomatically involved with other international powers involved in the Gulf problem but the matter is purely political and the seafarers are at the forefront of the conflict and being innocent they suffer from the circumstances.

As EU nongovernmental organization CESMA actively participated in EMSA events and together with the Secretary General of CESMA Capt. Hubert Ardillon we participated in EMSASAFE Conference in December 2025. In EMSA headquarters in Lisbon the safety report for the last three years had been presented with the key figures about the shipping in EU and EU waters, EU seafarers, incidents and accidents and investigations.

The most important issue for EU is the decline in the number of active EU seafarers and the matter arising out of that to keep the EU seafaring experience and to keep EU waters safe and secure. Using seafarers from the third countries requires more measures for monitoring and surveillance of ships visiting EU ports and seafarers serving on them in connection with the qualification and certification.

Our roles as CESMA as per the statutes, Article 2, AIMS are:

- To consider, maintain and protect the professional interests and status of European shipmasters vis-a-vis professional, political, administrative and economical bodies existing in the European Union.
- To work together with the above alluded to bodies in order to improve maritime safety and protect the marine environment in European, adjacent and international waters.
- To work in the best interest of European shipmasters world-wide.
- To promote establishment of effective rules which provide high professional maritime standards and proper manning scales for vessels under a European nation flag.
- To retain and develop the highest maritime knowledge and experience by promoting an efficient and common maritime education and training in Europe.
- To inform the public in the European Union about problems in its merchant navy and those concerning shipmasters in particular.
- To keep members informed about current activities and to seek a common position on all relevant matters.
- To co-operate with all international bodies related to maritime affairs such as IMO, ILO, and IFSMA.
- To assist colleague shipmasters who encounter difficulties in ports within the reach of nations represented by CESMA member associations.

For the moment in the Board we have no complaints from members about any colleagues in the problematic areas in the world but we are monitoring the situation.

The continued problem of criminalization of shipmasters requires we to continue raising the matter in EU and worldwide as we have at the moment the case in Turkey with 30 years sentence in prison for Croatian captain and Finnish chief officer blamed just because they serve on board the ship as master and chief officer and being held responsible without any proof but because they are responsible for the operation of the ship. There is no such possibility in the aviation industry and we have to insist on equal rights with other international transport workers.

Other important issues for EU shipmasters are continued administrative burden, increased paper work and decreased number of the crew on board, increase of intensiveness of the marine traffic, more and more wind mill farms endangering the safety of navigation especially in the congested coastal areas.

For all the issues we'll have the opportunity to discuss them in the coming CESMA AGA and to take our decisions in favour of our members, EU shipmasters and EU seafarers.

I declare the 31st CESMA AGA opened and I wish all the participants fruitful meetings and discussions.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The Agenda is presented by the Secretary General Capt. ARDILLON, and adopted.

ADOPTION OF THE MINUTES OF THE 30TH AGA (LISBON)

President Capt. DIMITROV reminded the audience that the Minutes of 30th AGA had been published in CESMA News, and agreed by the member associations. He asked for any amendments or corrections, none being issued, minutes were adopted.

RESOLUTIONS

There was a discussion on the resolutions as per drafted last evening and presented. The comments went on a proposal to add words in a resolution subject Black Sea. However, even being a security problem, it cannot add in the resolution 1 (Security - Strait of Hormuz and Arabian/Persian Gulf) because it is a "new war". Same to be added in resolution 2 (Security – Red Sea and Gulf of Aden) because it is more about piracy than war.

Wording was agreed, final text being at the end of the minutes.

MATTERS DISCUSSED

War zones (SoH, APG, Red Sea, and Black Sea)

Criminalisation of seafarers and shipmasters (Phoenician-M)

Pressure on shipmasters (more and more responsibilities and less and less power)

Shadow fleet and Baltic Sea

ZHUPK Capt JURAT gave some words on the restoration of an old passenger vessel in Croatia

BSMA Capt. STOYANOV spoke about the Global Compass International Maritime Forum that is scheduled for 8-9 September at Varna, Bulgaria

OTHER

At the end of the AGA, the floor was given to our guests:

Mr. Walter VERVLOESEM, President of the Nautical Institute, said that NI and CESMA have the same goals – safety, security, environment and seafarers. Discussions were very interesting and opened to all participants, including guests.

Capt. Andrew COOK, Secretary General of IFSMA, having appreciated to be invited, said also that discussions were good, even during the coffee breaks, and that CESMA and IFSMA have same topics. He had that we, CESMA and IFSMA, can work together to share shipmasters' point of view at IMO.

NEXT AGA INVITATION

It is reminded to all Members that in 2027 VDKS, Germany, will organize the 31nd AGA at Hamburg. Final and exact dates and places will be informed asap.

CLOSURE

Capt. Suzana DIAZ, Vice President of AVCCMM, made a summary of the topics covered during these two days (Council, AGA, and Seminar), and thanked all attendees for their presence.

CESMA President Capt. Dimitar DIMITROV closed the 31st CESMA Annual General Assembly and thanks again AVCCMM for the organisation and the hospitality.

Captain Dimitar Dimitrov
President

Captain Hubert Ardillon
Secretary General