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CIRCULAR

Impact of COVID-19 on the Maritime Sector in the EU by EMSA

EMSA wishes to inform all parties concerned on the consequences of COVID-19 pandemic followed by lockdowns and strict travelling restrictions.

[Notice to: Ship Owners/ Managers/ Operators | Surveyors/Auditors](#)

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The unprecedented escalation of COVID-19 and its global outbreak was followed by national lockdowns and strict travel restrictions. Consequently shipping, as a global industry, was severely impacted by COVID-19 in all areas, such as maritime traffic, trade, etc.

The European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) has released a [publication](#), after comparing data from the years before COVID-19 (2016-2019) with 2020 in the areas of maritime traffic, safety and pollution of the marine environment. With the support of an external contractor information on trade volumes and type, cargo freight, and other financial indexes and indicators related to shipping was obtained.

Among others, the publication refers to the below listed items, which are analysed in details and specific number values:

1. Disruption in Traffic;
2. Global Maritime Industry;
3. Maritime trade impact in the EU;
4. Freight Rate Impact;
5. Covid-19 impact on the EU-MS Flag & Ownership;
6. Shipbuilding impact;
7. Cruise & Passenger impact; and
8. Safety and Environmental Inspections.

[Safety and Environmental Inspections](#)

Port State Control (PSC) inspection activities by the EU countries of the Paris MoU and by the members of the Tokyo MoU in the period between 2016-2020 show a strong impact on the number of inspections carried out during the second quarter of 2020. However, in the third and fourth quarter inspections of EU-28 flagged vessels nearly returned to normal levels. At

the same time, it can be noted that the number of detentions did not drop during 2020, leading to a higher ratio of inspections resulting in a detention. This could be evidence of a larger amount of detected breaches or violations of the provisions of the international conventions governing shipping.

The occurrence of inspections leading to detentions as performed by the EU Member States which are part of the Paris MoU appears rather stable in the past 5 years, although the long-term trend for EU-28-flagged ships is negative. Notably, an increase in the ratio of detentions is noted during 2020, which is not reflected by ships with a non-EU-28 flag at the time of the inspection. However, even during the worsening period in 2020, EU-28 flagged ships are still doing better than ships flagged elsewhere.

From this analysis, it can clearly be seen that the pandemic also seriously affected the opportunities for PSC inspections by maritime authorities in the Tokyo MoU area. It is interesting to note that the volume of inspections was affected throughout the year rather than just in the second quarter of 2020, as happened in the EU.

Furthermore, it should also be noted that, contrary to what happened in the EU, inspections leading to detentions of EU-28 flagged ships diminished significantly during 2020. Overall, the occurrence of inspections leading to detention is rather low compared to similar figures from EU Port States (1.5% for Tokyo MoU inspections versus 3% for Paris MoU inspections performed by EU States).

EMSA has also looked at statistics on the marine casualties and incidents falling within the scope of Directive 2009/18/EC that were reported to EMCIP between 2016-2020. EMCIP data shows a drop in the overall figures of accidents and incidents in 2020 in comparison with the average data from 2016-2019. The decrease does not appear homogenous for all ship types, probably due to their different types of service, and the operations undertaken. In this respect, passenger vessels record the most significant drop in the number of accidents, which may be explained by the widespread halt in cruise vessel activity. The reduction for cargo vessels appears more pronounced during Q3 and Q4. Fishing vessels registered a sharp increase in the number of accidents in Q3. The type of casualty event also presents mixed trends; in general, the number of navigational accidents decreased in the period in question, while other types of casualties increased in specific quarters of 2020 (e.g. loss of control and contact in Q1, fire in Q3 and flooding/foundering in Q4).

In terms of the total number of inspections per sea region, the greatest reduction in total number of inspections (compared to previous years) has been observed in the North Sea, followed by the Baltic Sea and to a lesser extent outside the Sulphur Emission Control Areas (SECA). The results of the analysis of fuel samples taken during the sulphur inspections show that, although a progressive increase in compliance levels has been observed since 2018, this increase has been more significant in 2020. In terms of ship types, important reductions in the total number of inspections conducted in 2020 compared to the previous year on passenger ships (the category which for sulphur statistics mainly correspond to inspections on cruise ships) were observed. This has been followed by reductions among general cargo ships and bulk carriers. Conversely, inspections on container ships and ropax ships have been less affected by the COVID-19 situation.

Source: EMSA