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Circular Letter No.4245/Add 7
4 January 2021

To: All IMO Members
Intergovernmental organizations
Non-governmental organizations in consultative status

Subject: **Communication from the Government of the Republic of Turkey**

The Government of the Republic of Turkey has sent the attached communication, dated 22 December 2020, with the request that it be circulated by the Organization.



REPUBLIC OF TURKEY
Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure
Directorate General for Maritime Affairs

Ref No: 71700
Ankara, 22 December 2020

H.E. Mr. Kitack LIM
Secretary General
International Maritime Organization

Dear Mr. Secretary General,

The Republic of Turkey has adopted operational measures for ensuring safe continuation of maritime trade and facilitation of the repatriation of seafarers, including other nationalities, since the beginning of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Turkey has declared seafarers as “key workers” of the global transport chain to facilitate the movement of seafarers and crew change during COVID-19, taking into consideration the important role they are playing to keep supply chains intact in accordance with Resolution MSC.473(ES.2) paragraph 1.2.

Currently, there is no restriction on the crew change in Turkish ports, repatriation and joining vessels in all Turkish ports are available.

However, if the circumstances deteriorate and further precautions are needed to be taken that might affect free movement e.g., curfew and border closures, the attached Circular Letter of the Ministry identifies the crew change procedures and it will provide travel priorities, and waivers to seafarers.

The Organization is kindly requested to circulate these measures to the attention of the IMO Member States.

Yours Sincerely,

Ünal BAYLAN
Director General

Enclosed: Letter

CREW CHANGE DURING PANDEMIC RESTRICTIONS

A - General Provisions

- 1) Seafarers are regarded as "key worker in maritime logistics and supply chain".
- 2) All travel plans, tickets and hotel reservations if necessary, papers and documents for all ship crew who will embark or disembark in Turkey are to be submitted by the shipping agency to the Harbour Master Office where the change will take place, at least 48 hours in advance. The border crossing local authority/authorities will approve the transfer in line with the procedures to be carried out as per the relevant legislation by the authorized personnel of the General Directorate of Health for Border and Coastal Areas of Turkey of the Ministry of Health and the opinions to be provided, prior to the transfer, and the procedures shall be carried out under their supervision and in compliance with their directives.

This declaration is not required to be submitted for the vessels operating in the cabotage area and inland waters, and the crew on these vessels shall be exempted from all travel restrictions.

Crew in vessels in liner shipping between the ports of Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) and Turkey are regarded as domestic logistics workers and thus shall not be subject to quarantine restrictions.

- 3) In the case of travel restrictions which may be introduced during the pandemic, ship crew shall be exempted from national travel restrictions to facilitate embarking and disembarking from the ships.
- 4) The provisions of this Circular Letter shall be applicable for crew changes of vessels passing through the Turkish Straits during the pandemic restrictions, and the crew changes shall be made in Istanbul and Çanakkale.
- 5) Crew changes shall not be allowed for vessels for which a "Free Practice" and a crew change permit have not been issued by the General Directorate of Health for Border and Coastal Areas of Turkey.
- 6) The compliance of the shipping agencies with what they have declared on the application form is monitored, and the crew changes that comply with the terms and conditions stipulated in this Circular hereby are permitted.
- 7) The resolutions made on a provincial basis at the Provincial Health Protection Boards shall be assessed outside the provisions of this Circular hereby.
- 8) Decisions about crew changes who are citizens of countries for which there are travel restrictions

due to COVID-19 shall be assessed by the border crossing local authority, taking into account crew's sign on date and the ports of call. Changes not deemed suitable following such assessment shall not be permitted.

- 9) Crew of foreign nationalities who are not permitted to enter and exit to Turkey are outside the scope of this Circular.
- 10) All costs and expenses associated with the crew changes shall be borne by the ship-owner, operator or the agency.
- 11) Crew changes during the periods where there are no pandemic restrictions shall be made within the scope of the instructions and the resolutions to be issued by the General Directorate of Health for Border and Coastal Areas of Turkey.

B - Procedure for Crew Changes at Turkish Ports:

- 1) Crew changes of different nationalities who will embark or disembark in Turkey are made only in Antalya, Çanakkale, İstanbul, İzmir, Kocaeli, Yalova, Mersin, and Samsun.
- 2) The sign off crew shall be transferred to the airport or the land/sea border crossing point without contacting anyone, and they shall be accompanied by the shipping agency, when they are travelling to their countries. As for sign on crew, the shipping agency will accompany to transfer them from the foreign entry point or from the location where they are waiting to embark, up to the sea port where the vessel is located, without contacting anyone.
- 3) In case the seafarers are residing in Turkey, the embarking or the disembarking of the crew is ensured by the shipping agency that they are taken to their place of residence or to the vessel without contacting anyone. Quarantine at home practices shall be checked and carried out as per the instructions of the Ministry of Health.
- 4) In case it is mandatory for the seafarers to stay in Turkey due to any reason, it is the shipping agency's responsibility to ensure that the sign off crew are taken to their place of accommodation and then to the airport or to the border crossing, without contacting anyone, and to ensure that the sign on crew is taken to their place of accommodation, and then to the vessel. The compliance checks of the crew with the quarantine measures during their stays shall be made within the scope of the measures deemed suitable by the Ministry of Interior, including private security services.
- 5) Violations of the quarantine shall immediately be reported and a complaint shall be raised by the shipping agency to relevant Local Authority and the Provincial/District Pandemic Inspection

Centers operating under the Governor’s Office, or through the Ministry of Health’s “Hayat Eve Siğar (HES)” (Life Fits Into Home) application, or by calling the hotlines 112, 155, or 156. Administrative action is taken as per the relevant articles of the General Public Health Law.

- 6) The below steps are followed depending on whether the crew changes are for embarking or disembarking.
 - a) Upon the arrival of the vessel at the port, it is checked by the relevant units of the General Directorate of Health for Border and Coastal Areas of Turkey of the Ministry of Health whether the sign off crew are displaying symptoms of COVID-19 during the health examinations within the scope of the instructions issued. If there are any symptoms, the relevant issues associated with the quarantine, treatment and travel of the crew are subject to the practices of the competent authorities.
 - b) The sign on crew is required to present the negative result of a PCR type COVID-19 test made within the 48 hours prior to the date of embarkation. The tests are checked by the General Directorate of Health for Border and Coastal Areas of Turkey.
 - c) The sign on crew is required a health insurance covering a minimum period of her/his joining to the vessel and covering COVID-19 as well. Insurance policies submitted in electronic media and the copies of policies are accepted in cases where the original policy cannot be presented.
 - d) Assessments about the requirement for a quarantine period for the subject to crew change after the most recent ports of call shall be made by the units of the General Directorate of Health for Border and Coastal Areas of Turkey by taking into account the contacts in the previous ports. Following such assessment, the decision for the quarantine period and as for the cases where the quarantine period is not completed, the decision whether the quarantine shall be spent on board the vessel or on land shall also be made by the same units.
 - e) It is checked whether the sign on or sign off crew have the necessary travel documents.

C - The Responsibilities of the Ship Owners/Operating Companies and the Shipping Agencies:

The responsibilities of the ship owners/operating companies or shipping agencies include, but are not limited with, the following:

- 1) Notifying the crew change information by filling “Crew Change Form” to the Harbour Master Office 48 hours prior to the change
- 2) Initiating and monitoring the process of quarantine, and treatment if necessary (at the specified hotel, hospital, or if they are residing in Turkey, at their own residential address) within the scope of the Ministry of Health instructions, in case it is found out that the crew members to be changed carrying COVID-19 virus,
- 3) Ensuring the direct transportation of such crew without allowing contact with other persons,
- 4) Ensuring that the travel takes place between the first and last point of the transfer in line with the rules of all necessary hygiene equipment (disinfectants, masks, shields, etc.) and social distancing.
