Merchant shipping industry repeats call for urgent and immediate collective action by EU member states

Following the meeting of EU Foreign and Interior Ministers in Luxembourg on 20 April the European and global shipping industries have welcomed the increased attention that all EU Member States are giving to the humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean. This includes the ‘10 Point Plan’ adopted as a result of the impetus provided by the terrible tragedy involving the loss of hundreds of lives at the weekend (18/19 April.)

The European Community Shipowners’ Associations (ECSA) and the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) particularly welcome the decision to call an extraordinary session of EU leaders on 23 April to address this crisis, which is spiralling out of control.

Speaking from Brussels, ECSA Secretary General, Patrick Verhoeven, commented: ‘The scale of the tragedy at the weekend is unprecedented and European leaders can no longer ignore the catastrophe occurring on the EU’s maritime border.’

The shipping industry agrees there is a vital need to find a means to clamp down on criminal people smugglers, as well as the complex root causes of this mass migration by sea of tens of thousands of desperate people. Added Verhoeven: ‘But the urgent and immediate priority is for EU Member States to increase resources for Search and Rescue operations before thousands more people die.’

He went on: ‘The provision of additional funding and resources to SAR is a positive step but more clarity is required to understand the implications of operating within the FRONTEX mandate.’

Peter Hinchliffe, Secretary General of the London-based International Chamber of Shipping commented: ‘We really need an EU Mare Nostrum,’ referring to the humanitarian Italian Search and Rescue operation which, before being suspended last year, co-ordinated the rescue of around 200,000 people in 2014, about 40,000 of them rescued by merchant ships.

Hinchliffe continued: ‘Italy, Malta and other Mediterranean nations, and the merchant ships on which they have relied to assist with hundreds of large scale rescue operations, many involving hundreds of people at a time, simply cannot

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continue to manage the situation without the collective support of all EU Member States, which need to act now without further delay.’

Membership of ECSA and ICS comprises the world’s national shipowners’ associations in Europe and globally, representing more than 80% of the world merchant fleet. At the beginning of April, ECSA and ICS, supported by seafarers’ unions, wrote to EU leaders calling for action. – see link to previous press release.