

Conference on State-of-the-Art Environmental Ship Design and Operation

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Posidonia 2012

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Today marks a very special day. We are celebrating the 30th Anniversary of a unique initiative, undertaken voluntarily by the Greek shipping industry, on the 4th of June of 1982.

An initiative envisaged, by the late Greek ship-owner George P. Livanos, who inspired both seafarers and owners, to join forces and create HELMEPA, the Hellenic Marine Environment Protection Association. His vision was shared by 26 prominent Greek shipowners, the Founding members of the Association.

This day, also bears a significant meaning for me personally, given that it lastingly altered, the course of my own professional orientation.

Up until six to seven months following HELMEPA's inauguration, I was occupied with the shipbuilding industry. I was witnessing the ever-evolving technologies, employed in the design, construction and repairs of vessels, just as I was following the steady growing of Greek shipping.

When asked if I wanted to join HELMEPA, I could not believe that this experiment stood a chance to succeed. Finally, it was the enthusiasm of George Livanos, that overrun my hesitation concerning the viability of the whole initiative, which was indeed a revolutionary one for that time.

I discovered soon after, at the International Maritime Organization and elsewhere, that a number of people, not only from within world shipping but the wider society, questioned the sincerity of this Greek endeavor. They were reluctant to believe, that representatives of the Union of Greek Ship-owners and the Pan-Hellenic Seamen's Federation, had signed a Declaration of Voluntary Commitment, under the binding motto "to Save the Seas".

That declaration, highlighted the importance of the voluntary personal involvement, towards eliminating ship-generated pollution and upgrading safety at sea. It affirmed, that even the most widely accepted Conventions, designed to protect the seas from pollution, could not be effective, until, each and every individual, from ship owner to the last seafarer, consciously committed themselves to the task. And that document, gave birth to HELMEPA, with a

mandate, to help its membership grasp, why compliance with regulations, had to spring from their own free will, and not out of fear of penalties. The means of accomplishing this, would be to provide shipping companies and seafarers, simple and timely information, towards enriching and refreshing their knowledge.

The spirit of the Declaration first became a reality, when in April 1983, HELMEPA, with the consensus of its members, put MARPOL 73/78 and its Annex I into effect, six months before the Convention entered into force officially. The then IMO Secretary General, Mr. C.P. Srivastava, stated that HELMEPA is a model, which needs to be **emulated** the world over.

Implementing our mandate, while steering clear of any commercial motive and politics, made other key stakeholders, of the wider international maritime community, support from the outset, this proactive initiative. Classification societies, oil companies, P&I Clubs, banks, shipyards, suppliers, insurers and organizations, joined the experiment, by becoming members of HELMEPA, thereby, forming an almost complete chain of responsibility, for safe and pollution-free transportation of people and goods.

Through our continued participation in the works of IMO, during the past 30 years, we have witnessed major developments, in maritime legislation, breakthroughs in technology, and exciting advancements in marine equipment. Aiming at achieving quality shipping, the ever stringent and complex maritime legislation, made companies build and equip their vessels with the latest technologies for the time.

Sadly, incidents continue to occur, as technology alone does not suffice, as HELMEPA keeps insisting, because man **himself** is also the crucial factor towards achieving quality shipping.

The turning point came in the '90s, when IMO defined the "Commitment from the Top", as the key principle for the success of the International Safety Management Code, and started stressing the issue of the human element.

To motivate our membership, we have, since 1984, implemented 29 voluntary annual refresher-training programs, with a total participation of over 17,500 Greek merchant marine officers. We amend the syllabus of this training every year, **according to**, the needs of our members, proposals of participants, changes in international legislation and reports from Port State Control Authorities, with whom we cooperate.

Member-companies and organizations, especially classification societies, and the National Technical University of Athens, assist us in our refresher programs, by providing experts, to present technical topics to the attendees. On the other hand, HELMEPA scientific staff, enrich the participants' environmental knowledge, clarify areas of concern and analyze case studies. In this way, they

bring to the fore, the **personal responsibility** of officers, to ensure the quality performance of their vessel.

An example of where there is a gap, between the law on the one hand, and the way in which it is implemented on the other, concerns the oil water separator. In spite of all the years MARPOL has been in force, and the evolution of equipment in use on board ships, there are still incidents of improper operation. We **still** present the topic of the separators in our refresher training.

Another grey area, remains the multitude and complexity of regulations. With the aim to facilitate our member vessels' compliance with MARPOL, SOLAS and STCW requirements, under various circumstances, we developed in 1988 the bilingual HELMEPA Index Computer Software, for different types of vessels and made it available to our members. We continue this effort, by disseminating series of bilingual codified publications, which we compile, in cooperation with the US and the Canadian Coast Guards, as well as the Australian Maritime Safety Authority.

On the occasion of the association's 20th Anniversary, the then Secretary General of IMO, Mr. William O'Neil wrote: *"You tackle the problem from a different, but completely complementary angle from the IMO regulatory approach, and it is reassuring for IMO to know, that it will have the support of HELMEPA in its efforts to secure 'safer shipping and cleaner oceans'. HELMEPA, will in turn have the full cooperation and encouragement of IMO, in the years to come"*.

We are pleased that maritime authorities and regulators around the world, also recognize that HELMEPA complements the ever-becoming stringent regulations. It is equally rewarding, that Port State Control annual statistics, place our member vessels **high**, on the list of good performance during inspections.

In 2003, we added the spirit of security, to the environmental consciousness and safety-mindedness, we are trying to instill and nurture within our membership. The impending International Ship-Port Security Code was coming into force, and few could offer appropriate information to companies on the issue of security. We worked with the USCG, and prepared the HELMEPA Model of the Ship Security Plan, and disseminated it to our members. At the same time, we ran intensive seminars for ship security officers.

On the rather recent issue of the treatment of the ballast water, we have noticed, that despite the advanced technological methods in application, and the state-of-the art equipment onboard, engineer officers remain unsure of all the capabilities, and most importantly, the **limitations** of the systems they use. We first included this issue in our refresher training, as early as in 1993, and we continue to present it to the present day.

It is our hope, that our efforts to change habits in shipping, will positively impact upon climate change. On an individual level, officers attending our training, may find it easier to comprehend this issue, and adapt to new requirements. We believe, that by explaining to them the rationale of the latest regulations on carbon dioxide emissions reduction, we are supporting the efforts of their companies, to go **beyond** just compliance.

Over the years, we have identified certain areas, that hinder compliance with regulations, and jeopardize every effort to prevent pollution and accidents. We take every opportunity, at every forum, to project and convey the experiences and anxieties of our seafarers, on issues pertinent to inadequacy of shore reception facilities for ship wastes, poor ship-port interface, and increased paperwork onboard.

Even though legislation incorporates most of what HELMEPA's Founding Declaration expresses, the contribution of this Association remains relevant, proof for which, is also what the seafarers themselves report to us, in their evaluations of the training we offer them.

On a global level, we raised the topic of marine litter, its impact and broad dimensions. Cooperating with entities from Algalita in California, the research centre that discovered the Pacific garbage gyre, to the United Nations Environment Program for the Mediterranean Sea, we continuously project the importance of the issue. A few days ago, we presented the results of our studies and campaigns on litter, during the European Commission's Maritime Day in Gothenburg.

At this juncture, I feel, that the story of HELMEPA would not be complete, without making reference to one more pioneering initiative, the members embraced, as far back as in the '80s. It is a concept known today, as 'Corporate Social Responsibility'.

Our members agreed in 1984, that part of their annual membership fees, be used for the fostering of environmental awareness among the youth of this country. Future citizens would conduct themselves in an environmentally friendly manner, avoiding those mistakes committed by generations before them, as a result of ignorance and greed.

We began working with young learners, aged 6 to 13, in 1984. Since then, we have reached over 200,000 individuals, from across the country, through our environmental educational programs. A third of these people, have been members of the HELMEPA Junior Program, put into operation in 1993 and immediately embraced by the late Capt. Vassilis C. Constantakopoulos. He remained, to the last day of his life, a warm supporter of the program, and his legacy lives on through his sons.

When we celebrated our 25th Anniversary, emphasizing the significance of the gesture, made by the members of the Association to the community, the then IMO Secretary-General, Mr. Efthimios Mitropoulos wrote, *“Winning over peoples’ hearts and minds, underpins HELMEPA’s philosophy, and sustains and encourages its growing membership”*.

The founders of the Association, set another objective in their Declaration, where they pledged their expertise and energies to raise the environmental consciousness of the Greek Shipping community, so as to lead in an international effort, to combine environmental regulation and voluntary will, to eliminate ship-generated pollution. Gradually, other maritime industries around the world, asked our assistance towards instituting their own national MEPAs, and we gladly helped. These associations, adhered to an almost identical philosophy as that of HELMEPA's Founding Declaration and spirit.

Starting in 1992, CYMEPA was established on Cyprus, followed by BRITMEPA in the UK, TURMEPA in Turkey, URUMEPA in Uruguay, PHILMEPA in the Phillipines, AUSMEPA in Australia, NAMEPA in the U.S. and UKRMEPA in the Ukraine.

“HELMEPA and its affiliated MEPAs, set a fine example to us all, through their worldwide efforts to preserve and protect the marine environment”, wrote Mr. Mitropoulos in 2004.

In Posidonia 2006, the Associations of Australia, Cyprus, Greece and Turkey, jointly established INTERMEPA, the International Marine Environment Protection Association, a non-profit-making organization, headquartered in Athens, with members now being all existing MEPAs. INTERMEPA's key objective, is to promote environmental awareness in the wider society of every country, and across industries, through collaboration and uniform campaigns.

And so, Ladies and Gentlemen, my career orientation changed. Nevertheless, I consider it a privilege, to have taken part in the goals of this association as the Director General, for almost as long as it exists. But, the work accomplished over the years, would not have been possible, were it not for dedicated people that have worked in the Secretariat, and the Chairmen and the directors, who have served the Association all these years.

George P. Livanos of Ceres Hellenic Shipping Enterprises. He endowed HELMEPA with his enthusiasm, drive and inspired ambition. He pioneered the notion of personal voluntary commitment from within the industry, challenging Greek seafarers and owners, by appealing to their "Greek filotimo", their personal integrity.

Basil Ph. Papachristidis of Hellespont Shipping. He guided us, towards a technocratic direction, and initiated the longstanding cooperation between the association and the International Maritime Organization.

Captain John Halas, Secretary General of the Panhellenic Seamen's Federation. He brought into HELMEPA the values of traditional Greek seamanship, together with the vitality and concerns of the thousands of seafarers he represents.

Captain Vassilis C. Constantakopoulos of Costamare Shipping, personifying the voluntary commitment "from shipowner to seafarer", gave his relentless support to the children of HELMEPA Junior, and its endeavours.

Peter G. Livanos of Ceres Hellenic Shipping. He promoted the expansion of the concept of the association to other countries, with a view, towards establishing an international federation of MEPAs, and helped the founding of the Australian Marine Environment Protection Association.

Nikolas P. Tsakos of Tsakos Energy Navigation. In support of a close cooperation among MEPAs, with an emphasis on youth, he was instrumental in the founding of INTERMEPA.

Nicolas Pappadakis, along with the Chairmen of AUSMEPA, CYMEPA and TURMEPA signed the Constitution of INTERMEPA.

The current Board, under the Chairmanship of Dr. John Coustas, took the initiative to form a Training Committee, with representatives of member companies, with the aim to more realistically cater to the training needs of the membership. And it is in this spirit, that we are celebrating today's Anniversary, with this Conference. Updated key information, on issues the industry currently faces, with respect to innovative advances in technology, ship design and their impact on the marine environment, will be presented to you, by distinguished speakers, to whom we express our appreciation.

It would be remiss of me, if I did not extend our gratitude to the organizers, Posidonia SA, for continuing to offer to HELMEPA since 1984, complimentary space for its stand, and today, these facilities for the Conference.

Equally important, it is to publicly thank members of the Press, both here in Greece as well as in many other countries, for reporting on the goals of HELMEPA and its sister organizations.

It is a fact, we are yet to extend our scope among the greater majority of Greek shipping. And in the tumultuous times faced by our country, this may be even more difficult. However, I am certain that HELMEPA will continue to play its proactive role, for the benefit of the marine environment and the human element

in the years to come. I am certain, because there are a select few, who will be there, to bestow this legacy on future generations of Greek owners and seafarers.

In his address in HELMEPA's 2011 Annual Report, the current Secretary General of IMO, Mr. Koji Sekimizu, wrote, "*Today, the concept of environmental protection, is firmly embedded in global society, and yet, still HELMEPA works to raise awareness and push for ever-higher standards; IMO has long supported HELMEPA, and the support will continue, as both organizations work, to develop and implement ways, to achieve our mutual objectives*".

Thank you for your attention.