

Joint Union Statement **on the 75th Anniversary of NATO**

As NATO marks its 75th anniversary, we, as unions representing merchant seafarers across several NATO member states, urge the alliance and its members to recognise the vital role of merchant navies in national resilience, security and defence, especially in today's volatile geopolitical landscape.

With rising geopolitical tensions threatening Europe with war in Ukraine, escalating violence in the Middle East, and as we witness efforts by other nations to dominate the high seas, NATO must confront the alarming decline in the numbers of qualified merchant seafarers and national-flagged merchant vessels.

This decline significantly jeopardises NATO's obligations to its members, with Professor Geoffrey Till, former Head of Defence Studies at King's College London, warning, "*[A] healthy merchant marine and secure sea lines of communication are essential for national security in peace and war.*"

Recent studies reveal the vulnerability of the United States of America's maritime sector, heavily reliant on foreign-flagged ships and with a shrinking merchant shipping capability and shipbuilding capacity. These issues extend beyond the USA. A similar situation has prevailed in the United Kingdom and other traditional maritime nations within NATO for decades.

The proliferation of flags of convenience like Panama, Liberia, and the Marshall Islands have weakened national merchant marines. Across Europe, many states are facing historic lows in seafarer numbers and national flagged merchant vessels.

Diminished merchant marines and a shortage of qualified officers and ratings impair our collective and individual ability to support military logistics and secure essential supply chains for energy, food, and medical supplies during conflicts and health emergencies. This decline exposes our nations to severe risks, with potentially disastrous consequences.

We call on the governments of NATO member countries to use this milestone to commit to significant investment in maritime capabilities, to strengthen their merchant marines and to invest in their maritime professionals.

Together, the undersigned unions advocate for a coalition of like-minded maritime nations to work together to increase the number of qualified merchant seafarers and national registered vessels, to end incentives for flags of convenience and to put a stop to the continued exploitation of foreign crews.

This is crucial to counter rising adversaries and to protect our nations in times of crisis.

Signed on this 9th day of July 2024,

- Nautilus International – UK & Netherlands;
- ACV-Transcom – Belgium;
- CFDT: Union Fédérale Maritime – France;
- Danish Maritime Officers;
- Finnish Engineers' Association ry;
- Finnish Ship's Officers' Union;
- International Organization of Masters, Mates & Pilots – USA;
- Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association – USA;
- Norwegian Union of Marine Engineers;
- Seafarers' Union of Croatia;
- Sjöbefälsföreningen Maritime Officers' Association – Sweden.



Suomen Laivanpäälystöliitto -
Finlands Skeppsbefälsförbund r.y



Danish Maritime Officers

