

THE DARK SIDE OF THE BLACK SEA

SUBSTANDARD SHIPPING – A DISASTER WAITING TO HAPPEN

Of the 2,400 vessels active in the Black Sea of 1,000 DWT or more, some two thirds are coasters under 4,000 DWT – of which half are over 20 years old. The bottom end of this trade sees vessels that have already fulfilled their economic life and are run on a shoestring with certification costs kept to a minimum. The consequences are accidents, groundings and total losses, with the accompanying human impact of serious injuries and fatalities.

RIVER-TYPE VESSELS – NOT FIT FOR OPEN SEAS

At the core of the problem are river-type vessels not designed to sail in open seas. Classed for sea-rivers, with certification that should not allow them to sail more than 25 miles from shore, they take the quickest, cheapest route from port to port in order to save time and fuel. Most of the vessels that have sunk in recent years in the Black Sea have been sea-river type ones, with low freeboard and draft, and weak engines. Their design, strength and resistance are inadequate for open seas, particularly in the inclement waters of a Black Sea winter. Long, thin, shallow vessels, with a heavy load rolling with a low centre of gravity, they have a tendency to break in half when subject to high waves.

INADEQUATE INSURANCE – NOT WORTH THE PAPER IT'S WRITTEN ON

While the vessels generally have certificates from P&I clubs, or similar insurance, there is no correlation between the risk insured and the funds held to underwrite that risk. In effect companies buy a piece of paper that is largely worthless, except to maintain the fantasy of a functional system. Without assets, the companies are 'ghost companies', as ephemeral as the shipping companies that contract them.

ABSENCE OF MONITORING AND REPORTING – MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS

Finding concrete figures is challenging. When it comes to enumerate how many vessels in the region have sunk, how many seafarers have died, and how many accidents have taken place, no-one knows. The absence of effective monitoring and reporting undermines the possibilities for addressing the issues. What is clear is that, in the Black Sea, substandard is the norm.

FAILURES IN IMPLEMENTATION OF INTERNATIONAL REGULATION – TIME FOR A COORDINATED RESPONSE

Weak implementation of regulation is widespread. Allegations of corruption abound. The acceptance of standards well below international norms is endemic, creating a fundamental problem of scale. No single administration can be expected to single-handedly act against such a significant number of operators where the logistical and economic consequences would be unmanageable. Nevertheless, something needs to be done to eliminate this shameful blot on the maritime industry. What is needed is firstly a recognition that the problem exists, followed by the political will to develop a regional solution.



Dark side of the Black Sea: seafaring in substandard vessels is available to view on Youtube in English and Turkish and with Russian subtitles: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tk440t7llh8

For a copy of the film on DVD contact:

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SUBSTANDARD VESSELS AND A CAVALIER APPROACH TO SAFETY
EQUALS A RECIPE FOR DISASTER

BLACK SEA



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