



TEN-T PROJECT NO: 2010-EU-21109-S

*TP 5: A STUDY ON THE INSPECTION OF
CERTIFICATES IN THE BALTIC SEA AREA*



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Introduction

The Head of Sector at the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA), Dr. Jaime Veiga (2011) spoke at the International Conference IMLA 19 last year in Opatija, and called upon maritime administrations to both approve and monitor education and training programmes and only issue certificates for programmes that are in line with STCW Convention. Veiga claimed that there is evidence that suggests that this is not the case, and challenged all involved parties from administrations, MET institutions, shipowners, trade unions, seafarers, IMO, the EC and to EMSA to all participate in a concerted effort to comply with the requirements of the STCW Convention. EMSA (EMSA 2012) has also increased the amount of inspections of MET and certification systems over the last three years, and based on these inspections, EMSA has provided evaluations to the Commission. However, Veiga's call for a concerted effort to control certification stands in contrast with The International Maritime Organisation's (IMO) official figures, claiming that the majority of certificates are not forged or altered by seafarers.

There are numerous certificates that officers and crewmembers must ensure are updated and valid, in order to allow a certain vessel to make passage into a specific harbor or fairway. The control of these certificates is of a random character, not very frequent and often verified via radio, communicated to some land central i.e. VTS Centre (Vessel Traffic Service) or Coast Guard station. There is of today no system that really verifies that the person communicating his PEC or other STCW certificate for that matter to a harbor VTS centre is in fact the officer that he claims to be. This is only checked and verified via the different countries Port state controls, which occur from time to time but far from at every port call. Hence it is possible for one person to claim that they are in possession of a crucial certificate for that specific cargo/harbor/country/ship type/size that they do not possess. Alternatively, the officer's certificate could be outdated and not in force.

The EU co-funded project MONALISA is currently investigating how the verification of certificates in the Baltic Sea is experienced, and if there is a way to, in an automated manner, verify certificates held by onboard personnel that are of importance for a specific passage i.e. Pilot exemption certificates (PEC), Tug boat exemptions and different STCW (Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers) certification. In connection with this study, an investigation of the possibility of creating such a system, both to simplify the management of certificates of seafarers but also to improve maritime safety will be conducted. Some of the potential impacts of such a system are to:

- Enable authorities to gain a better overview – easier to take responsibility
- Increase the sense of surveillance
- Reduce administrative burden
- Provide an overview of skills onboard any given vessel.



Objectives

The objectives of this technical paper are to:

- To investigate how the verification of certificates in The Baltic Sea is experienced.
- To investigate attitudes towards implementing a new automated system that can verify certificates.

Method

This Technical Paper involves an explorative study of the inspection of certificates in The Baltic Sea Area. The qualitative method interview was selected in order to accomplish this. This method is relevant to select as it enables the possibility to explore individual differences in experiences with certification inspection (Denzin and Lincoln 2010).

The initial intention of the study was to interview 4-6 respondents that either take part in or have taken part in the inspection of certificates in The Baltic Sea Area. The target areas that contained relevant respondents were the Swedish Transport Agency, The Swedish Coastguard, The Swedish Maritime Authority and a Swedish Vessel Traffic Service. It was possible to gain access to four respondents from within the target areas. The interviews were achieved through informed consent (Denzin and Lincoln 2010).

The respondents were given an interview guide, which can be seen as an appendix to this paper (Kvale 2001). However, in brief, the interview guide contained a short text about the Mona Lisa project. The interview was initiated by questions regarding the education of the respondent. The respondent was then asked to answer a range of questions of whether cases of false certificates have or are something that the respondent has experienced and whether the new system proposed in the Mona Lisa project is something that is viable. The interview was a standardized, open-ended interview, which encompasses when the same open-ended questions are posed to all respondents. This enables the interviews to be planned quickly, and they are easily analysed and comparable. The first questions were designed from a more general perspective, such as “What is your experience with certificate checking”, in order to allow the respondent to be the one to decide whether there are problems involved in certificate checking. The third and fourth questions relate directly to experienced problems with certificate checking. This question design was installed in the interview guide as a means of minimalizing researcher bias that certification checking is attached to problems. At the end of the interview, there was a slot where respondents were asked if they had any other topics or comments to add, enabling the respondent to more freely elaborate on topics of their choice.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed in verbatim.

The chosen method for the analysis of the interviews is a five-step method called meaning condensation (Kvale 2001). This analytical method entails the task of reducing qualitative data into brief formulations. In this study, this means condensing the respondent’s answers in



the interviews into shorter and more concise formulations. The condensation was conducted in the following tempi.

First the interviews were all read in their full, in order to obtain an overall impression. Then the interviews were read once more in order to divide the text up into ‘meaning units’ – a shorter piece of text that explained what the lengthy piece of text was implying. The most dominant themes were categorized and the most important themes in the interviews were then bound together in a descriptive statement. Finally, the meaning units were analysed in regard to answering the objectives of the study (Kvale 2001).

Analysis

All of the respondents had contact in some way with certification, either in the past or in their current position.

It was predominantly the experience amongst the respondents that there is little or virtually no control of certificates in The Baltic Sea Area. It was also their experience that there are only few examples of false certification, possibly one a year. However, respondents informed of rumours that they had heard, of instances of certificate falsification. Some of these rumours entailed examples of ships that claimed to have pilot certificates (PEC) to sail in specific waters, when the ship in reality did not have the necessary certificate. One of the respondents spoke of a very strong suspicion that he had experienced, although it was never validated, of a ship that had used the same officer’s pilot certification for so long, that the officer could never have been home. This meant that the officer’s papers must have sailed on the ship without his physical presence.

Despite talk of rumours and experience of only few incidents, one of the respondents was directly employed with checking certificates. Between January and August 2012, the respondent reported 138 controls of certificates of persons and vessels in The Baltic Sea Area. Of these controls, 21.7% had certificate deficiencies. These false certifications are predominantly the case on small fishing boats, smaller vessels and bunker vessels. The respondent had noticed a difference in responsibility for ensuring the update of certificates. It used to be the shipping companies who took care of this, but today, it is the individual seafarer who has this responsibility.

Another theme that was emphasized by one of the respondents, was the unfairness that Sweden be used as a test nation in a project that focuses on controlling certificates. This could expose weaknesses in a way that other nations do not do, and this could create some problems for Sweden.

Although all respondents informed that they found the MONA LISA project and the new system positive, one respondent was seemingly hesitant. It was pointed out that there are already existing systems that can be used to validate certification and mitigate falsification, such as AIS. In the long run, the respondent believed that the Mona Lisa system would only



be good for authorities as it provided them with an elaborate authority. For the common seafarer, it will not be a positive thing. Seafarers would be trapped between ports due to meager lack of medical certificates, and the system will create more administrative burdens. Along the same vein, all mistakes, both large and small will be mistakes in the eyes of the law and the system, so there will be no escaping even the smallest of errors.

When asked to grade rank the aspect which they considered to be the most important not to increase with the new system, all respondents answered administrative burdens. There are already so many administrative burdens on officers today, so if the system was to be effective, this must be taken into consideration. Apart from this, the increased sense of surveillance was viewed to be something that was important to minimize.

In regards to the fifth principle of meaning condensation by Kvale (2001), the objectives of this study must be compared to the answers given in the interviews. The objectives were:

- To investigate how the verification of certificates in The Baltic Sea is experienced.
- To investigate attitudes towards implementing a new automated system that can verify certificates.

It can be said that although this is a small explorative study, it points to opinions, ranging from little or no experience, to a strong suspicion and finally, to actual certificate falsification confrontations with persons and vessels. Although one respondent could provide hard data to substantiate that there are certificate deficiencies in The Baltic Sea Area, the respondents predominantly spoke of rumours and single instances of falsification.

The attitudes towards an implantation of a new system such as the one suggested in the MONA LISA project were predominantly positive.

Method critique

When the purpose of a study is to gain familiarity with a phenomenon or to acquire new insight into a specific phenomenon in order to formulate a more precise problem or develop a hypothesis, it is relevant to conduct an exploratory study. Such a study can then contribute to the formulation of a more definite objective for further investigation. As an explorative study, this Technical Paper serves its purpose. The data indicates that there is a need to gain a more extensive overview of factual certificate control and eventual falsification. The study also shows that the control that does exist is sporadic and conducted differently in all Member states. This indicates that there is a need for a standardized manner in which to conduct these controls. Alone this argument makes the study Mona Lisa extremely relevant.

The sample used in this study is relatively small and cannot be representative for certification falsification in any way, but this is also a premise for an explorative study.

The choice of interviews as a method was relevant to draw on according to the recommendations from Technical Paper 3, where it was concluded that interviews would



appear to be an adequate method of eliciting information from respondents in the maritime industry. This study however, urges that it be done on a larger scale with a greater degree of rigour.

Discussion and concluding remarks

This Technical Paper has sought to uncover the experience that respondents from the maritime industry have with falsification of certificates, and the attitude towards the implementation of a new system.

The data shows that there are many rumours in the industry of instances of false certification and too little factual knowledge. These rumours in themselves indicate the lack of factual knowledge more than they indicate that falsification does not exist. As a respondent pointed out, 21.7% of 138 controlled vessels and persons were in the possession of deficient certificates. This figure indicates that there is a problem, and this study urges that further research be conducted, in order to identify how big a problem it is.

The Technical Paper 3 in the Mona Lisa project pointed out several instances of corruption in connection with certificates, and differences in the rigour and degree of validating certificates amongst flag states. According to IMO's own figures, it is not the predominant case that seafarers forge their certificates. The problem therefore lies within the individual flag states and their willingness to control certificates. TP3 also concludes that the problem is not that seafarers claim to be someone else, moreover that they seek to claim qualifications that they do not have. This seemingly points to the issue that the problem lies in lack of flag state control of certificates.

In the MONA LISA Activity II investigation, several questions are posed to the effects of Sweden being a 'pilot study nation'. Answers to this question have been given in this paper that could be considered, such as, an unfair exposure of errors that other nations are not subjected to, and this could damage the Swedish reputation.

References

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- Activity report II MONA LISA: by Margareta Lutzhoft and Fredrik Karlson



Appendix

MonaLisa: Interview

Background

Today there are numerous certificates held by officers and crew which should be up to date and in force in order to allow a certain vessel to make certain passage into a certain harbor or fairway. The control of these certificates is of a random character, not very frequent and often verified via radio, communicated to some land central i.e. VTS Center (Vessel Traffic Service) or Coast Guard station. There is of today no system that really verifies that the person communicating his PEC or other STCW certificate for that matter to a harbor VTS center is the officer he claims to be. This is only checked and verified via the different countries Port state controls, which occur from time to time but far from at every port call. Hence it is possible for one person to claim that they are in possession of a crucial certificate for that specific cargo/harbor/country/ship type/size that they do not possess. Alternatively, the officer's certificate could be outdated and not in force.

We are currently in the EU co-founded project MONALISA, and the objective of this activity is to investigate how the verification of certificates in the Baltic Sea is experienced if there is a way to, in an automated manner, verify certificates held by onboard personnel that are of importance for a specific passage i.e. Pilot exemption certificates (PEC), Tug boat exemptions and different STCW (Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers) certification. In connection with this study we are therefore carrying out an investigation of the possibility of creating such a system, both to simplify the management of certificates of seafarers but also to improve maritime safety.

The potential impacts of such a system are:

Better overview – easier to take responsibility

Increased sense of surveillance

Reduced administrative burden

Overview of skills onboard

Equality – Fairness

Your participation is voluntary and anonymous.

Your demographics:

Current occupation/position: _____

Year of birth: _____

Level of education / Graduation year: _____



Competence: _____

Do you want to participate in more studies on this subject? Please enter contact information:

.....
.....

General issues

What is your overall experience with issuing certificates in the Baltic Sea?

Comment (feel free to comment or describe on any shortcomings):

.....
.....
.....
.....

What is your overall experience with checking certificates in the Baltic Sea Region?

Comment (feel free to comment or describe on any shortcomings):

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.....
.....
.....

Do you have experience of shortcomings concerning seafarers' certificates and ratings, such as neglect, missing or falsified documents?

Yes No

Comment (feel free to comment or describe on any shortcomings):

.....
.....
.....
.....



What do you think of a potential system that could check in real time if a vessel is properly manned regarding certificates?

negative-----neutral-----positive

Comment:

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.....
.....
.....

The following aspects may change with such a system, please rank them. Rank the one aspect below that you / your organization consider to be the most important not to increase with a new system.

Administrative burden

Working hours

Increased Costs

Increased sense of surveillance

Comment:

.....
.....

Do you have specific questions or comments to the issue of certificate verification or a adjacent topic? – specific (to be added if suitable)

Authority:



Shipping Company.

Ship:

Individual:

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