The maritime security code three years on

There should be a proper balance between the needs of security and the protection of seafarers’ human rights but, says Erol Kahveci of the Seafarers’ International Research Centre, in recent years this balance has seemed to shift against seafarers.

The security regime in international shipping on a global basis has potential human aspect problems affecting the fundamental human rights of seafarers. Seafarers have the primary duties and responsibilities for implementing the new security regime for ships. However, emphasis on port facility security can result in the ship and seafarer being viewed as a potential threat to security rather than partners in the new security regimes. There should be a proper balance between the needs of security and the protection of the human rights of seafarers, but over the past three years the balance has seemed to shift against seafarers.

The seafarers under more stress and visiting to be accompanied in port, passes to be checked, greater than ever. (Photo: Erol Kahveci)

The crewing manager decided to terminate their management company has various ports due to their experiences by seafarers in other countries. "There have to be more crew changes at very short notice. As the above account shows, seafarers from Islamic countries seem to supersede the existing regulations. The crewing manager of one of the biggest ship management companies has reported that until recently his company used to employ officers from Pakistan but, because of the difficulties experienced by seafarers in various ports due to their Pakistani nationality, the management company has decided to terminate their employment. The manager said that the company had considered not employing them aboard US-destined vessels but this proved to be very difficult as vessels could change their schedule at very short notice.

As the above account shows, seafarers from Islamic countries seem to be negatively affected by the new security regime which potentially could limit the employment of seafarers in those countries. However, we have seen, despite various international Maritime Organisations put in place to counterbalance the potential pitfalls, the implementation of the new security code undermines fundamental rights, freedoms and the basic dignity of seafarers as well as increasing their workload and social isolation.

The ISPS code has, among other negative effects, made the social isolation of seafarers greater than ever. (Photo: Erol Kahveci)

There are no proven statistics or scientific works that state that seafarers are more of a security risk than any other occupational group. On the contrary, seafarers are more likely to be victims of terrorist attacks and piracy. However, seafarers are currently assumed to be, and are portrayed as, possible terrorists rather than marginalised victims. To limit the negative impact of the new security regime on seafarers’ basic human rights some steps need to be taken. It is important for everyone in the maritime industry, including seafarers, to systematically document the extent of the problems caused by the new security regime in co-operation with trade unions, shipping representatives, maritime welfare organisations and regulatory bodies. When there are problems, it is important to try to resolve these through representation and discussion.