



MARITIME SAFETY COMMITTEE
71st session
Agenda item 22

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ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Preparation of a new report covering all aspects of safety and environmental protection, including the review of the IMO Rules and Recommendations on Navigation through the Strait of Istanbul, Strait of Çanakkale and the Marmara Sea

Comments by Turkey on the note (MSC 71/22/8) presented by IFSMA, IAIN and IMPA on the Turkish Straits

SUMMARY

<i>Executive summary:</i>	This paper responds to the paper and proposals continued therein, on the safety of navigation in the Turkish Straits
<i>Action to be taken:</i>	Paragraph 14
<i>Related documents:</i>	MSC 70/INF.19, MSC 70/INF.20, MSC 70/INF.21 and MSC 71/22/8

This document is submitted in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 45.4 of the Guidelines on the organization and method of work of the MSC and MEPC and their subsidiary bodies (MSC/Circ.816 and MEPC/Circ.331).

1 Safety of navigation and protection of the marine environment in the Turkish Straits are of vital importance both to Turkey as emphasized in the paper presented by IFSMA, IAIN and IMPA, and also to all users and the international maritime community.

2 In 1994, Turkey put into effect a set of regulations for the control and management of maritime traffic through the Turkish Straits. This was a direct response to the rapid increase in the volume of maritime traffic crossing the Straits and the alarming magnitude that maritime accidents had taken over the past years. The "Regulations" include a Traffic Separation Scheme (TSS) established according to international standards. The TSSs were submitted to the International Maritime Organisation for approval and were adopted by the Organization together with associated IMO Rules and Recommendations.

3 The amendments to Section 6 of the "General Provisions on Ships Routeing", which were passed through MSC 70 despite the objection of Turkey, seem to be of general application, except that there are no other TSSs in the international maritime system other than the ones in the Turkish Straits not able to contain vessels of all sizes within the established lanes. Consequently, it is clear that the ICS proposal (NAV 44/3/4) was directed at changing the present regime in the Turkish Straits.

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4 The primary objection raised against the current application of Rule 10 of the International Collision Regulations (COLREG - 72) in certain narrow areas of the Turkish Straits is based on the delays resulting when traffic is temporarily suspended for the passage of large vessels. The argument in favour of replacing Rule 10 with Rule 9 asserts that maritime traffic will move faster and reduce the costs associated with delays.

5 COLREG Rule 9 provides that:

"A vessel proceeding along the course of a narrow channel or fairway shall keep as near to the outer limit of the channel or fairway which lies on her starboard side as is safe and practicable."

6 This rule clearly recognises and accepts the probability of a large vessel navigating in a narrow channel and crossing the meridian line. This also means that two vessels crossing a narrow channel at the same time, despite being in conformity with Rule 9, will collide. This is precisely the risk in the Turkish Straits.

7 If a vessel greater than 200 metres sought passage under COLREG Rule 9, there would be no way to prevent another oncoming passage of a vessel of equal size or larger. Given the restricted width of the channel, the strong currents, and the demanding manoeuvring requirements, the danger posed by the passage of two such large vessels is abundantly obvious.

8 Under the current Turkish regulations, in the above situation, the oncoming passage of other vessels of equal or greater size are temporarily suspended until the large vessel exits the Strait of Istanbul. During the passage of the vessel, the application of Rule 10 is suspended in conformity with IMO Rules and Recommendations, thereby allowing the vessel to navigate as close as is practicable to the starboard side. Under this scheme, there is no risk or associated liability of the captain violating the TSS as it has been temporarily suspended. Moreover, the great majority of the 49,304 vessels which passed through the Straits in 1998 were smaller than 150 metres and had no problems remaining within the established traffic lanes, while 9.6% of vessels were between 150 and 200 metres in length and only 3.95% were longer than 200 metres. Given the proven safety benefits of the TSSs, the associated Rules and Recommendations and the geographical limitations of the Straits, which make it impossible to extend the TSSs, Turkey would be ill-advised to return to the dangers of the former Rule 9. The current system not only accommodates the passage of large vessels but, more importantly, secures all aspects of safety.

9 On November 6, 1998, Turkey adopted a new and revised set of Regulations for the Turkish Straits. However, the provisions relating to the TSS and the application of Rule 10 of COLREG remains unaltered.

10 The question remains as to why the proposals to establish "two-way routes" for certain parts of the Straits persist. Such a change in the passage regime might be advantageous from an economic standpoint. And while such interests should not be overlooked, they cannot dominate the far more important issue of the safety of Istanbul and the fragile marine environment of the Straits.

11 Turkey has introduced a ship reporting and navigation information system (TUBRAP). All vessels intending to pass through the Straits are strongly recommended to participate in the System. TUBRAP is the centrepiece of the Turkish Regulations and is essential for the efficient traffic management. There is a steady increase in the vessels which file reports during passage in accordance with TUBRAP. Nevertheless, in 1998 only 50% of the vessels, which passed through the Strait of Istanbul, participated in TUBRAP. The corresponding figure for the Strait of Çanakkale is 45.62%. Turkey continues to strongly recommend that all vessels passing through the Straits report to the relevant authorities in accordance with TUBRAP.

12 IMO strongly recommended that vessels passing through the Turkish Straits should take a pilot in the interest of safety of navigation, life and property, and the protection of the marine environment (SN/166 para.3). Despite this strong recommendation, in 1998 only 38% of vessels, which passed through the Strait of Istanbul and 30% of vessels which passed through the Strait of Çanakkale, made use of the pilotage services. What is of particular importance is that in 1998, 91% of vessels over 150 metres in length used a pilot while passing through the Strait of Istanbul. This is evidence by the shipmasters themselves, who are personally responsible for these large vessels, as to the difficulty of navigating through the Straits.

13 In the light of the foregoing, the present routing system has significantly enhanced safety of navigation, life, property and protection of the marine environment and should, therefore, remain unchanged. Turkey continues to take additional measures with a view to increasing the effectiveness of the existing system given the constant growth in the already dense maritime traffic in the Turkish Straits.

Action requested of the Committee

14 The Committee is requested to consider the above comments and to take action as appropriate.
