Annexe V
Interview avec compagnie maritime belge

1. What were the problems that your company encountered in Argentina?

I will first explain a little bit the general way of working when it comes to languages. And then the specific issue we had with that particular project in Argentina, which was different from the normal way of working in the company. Normally on the ships we manage, we have the official working language, the official language and the working language, which needs to be English. That is the normal way. But for some projects, inside some countries, like this one it is a little bit different. For our project, it was one gas vessel which was going to stay in one country, Argentina, during the duration of the whole project. So we can say that it was not international shipping, but rather a domestic operation. And this had some impact on the regulations that apply on that vessel. In this case, it was a little bit more complicated because the ship was flying a Belgian flag, which means that you still have to comply with the rules for Belgian flagged vessels. But at the same time it operates in Argentina, and the local law over there is that you need to have an Argentinian flagged vessel. So there was a conflict between the two legislations. And in order to solve this conflict we asked for a waiver in Argentina. A waiver means that you can operate a foreign flagged vessel in Argentina under certain conditions. One of the conditions was that the full crew needed to be Argentinian. This made the situation it a little bit specific. You have a Belgian flagged vessel, which is quite specialized, so you need a qualified crew, and that is what we did. We obtained a waiver, to go from zero argentine to full argentine crew. So in the beginning, the idea was that we would keep English as the language of communication on board. Because for a certain period we would have a mix of argentine crew with Belgian, Croatian and whatever other nationalities we would have on board. So the only language that we could use was English. But then the problems started to appear very soon. In the case of the ratings for example, the majority of them did not have enough knowledge of the English language. Or at least to pass the language requirements that our company has. And this is no secret but in many countries, Spanish speaking countries I would say as well, the knowledge of English as a second language is not spectacular. It is not always very good. Especially in Latin America and in Argentina we have seen that, when you go outside and ask for something in English, it will be difficult. People over there speak English

very badly. In order to overcome that problem we started language courses. In this case English language courses. So that was the strategy that was followed in the beginning.
But that strategy was changed, because the efforts were actually too large, we saw that the ratings we had started from scratch really, and also the turnover of ratings was quite high. For example, we had 10 ratings on board of one ship, and already after a year we had maybe 40 new ratings. And at that moment, we decided that we would actually change the working language to Spanish and that we would teach the Belgian officers in charge of the operations to speak in Spanish. And it appeared to be more successful! So there were a few non argentine officers on board. Of course we had to make a selection of who would take part of the project. We had some officers who spoke Spanish as second or third language so of course these were given the priority to go over to this project. The group that we trained, were people that were interested to learn Spanish or at least the basic knowledge of Spanish at the cost of the company of course. So we had quiet some volunteers who were willing to go to Argentina, with an Argentinian crew, and were willing to engage themselves to learn Spanish.
This was, so to say, the negative perspective of the project, where we had to force an English language upon local people who had no interest really to learn English, and it ended not being really successful. So to solve this we turned it around and asked for volunteers: non-argentine officers who wanted to learn Spanish and work in Argentina. And that has been much more successful. So this is a brief, explanation of the situation which was very specific of course with our project in Argentina.

2. What importance does the company give to the Spanish language when it comes to recruiting new people. How do you dispatch them?

Normally, the number of languages you speak is an advantage if you are a seafarer. So, the more languages you can speak the better it is. So that is a general rule. After it depends also on the trading of the vessel. If you are in a vessel in South America regularly, then obviously Spanish or Portuguese for brazil will be a big advantage if you are in such a trade. If you are more in the middle east, then Arabic as a second language will be more of an asset. We take this into account and people with language knowledge or assets will be engaged. So in that way yes, Spanish is the second most spoken language worldwide and it is an important language for the marine industry. And it is in fact one of the official languages of the IMO.

3. Have you experienced communication problems in other situations? Not necessarily with spanish. But f.e vessel communicating with VTS or between crew?

Yes, and that is a basic requirement for learning the English language for the deck officers. But when it comes to the AB's or for the ratings this is not necessarily the case. Most companies they have requirements for English, on top of the STCW requirements. STCW is quite limited, it's actually focused on the deck officers but not on the others. So then it depends on the school, but for example we have ratings and AB's from Ukraine and if they would not do our language test for recruiting people then it would not work. So we need to do these additional tests because otherwise the knowledge of the English language would not be enough for most of the seafarers. And of course you have other issues that go together with that because in some countries they will try to cheat on the language test. We have known stories and heard stories about people who were bribing the local agents to get the false English language certificate, so it is really complicated. In our case for example, we would need to do the interview face to face to make sure that we are speaking to the right person and not somebody else. But now it is even worst, because now they also ask the person's ID as there have been some identity frauds. Because people have sent their brothers or somebody else. It is really something which is an issue. And especially, now in a situation where the shortage of seafarers.

4. When dispatching different nationalities, do you take into account the incompatibilities that may exist between different nationalities?

In our case, we make a selection, we are having our resources in crew and we are taking into account that we are not putting on board nationalities where there might be issues. To give an easy example, we will not put Pakistani and Indian crew on board of the same vessel. It will be very tricky because you never know and it will depend on the experience. But yes, definitely we take all those elements into account and again, for the officers it is rather easy because most of them have had some education and you can have more communication, more interaction with them. But for the ratings it will be tricky because there is not always the same contact between the rating and the office, so we don't experiment too much about the different nationalities to put on board the vessel. So for the ratings it is typically, all of them the same nationality. Sometimes we have ships with Indian ratings but again it will need to be

all of them Indian ratings or all of them Ukrainian ratings. So with ratings we are a little bit more careful in mixing the nationalities.