



# RESPECT FOR EVERYONE ON BOARD IS THE CAPTAIN'S MANTRA

Jurica Eterovic has given the matter a good deal of thought, and the 56-year-old Croatian captain of TORM Sara does not harbour any doubts. Regardless of whether it is the assignment he is called upon to tackle, his expectations for the crew, or how he must handle the many different roles required of a ship's captain, the end result must be a straight-forward tone, a pleasant atmosphere and an immaculate vessel.



**T**ORM Sara has just left Ventspils, Latvia. The cargo, which consists of some 70,000 tons of petrol, is now en route to Tunisia. An 11-day voyage. The captain does not hide the fact that the days in port have been stressful. No one on board sleeps much. The entire operation must run smoothly regardless of whom the crew meets and has to deal with from the local authorities. "I'm good at sizing people up. There's a big difference in the way partnerships work. Sometimes you just have to let them speak, and other times people are quite into details and small things. Everything comes back to the way people feel, of course. One thing's for sure: having a row with somebody never helps. I prefer staying calm and give people what they want," the captain explains.

Jurica Eterovic is quite aware of what his job entails, and he takes it extremely seriously: getting the vessel, cargo and crew safely from A to B. "Think about it: at night we have two men on the bridge who are responsible for the entire vessel, crew and cargo. The latter is both very expensive and potentially hazardous. That's the reality of the situation, and I'm not paid to do whatever I feel like. Ours is an extremely serious assignment," Eterovic explains, who holds no romantic notions of sailing the vessel however he sees fit. Procedures, checklists and regulations do not bother him. On the contrary. "You have to know how to get the best out of procedures and checklists. It's a big

help being able to get through everything without forgetting. I know where to find all the information I need, and it's a help for all of us. My job includes preventing the entire operation from ending in lawyers and problems," he says. In spite of the new technology that never leaves him with a moment of peace, Eterovic never complains. Instead, he chooses to see e-mails and telephone calls at 2 am as keys to working successfully with those on land. "It means a lot to me to receive help and advice from people on land about the demands and requirements I will meet, and how to solve them effectively. There's a sense of security in knowing that there are several of us sorting out the regulations and inspections that we'll be met with when entering a new port," he explains. In order to reach this goal, the crew's wellbeing is of the utmost importance to Eterovic. Respect and tolerance are two principles that apply to his fellow Croatians leading the vessel, as well as to the vessel's ten Filipino crew members. "I respect anyone who does a good job on board the vessel, regardless of who it may be," Eterovic states. Respect is also about keeping the vessel clean and tidy, so that even the stairways shine on board TORM Sara. "This is our home. We must treat it the same way we would our houses back on land," the ship's captain says. The tone on board is also cosy and jovial. The captain and Slavko Zohil, the chief engineer, almost sound like an elderly married couple as they chat and bicker

about everything from life at sea, to politics and the status of war veterans in their native Croatia, which experienced civil war and seceded from the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Croatia's new identity as a tiny democracy that is home to some 4.5 million inhabitants has brought about massive change, though its historic role as one of Europe's leading maritime nations remains intact. Today, approx. 25,000 Croatians work as seafarers, primarily for international companies like TORM. Chief engineer Denis Stancic was one of the first Croatians hired by TORM some five years ago. The 42-year-old engineer loves the fact that TORM Sara is a relatively new vessel and therefore easy to operate. For one thing, he is able to work primarily during the day. "Just look at this engine - now this is engineering. There's nothing romantic about it," says Denis, who lists his salary and the good life he lives with his wife and young son while on land as his main reasons for choosing the seafarer's life. And yet, he still retains an ill-concealed preference for the sea. "I grew up by the sea. My father was a sailor, but quit once my sister was born. I wasn't so quick to do so," says Denis with a smile. He met his wife at a chartering and shipping agency in Croatia. They plan on taking a Mediterranean cruise when he returns home, in the meantime, he spends his free time on board TORM Sara building a model ship. He rarely notices that he works for a Danish company, though he is pleased with TORM's guidelines and standards, such as those that apply to safety on board.

Dejan Nathigal was recently promoted from cadet to third officer. His ambitious energy spreads to everyone on the bridge. As he sees it, his experience as a security officer in both the shipping and construction industries, combined with a maritime education from a Croatian university, means that he will one day make an ideal captain. In the meantime, he is more than happy to show the current captain what he can do. "It's no good burning all your energy in one day! You should save some for later," the captain admonishes. The young third officer smiles, but does not let his tempo drop. With rapid movements he follows

the pilot's indications, changes the vessel's course, charts its location on the map and makes a note of everything that happens in the log.

It is now time for Dejan Nathigal to relieve Liberat Grbin. Like the other Croatian seafarers on board, he comes from a region near the Adriatic coast. He said goodbye to his wife and two children just one week ago. Parting is never easy, but he focuses on the task at hand and tries not to miss his family, particularly his youngest son, who is only eight years old. He always cries when dad leaves, and leaving his family behind is tough for dad.

"In Croatia we say that the woman takes care of three corners of the house, while the man sees to the fourth. But my wife tends to all four corners of our house. It's always tough for the kids when I have to leave, but I have to force myself not to dwell on it. Without my wife and a good family life, it would be impossible for me to do my job," Grbin explains. He could not be home for his youngest son's last birthday, and he has celebrated both Christmas and New Year at sea for seven years now. He has been forced to make sacrifices, but Grbin wishes to remain at sea for TORM and, hopefully, one day become captain.



## CROATIANS CAN WORK WITH EVERYONE

The oldest known description of a sailing vessel dates back to some 2,700 years BC on an island off the Croatian coast. The Croatian seafaring tradition, in other words, goes far back. In recent decades, however, the export of seafarers to international shipping companies has meant a great deal to the tiny country of 4.5 million people, a country which is still in its infancy, so to speak, after gaining independence from the former Yugoslavia.

25,000 Croatians currently work for international shipping companies, and foreign income is extremely valuable to the country, explains Mario Zorovic, who runs Zorovic Maritime Services, and who works with TORM to crew TORM Sara, TORM Signe and TORM Venture. Some 100 Croatian crew members currently work on TORM vessels. "Seafaring is a key economic activity in Croatia. With four maritime universities and another six nautical colleges and other training programmes, Croatia is investing heavily in delivering highly trained personnel for the shipping industry," Zorovic explains. The tiny country trains 500 cadets each year.

In 1996, the focus of Croatia's maritime activities shifted from bulk carriers to container vessels for companies involved in potentially hazardous shipping such as chemicals cargo, tankers and off-shore units. As Zorovic sees it, this requires a more qualified workforce, with a focus on safety, which also equates to higher wages in order to make increased industry training and education more alluring. The combination of good educational opportunities and a long seafaring tradition forms the basis of the export of Croatian maritime professionals, but as Zorovic sees it, there are other important factors that give Croatians an edge. "The standard of living in Croatia is still not as high as it is in many other European countries, particularly in Scandinavia. That is why we can still compete when it comes to the salaries and wages of highly qualified personnel. We also have a tradition of adapting to conditions and opportunities, as well as multi-cultural tolerance. This means that we have no religious or cultural hang-ups and can therefore work with anyone from across the globe," Zorovic says about Croatia's rise on the world maritime market.