

PBBM elated over EU decision to keep recognizing PH seafarers



MANILA – President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. on Sunday welcomed the European Commission's (EC) announcement that it will continue to recognize certificates of seafarers issued by the Philippines, allowing Filipinos to continue working on European Union (EU)-flagged ships.

"Labis kong ikinagagalak na nabigyan ng extension ng European Commission ang ating mga seafarers sa kanilang certification upang patuloy silang makapagtrabaho (I am very happy that the European Commission granted an extension to our seafarers in their certification so that they can continue to work)," he said in a statement.

Marcos recognized that "deficiencies" in Filipino seafarers' education, training and certification system have been a long-standing problem.

This is why he prioritized meeting with EC President Ursula von der Leyen in Brussels, Belgium in December last year to explain the Philippines' efforts to comply with European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) standards.

During their meeting, Marcos said von der Leyen promised that the EC would provide technical help to the Philippines so that they will be able to "remedy all of the deficiencies that EMSA has been pointing out" within three months.

Marcos was in Brussels on Dec. 12 to 14 last year to attend the Association of Southeast Asian-EU Commemorative Summit.

Citing data from the Department of Migrant Workers, he said the EC's decision to keep recognizing Filipino seafarers' certificates prevented 50,000 Filipino seafarers from losing their jobs.

He likewise reaffirmed his administration's promise to prioritize the local maritime industry and provide the sector with all the necessary support.

"Gagawin natin ang lahat upang mabigyan natin ng solusyon ang mga isyung kinakaharap ng ating maritime industry upang patuloy tayong mag-develop ng mga world-class at magagaling na seafarers para sa buong mundo (We will do everything we can to provide solutions to the issues facing our maritime industry so that we can continue to develop world-class and the best seafarers for the whole world)," he added.

On March 31, EC Directorate General for Mobility and Transport finally decided that it will continue to recognize certificates issued by the Philippines to seafarers.

European Commissioner for Transport Adina Vălean acknowledged Manila's "constructive cooperation" with the EU and welcomed efforts by Filipino authorities to improve the system for training and certifying seafarers.

The EC, the executive arm of the EU, first notified the Philippines in December 2021 that recognition of its seafarer certificates would be withdrawn unless serious measures were taken, including compliance with the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for seafarers.

"Since then, the Philippines has made serious efforts to comply with the requirements, in particular, in key areas like the monitoring, supervision, and evaluation of training and assessment," the EC said.

Marcos ordered the creation of an advisory board last year to address deficiencies identified by the EU.

The Philippines remains the top provider of seafarers for both officers and ratings, across all departments, aboard merchant cargo vessels, according to a United Nations Conference on Trade and Development 2021 study.

In 2021, Filipino seafarers remitted a total of USD6.54 billion from USD6.353 billion in 2020, or an increase of 3 percent, making them a significant contributor to the country's economy. **(PNA)**