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UNIFICATION OF MARITIME TONNAGE MEASUREMENT

Note by the Secretary-General

The Commission considered the question of the unification of maritime tonnage measurement at its third, fourth and fifth sessions. At this last session, it adopted a resolution stating that it "is of the opinion that the problem of unification of maritime tonnage measurement should be among the first problems to be considered by the Inter-Governmental Maritime Consultative Organization when it has started to function". It should be added that the resolution (298 B (XI)) on the "Situation in respect of Ratification of the Convention on the Inter-Governmental Maritime Consultative Organization", adopted by the Economic and Social Council at its eleventh session (Geneva, July-August 1950) mentions unification of maritime tonnage measurement among the problems which the Inter-Governmental Maritime Consultative Organization (IMCO) could appropriately handle.

This Note reports the new developments that have occurred in this field since the Commission's last session.

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A meeting of tonnage experts was held at the Hague from 4 to 14 June 1952. It was the third meeting of this kind to be called in virtue of a provision of the Final Protocol of the Conference on a Uniform System of Tonnage Measurement of Ships held at Oslo in 1947. The aim of this meeting, like that of the

earlier ones held at Oslo in April 1948 and Stockholm in June 1950, was to ensure uniform application and interpretation of the "International Regulations for Tonnage Measurement of Ships". These Regulations drawn up under the auspices of the League of Nations in 1939, form an annex to the "Convention for a Uniform System of Tonnage Measurement of Ships" adopted by the aforementioned Oslo Conference.

Experts from the following countries signatories to the Oslo Convention took part in the meeting at The Hague: Denmark, Finland, France, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden. In addition the United Kingdom, the United States of America, the Federal Republic of Western Germany and Japan were represented by observers.

During the discussion, the Meeting considered the situation in respect of ratification of the Oslo Convention. Under article 16 of the Convention, it is to come into force three months after the date on which the fifth ratification is deposited. It was found at the meeting that the Convention had been ratified by only three signatories: Iceland, Norway and the Netherlands, and that only one country, the Netherlands, had put it into effect. Statements were made by representatives of signatory countries. The expert for Denmark said that he expected his country to ratify the Convention early in 1953 and to promulgate at the same time new legislation regarding tonnage measurement. The expert for Sweden stated that he expected the parliament of his country to be able to take a decision on the matter at the session scheduled to begin in January 1953. The expert for France said that he thought the French Government would take steps to ratify the Convention as soon as a larger number of countries had done so. The expert for the Federal Republic of Western Germany stated that he would propose ratification of the Convention by his country. A memorandum from the Japanese Government expresses its desire to co-operate in the establishment of a uniform system and its hope that the International Regulations will be universally adopted. As regards the position of the last two countries with respect to the Convention, it should be pointed out that under article 15 of the Convention a non-signatory government may accede to it at any time after the Convention has come into force.

It was decided that the next meeting of experts should be held at Paris in 1954. It was observed that if the Convention had come into force by that time, it would be possible to hold a conference.

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The rules of maritime tonnage measurement are under study by professional bodies in various countries.

In the United States of America, the International Standards Committee of the Society of Naval Architects and Marine Engineers, New York, emphasized in a report published at the end of 1951 the desirability of an international agreement on the basis of a uniform system of tonnage measurement, with a single tonnage certificate which would be recognized by all maritime countries and be acceptable to the Panama and Suez Canal authorities. The Committee also considered that a relatively simple formula for determining tonnages in place of the present complicated and antiquated system was feasible, and that a strong endeavour should be made to reach international agreement along those lines.

In the United Kingdom, the Institution of Naval Architects set up, in June 1949, a committee to consider the effect of the present laws of tonnage measurement on the efficiency of ships. The Committee presented its first report in April 1951. Two aspects of the existing regulations were considered: the rules for propelling power allowance and the practicability of drafting new, and simpler, regulations more in accordance with modern ideas on the subject. Shipowners, shipbuilders, the technical institutions (the Institution of Naval Architects already mentioned) and Lloyd's Register are working together in studying the question of maritime tonnage measurement. In particular, they join in urging an interim international agreement concerning the propelling power allowance, so that shipbuilders should not continue to be hampered for an indefinite period. On this particular point it is generally acknowledged that the existing regulations are out of date and are interfering with better and more economical design in certain kinds of ships. As main engines became more and more compact for any given horsepower, the defects of the existing rules became more apparent. The British shipping industry takes the view that, except for this question of propelling power allowance, the revision of maritime tonnage measurement rules is not an urgent matter and is so complex that it

should only be approached with caution. Any reforms would require international agreement to be effective. Nevertheless, it is conceded that the problem of unification of maritime tonnage measurement has assumed some importance as it is to be among the first which will be treated by the IMCO.

It should be recalled that in Resolution 5, adopted at its fourth session, the Commission urged Governments to continue their studies of this problem.

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