

Interview with Dr. Hisashi Yamamoto, Director of International Relations with the Istanbul Technical University and Secretary General of the Black Sea Association of Maritime Institutions, for the BSUN International Journal "Letters from the Black Sea"

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1. *Dr. Yamamoto, you have a very vast experience in maritime education, which also accounts for your contribution to the Black Sea Association of Maritime Institutions. How do you see the future evolution of maritime education?*

HY: It is very difficult to foresee how world maritime education and training (MET) will evolve from here. It is clear to me that the world maritime domain is amidst rapid change, the most significant element of which is technology. It seems to me, therefore, that what decides the evolution of MET from where we are now is how MET institutions and all the direct stakeholders, above all, the relevant offices of the administration (i.e. the Ministry of Higher Education, and the Ministry of Transport) in the respective country correctly understand where they are, what kind of initiatives they should take, and who is/are responsible for this evolution. My perspective in writing this is cautiously pessimistic. The reason is that almost all the MET institutions of the world are essentially colleges (i.e. specialized in the basic two areas of navigation and marine engineering). The Maritime Faculty is independent from the Naval Architecture Faculty in most cases. There are many MET institutions in the world which do not have the naval architecture specialization. A typical vertical institution, like a knowledge accumulation "silo", with a strong sense of being different from other silos. Tensions between/among them are real. Technological advancements, especially those in ICT, have power to spear horizontally. If MET institutions should succeed in overcoming the tensions, the evolution of MET would be dynamically innovative, productive, and exciting. Should they fail, MET institutions would lose their capability to evolve by themselves.

2. *Which are, in your opinion, the most relevant tendencies at the global and regional scales?*

HY: The current tendencies are globally identical. This is largely because world MET activities are unique in terms of having clear and mandatory minimum mandate by the international STCW Convention of IMO¹. Because of its mandatory power over 170 member countries of the world in their MET activities, the tendency of homogenization of MET contents to "STCW minimum" has been globally established and shared among all the MET institutions of the world for some time. In other words, MET institutions of the world seem to have lost dynamism in transforming themselves to respond to the rapidly changing reality of the maritime domain based on the advancement of technology. Changes, if at all, should be the ones that horizontally pierce silos. It seems to me MOOCs².

3. *Which are the achievements in maritime education that have drawn your attention?*

HY: As far as I know, there are very few embryotic ones at present. What I consider necessary is a Copernican change of our mind. A total change of mindset. For example, let participants of edX, COURSERA, and/or Udacity come into MET.

¹ International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers

² Massive Open Online Courses

4. *As Secretary General of the Black Sea Association of Maritime Institutions, what is your take on the structure and development of this fairly new association of the Black Sea Region?*

HY: BSAMI is the only international organization of MET institutions of higher education in the region. Coincidentally, the Black Sea (BS) and the Caspian Sea (CS) regions are rapidly increasing their significance in the global arena, especially in terms of energy. In such change of circumstances surrounding BSAMI, I see BSAMI has a great potential to contribute as knowledge centre of excellence, above all with regard to the maritime sector. To keep BSAMI capable to meet the changes and development of reality is the point. As Secretary General, I consider, therefore, that BSAMI should be as flexible to change itself as possible, so that this newly born organization of 3 years can meet the needs of the region appropriately.

5. *How did you hear about the Black Sea Universities Network and what do you think are its main contributions to the region?*

HY: I was advisor to the President of ITU³ for two years, from 2010 to 2012, in the area of expanding the international exposure of ITU. Through my strategic policy formation process, I kept close relationship with our International Department. As ITU is also a member of BSUN, I was encouraged to increase its exposure by adding maritime elements as well. Another factor was that the Permanent Deputy Secretary General of BSEC, H.E. Ambassador Madam Sumru Noyan of Turkey, attended the founding meeting of BSAMI in April, 2010 at ITU Maritime Faculty, suggesting that BSAMI keep close communication with BSEC in the future. At the same BSEC Ministerial Meeting in May 2010, when BSUN was approved for Sectoral Dialogue Partnership Status, the application of the Japanese government to the same status was also approved. Ever since, I have been in close communication with the Director at the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs in charge of BSEC. He expressly supported the concept of Knowledge Highway. This situation directly brings me to the point, i.e. what the contents should be. As I mentioned previously, what MET institutions of the world, including those of BSAMI members, are required now is to transform themselves through the introduction and realization of a horizontally piercing vector to the current modus operandi within their own independent vertical silos. BSUN, a network of universities with rich resources, should be a friend in need for BSAMI. Should the horizontal vector be realized in BSAMI through collaboration with BSUN, our common region will open the historical new chapter in the world MET. I firmly believe we can. It should be the best contribution to the next generation of this region as well as the world.

6. *What future projects do you plan to develop?*

HY: The core one should be a project for systematic capacity building system for maritime human resources for the 21st century. This core project will have a number of ramifications, just like your ARGOS⁴ as a part of your more grandiose concept.

7. *Dr. Yamamoto, you come from a culture which is considered to be traditionalistic. How do you see the culture of the Black Sea Region from the point of view of your Japanese background?*

HY: The fundamental differences between the cultures of the two regions are homogeneity and diversity. I have just started my learning about your region, where, for example, 6 different languages are spoken in the 6 littoral countries. The same goes for religion. The commonality is sharing the Black Sea. As you know, Japan is very much homogeneous. The characteristic of the Japanese people is said to be its changeability or

³ Istanbul Technical University

⁴ BSUN Joint Master Degree Study Program on the Management of Renewable Energy Sources – ARGOS, <http://www.bsun.org/argos/>

adaptability. In this context, Japan may not be so traditionalistic, as you may observe. We respect and tend to preserve traditions, but this may be the same as each and all of the BS littoral countries do. As to me, I am keenly interested in how BS region countries will take the most out of its diversity and variety toward the common development toward the future in a positive and productive manner. For this, the region needs a common value and identity in a clear and firm manner. I observe it is a significant challenge for the region. How you will overcome it is my keenest interest.

8. You have visited Romania and you have lived for several years in Turkey. What do you consider to be specific to each of these two countries?

HY: I should be excused my ignorance and shallowness of knowledge and experience in answering this question. As a foreigner to both countries, my observation for Turkey is how it will maintain and continue its extremely successful development of the past decades in the coming new one so that it will celebrate its centenary as it plans now. Romania, as a member of the EU, under the circumstances that the challenges of which are coming to the surface in sometimes rude manner these days, seems to be facing a challenge of manoeuvring the country as an independent nation in the context of the aggregate development of the EU as a regional community. The ongoing fundamental geopolitical shift of power balance of the US in the Eurasian continent is affecting both countries in a significantly different manner. I personally foresee the two national characteristics may become more apparent in this decade, during which period China is expected to exceed the US in terms of GDP. The weight of power balance of the countries on the Eurasian continent may gain more momentum. Both Romania and Turkey have fronts on their Eastward. This decade may specify their respective difference.

9. What do you believe to be specific to the Black Sea Region?

HY: Diversity.