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## HOME PAGE

- NEWS
- OPINIONS
- EDITORIAL
- LETTERS
- FEATURES
- SPORT
- BUSINESS
- CLASSIFIEDS
- ARCHIVE
- ADVERTISING
- CONTACTS
- ABOUT US



[Print Article](#)

[Email Article](#)

[Comment](#)

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## Maritime pilots training for new generation ships

by Annaliza Borg

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Mi piace

Maltese pilots and tug masters have completed a training course during which they simulated manoeuvres on the new generation of an ultra large CMA CGM container vessel in Marsaxlokk port.

The infrastructure was built in Malta for this ship and similar ones. The ship is 400 metres long and 56 metres wide.

This ship, the size of four football grounds, is still being built and will carry 16,800 containers. It is bound to berth in Malta during the day or at night and has to follow strict schedules. From the Mediterranean, it would need to pass through the Suez Canal and if it loses its timing slot, it would have to wait a number of days, costing it thousands of euros per hour.

Chief Pilot Jesmond Mifsud said the simulator is the only one in the Mediterranean and a similar one is found in Holland. It makes it possible for pilots and tug masters to train, understand the limitations they have and learn how to work with the existing resources.

The ship should call at our port towards the end of the year. Meanwhile, CMA CGM captains have also been in Malta to train on the simulator.

Training for Maltese maritime pilots and tug masters was divided into three modules: Port infrastructure and risk assessment, ship handling practices in various weather conditions and emergency manoeuvring including engine failure, radar failure, assisting tug disabled and bow thruster failure.

The City of Glasgow College, with which the Mediterranean Maritime and Research and Training Centre (MMRTC) is twinned, has conducted an independent evaluation of the operations. Pilots and tug masters training at this college can now come to Malta to use this simulator.

MMRTC is the training and research cooperative set up by the Malta Maritime Pilots Cooperative in September. Since then, it has offered high-quality and specialised training to pilots and seafarers that was not offered in Malta before.

Financial assistance from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) innovation funds acquired through Malta Enterprise, helped the Malta Maritime Pilots and Tug Malta to build the simulator and undertake the training at the MMRTC, at the Transport Malta building. Training was also co-financed under the ETC Training Aid Scheme. This allowed a captain from CMA CGM to supervise the operations at the simulator.

- ▶ [Damage: Strong coordinated effort to remove storm damage, debris](#)
- ▶ [Serracino Inglott critical](#)
- ▶ [Enemalta's financial headache](#)
- ▶ [Maritime pilots training for new generation ships](#)
- ▶ [Worker critical after wall collapses](#)
- ▶ [Court: Couple accused of stealing handbags during Holy Communion](#)
- ▶ [Court: TM fraud - Court hears that road costings were more than doubled](#)
- ▶ [Slight drop in foreign students](#)
- ▶ [Harnessing wind energy](#)
- ▶ [Court: Man in court on second fraud charge](#)
- ▶ [AFM deputy commander visits USS Mount Whitney](#)
- ▶ [Greece swaps bonds worth €177.2bn](#)
- ▶ [Last councillors to be elected](#)
- ▶ [University gets €1,331,530 funding grant from ESF](#)
- ▶ [Finance minister at Ecofin meeting](#)
- ▶ [Young people's participation](#)
- ▶ [Nine asylum seekers start a new life in Norway](#)
- ▶ [Commonwealth Day: 'IT offers opportunities'](#)
- ▶ [The history of the Malta burlesque](#)
- ▶ [Microsoft Malta collaborates with local partners and launches SAM programme](#)



Before the simulator was built in Malta, pilots used to do their training abroad. The last one-week course for 15 pilots at Port Ravel cost €200,000.

Mr Mifsud said this sort of training, and the new skills acquired, are generating a ripple effect on the economy because they mean more ships being able to call at our ports. Continuous training is meanwhile necessary as ships change all the time.

The Malta Maritime Pilots Cooperative is filling a gap in vocational training offered by leading an international consortium in the implementation of CertiPilot: A Leonardo project co-financed by the European Commission, to create a common EU framework for pilotage training, as this does not exist.

Next year, Malta would be the first country in Europe to apply the European Credit system for Vocational Training to pilotage and will then export this innovation to other EU countries.

The pilots' cooperative will continue investing and developing innovative activities, in particular new courses to be launched in the coming months, as well as new equipment.

Before presenting certificates of achievement to the pilots and tug masters, Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi said that Maltese pilots and seafarers have great expertise and are now able to manoeuvre one of the biggest ships in the world. The investment from the pilots' cooperative will help the Malta Freeport thrive.

The pilots' cooperative, established in 2003, has invested thanks to its success and is now delivering training courses. Continuous investment is paramount in the industry, as it is for the rest of the island, he said, otherwise everything comes to a stalemate.

He added that the government is investing nearly €25 million in the maritime industry, including in breakwaters and other necessary infrastructure.

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[Top](#)

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