



**GOUVERNEMENT**

*Liberté  
Égalité  
Fraternité*

**General Directorate for Maritime Affairs,  
Fisheries and Aquaculture**

*Fleets and Seafarers Department  
Merchant Fleet Division  
French International Register Office*

## **Synthesis about the aptitude to command a French International Register-French flagged ship.**

Annex:

- List of the 38 States whose nationals are eligible to command under the French flag;
- Flow chart and diagrams explaining aptitude for command under the French flag.

### **Legal references:**

- Article L. 5612-3, French Transport Code;
- Decree no 2015-598 of 2 June 2015 implementing certain provisions of the French Transport Code relating to seafarers;
- Order of 5 July 2016 on training in legal matters for captains and officers in charge of their deputies;
- Order of 18 October 2019 specifying the operating conditions of the national jury set up by Decree no 2015-598 of 2 June 2015, as amended, for the application of certain provisions of the French Transport Code relating to seafarers;
- Agreement on cooperation in the field of merchant fleet between the Government of the French Republic and the Government of the Republic of Dahomey [Benin], 27/02/1975;
- Agreement on cooperation regarding merchant fleet between the French Republic and Burkina Faso, 04/02/1986;
- Agreement cooperation on merchant fleet between the French Republic and the People's Republic of Congo, 01/01/1974;
- Agreement on cooperation regarding merchant fleet between the French Republic and the Ivory Coast, 24/04/1961;
- Agreement on cooperation between the French Republic and the Republic of Niger in the field of merchant fleet, 30/08/1961;
- Agreement on cooperation in the maritime field between the Government of the French Republic and the Government of the Togolese Republic, 23/03/1976;
- Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Tunisia and the Government of the Republic of France relating to the organisation of maritime transport between French and Tunisian ports, 27/10/1958.

## I. Reminder of the rules regarding aptitude for command in French legislation

A distinction must be made between the master and his/her substitute as defined by French legislation and the master and his/her deputy as defined by the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW).

The ability to command under the French flag is therefore specific to the Transport Code, which confers numerous responsibilities on the captain and the officer in charge of deputising for him, including public authority prerogatives:

- security and investigation powers in the event of criminal offences committed on board ships;
- disciplinary powers;
- maritime security powers;
- civil status and notarial powers.

Legal references	Officer	Function	Aptitude criterion
International convention STCW	Master or his/her Deputy (chief officer)	Conduct of the vessel	COC of captain/COC of chief officer
French law Transport Code	Master or Chief officer or Chief engineer	Public authority prerogatives	Nationality EU/EEA/Switzerland and Knowledges in French language and French legal matters and COC of captain/COC of chief officer/COC of chief engineer

## II. The criteria for access to command set out in the French Transport Code

In addition to holding the relevant certificates, access to the positions of master and his/her substitute on ships flying the French flag is subject to 3 cumulative criteria:

- nationality ;
- French language skills;
- knowledge of French legal matters.

### Aptitude to command under the French flag

Nationality EU/EEA/Switzerland/ State party to an agreement with France	French language skills	Knowledge of French legal issues
---	------------------------	-------------------------------------

## II. a. Nationality criterion

The first criterion of aptitude for command under the French flag is nationality. The officer must be a national of:

- a European Union (EU) Member State,
  - ➔ Nationals of the 27 Member States can command under the French flag.
- a State party to the European Economic Area (EEA),
  - ➔ Nationals of the following 3 countries can command under the French flag: Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway.
- of the Swiss Confederation;
  - ➔ Swiss nationals can command under the French flag.
- a State that is party to any international agreement signed with France that has the same scope in terms of the right to reside and work.
  - ➔ Nationals of the following 7 countries can command under the French flag: Benin, Burkina Faso, Congo, Ivory Coast, Niger, Togo and Tunisia.

## II. b. French language skills criterion

The ability to command under the French flag implies knowledge of the French language.

This knowledge is verified in 3 ways. The officer must present:

- either a French secondary or higher education diploma;
  - ➔ example: baccalauréat diploma or 1st class diploma of higher studies in the merchant navy (DEO1MM) awarded by the French Maritime Academy (ENSM).
- or a certificate less than 1 year old attesting to a B2 level of proficiency as defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages;
- or a certificate of passing the exam of the national jury responsible for evaluating the knowledge of French language and legal matters of officers intending to command (or their substitute) French flagged ships.

## II. c. Knowledge of French legal matters criterion

The aptitude to command under the French flag implies knowledge of French legal matters.

This knowledge is verified in 4 ways. The officer must present:

- either a certificate of successful completion of the national bridge 1 exam (« *module national pont/NP-1* » in French);
- or any French higher education diploma certifying training relating to the powers and prerogatives of public authority conferred on the master of a ship flying the French flag (e.g: a diploma issued by the French Maritime Academy – ENSM);
- or a certificate of successful completion of the tests leading to such training, approved under the conditions governing the approval of providers of maritime vocational training;
- or a certificate of passing the exam of the national jury responsible for evaluating the knowledge of French language and legal matters of officers intending to command (or their substitute) French flagged ships.

**Is an officer of French nationality automatically qualified to command a ship under the French flag?**

No, because nationality is only 1 of the 3 criteria to qualify for command under the French flag. Thus, an officer of French nationality must also satisfy the condition of French language knowledge and the condition of knowledge of French legal matters (e.g. hold a French COC).

**III. The national jury responsible for evaluating the knowledge of French language and legal matters of officers intending to command (or their substitute) French flagged ships**

If an officer wishing to take up the position of master or his/her substitute on board a ship flying the French flag does not hold one or more of the diplomas, qualifications, certificates or attestations mentioned above (see II.b and II.c), he/she may be registered in the national jury.

The national jury responsible for evaluating the knowledge of French language and legal matters of officers intending to command (or their substitute) French flagged ships is organised by the RIF Office.

National jury exam organised by the RIF Office		
Written test (in French)	<b>Writing a sea report</b> Ability to use French legal knowledge and to draft reports and onboard documents in French.	Duration : 02h00 Rating : /20
Oral test (in French)	<b>Interview with the jury</b> It aims to assess the candidate's knowledge of French language and legal issues necessary for the performance of his/her duties.	Duration : 30 min Rating : /20

	The questions are based on the content of the "knowledge guide" (« <i>précis de connaissance</i> ») published by the RIF Office on its website.	
--	---	--

#### IV. Documents proving aptitude for command under the French flag

##### IV. 1. For officers holding a French COC/COP/GMDSS

The level of knowledge of the French language and legal matters required of the master and his/her substitute of a ship flying the French flag is established by the production, prior to embarkation, of a French maritime vocational training qualification authorising access to the duties of master pursuant to the provisions of Decree no 2015-723 of 24 June 2015 on the issue of maritime vocational training qualifications and the conditions for performing duties on board commercial ships.

**→ If the officer has this document, there is no need to contact the RIF Office: he/she can be appointed to the position of captain/chief mate/chief engineer.**

##### IV. 2. For officers holding documents attesting to French language and legal knowledge

The officer holds a document proving his knowledge of the French language (see II.b) and a document proving his knowledge of French legal matters (see II.c).

**→ He/she must apply to the RIF Office for a certificate of French language and legal knowledge required for the master of a vessel flying the French flag or the officer upon whom the command of the ship will fall in the event of the incapacity of the master**

##### IV. 3. For officers who have passed the examination of the national jury for the evaluation of French language and legal knowledge

The officer passes the exam of the national jury responsible for evaluating the knowledge of French language and legal matters of officers intending to command (or their substitute) French flagged ships.

**→ The RIF Office issues a certificate of French language and legal knowledge required for the master of a vessel flying the French flag or the officer upon whom the command of the ship will fall in the event of the incapacity of the master.**

\* \* \*

The RIF Office's team is available for any support.

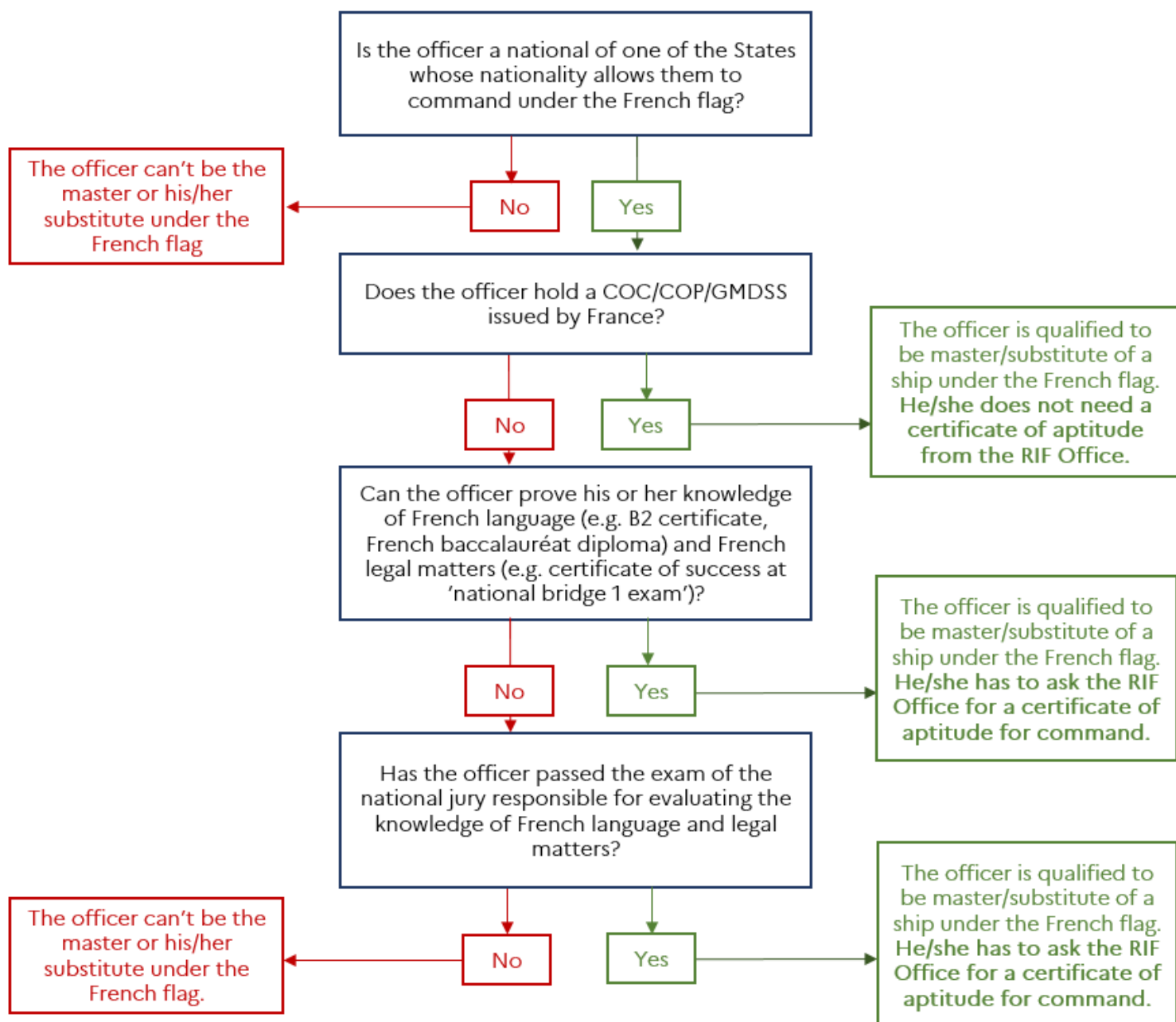
[rif.equipage@mer.gouv.fr](mailto:rif.equipage@mer.gouv.fr)

## ANNEX

### I. List of the 38 States whose nationals are eligible to command under the French flag.

Austria	Ivory Coast
Belgium	Latvia
Benin	Liechtenstein
Bulgaria	Lithuania
Burkina Faso	Luxembourg
Congo (Brazzaville)	Malta
Croatia	Netherlands
Cyprus	Niger
Czechia	Norway
Denmark	Poland
Estonia	Portugal
Finland	Romania
France	Slovakia
Germany	Slovenia
Greece	Spain
Hungary	Sweden
Iceland	Switzerland
Ireland	Togo
Italy	Tunisia

**II. Flow chart: aptitude for command under the French flag according the French Transport Code (not to be confused with the function of master and his/her deputy according the STCW).**



### III. Diagrams explaining aptitude for command under the French flag.


#### Option 1: the officer holds a French COC/COP/GMDSS

Nationality  
EU/EEA/Switzerland/State  
party to an agreement with  
France



French COC/COP/GMDSS  
(= French language skills + French  
legal matters knowledge)



The officer is qualified to command under the French flag (no need to ask for a certificate of aptitude for command) 

#### Option 2: the officer holds a document proving his knowledge of the French language and a document proving his knowledge of French legal matters

Nationality  
EU/EEA/Switzerland/State  
party to an agreement with  
France




French language skills  
(e.g: certificate less than 1 year  
old attesting to a B2 level of  
proficiency)



Knowledge of French legal  
matters  
(e.g : certificate of success at  
'national bridge 1 exam')



The officer has to ask the RIF Office for a certificate of aptitude to command under the French flag 

#### Option 3: the officer passed the national jury exam organised by the RIF Office

Nationality  
EU/EEA/Switzerland/State  
party to an agreement with  
France



Successful completion of the  
national jury exam organised by  
the RIF Office



The officer has to ask the RIF Office for a certificate of aptitude to command under the French flag 