Resolution on the shipping disasters in the Kerch Strait in the Black Sea and the subsequent oil pollution

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Following a debate on 12 December 2007, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the shipping disasters in the Kerch Strait in the Black Sea and the subsequent oil pollution, expressing its solidarity and reiterating its support for the victims of the disaster. It recalled that 10 vessels (tankers and cargo carriers), including the Volganeft-139, which was not designed to withstand severe weather at sea, sank or ran aground in the Kerch Strait and the northern Black Sea region during a severe storm. 6 seafarers died and more than 2 000 tonnes of fuel oil and sulphur were spilt into the sea, causing an environmental disaster and killing over 15 000 birds. Violent storms dispersed oil pollutants, affecting communities in the region as well as the environment, and the oil and sulphur pollution also directly affected fauna and flora, with possible long-term impacts on the ecological quality of the natural habitats affected.

Parliament pointed out that the Black Sea is becoming one of the main routes for the increasing oil exports in the region. The human loss and ecological disaster in the Black Sea highlights the need to speed up deliberations in the Council on the remaining legislative acts in the third maritime safety package. With the accession of Romania and Bulgaria, the EU has become a major player in the Black Sea region, which is of geo-strategic importance in terms of energy security and the diversification of EU energy supply routes, given its proximity to the Caspian Sea, the Middle East and Central Asia. Parliament called on the Council and the Commission to monitor closely the situation in the Black Sea and to take concrete action to help to reduce the ecological impact of the disaster. It called on the Member States to ensure the rigorous application of existing Community legislation, especially legislation on ship standards, for example Port State Control.

Parliament called for the following :

- the Commission and Member States to promote the principles of the Integrated Maritime Policy for the European Union in the Black Sea region, as proposed in the communication from the Commission;

- Member States and the neighbouring countries of the EU to ensure that vessel crews and maritime administrations ignore alerts or storm warnings under no circumstances;

- the Council and the Commission to reinforce cooperation with non-EU coastal states as regards the implementation of measures to lessen the threat of environmental pollution from shipping accidents, including through action taken in the context of the International Maritime Organisation and the Paris Memorandum of Understanding;

- the seven legislative proposals are closely interrelated and therefore need to be approved as a package. The Council must adopt common positions on all seven legislative proposals immediately;

- the Commission and the Member States to utilise to the maximum possible extent the new European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument as a tool for addressing Black Sea environmental problems and to utilise the new Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance to address environmental issues in the states in the Black Sea region.

Parliament underlined the fact that the Black Sea disaster should draw the attention of the neighbouring countries of the EU - principally Russia, which has announced plans for a several-fold increase in its oil transhipment and export capacities on the Black Sea coast - to the issues of modernising maritime fleets and banning the use of obsolete single-hull tankers.

Lastly, it highlighted the key role that regional organisations, in particular the Organisation for Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), can play in ensuring better management of and cooperation in seafaring on the Black Sea.