Resoloution on the New Flame shipwreck and its consequences in Algeciras Bay

2008/2551(RSP) - 24/04/2008 - Text adopted by Parliament, topical subjects

Following the debate which took place during the sitting of 21 April 2008, the European Parliament adopted by 555 votes to 7 with 6, a resolution tabled on behalf of the EPP-ED, PES, ALDE, UEN, Greens /ALE, GUE/NGL groups on the New Flame shipwreck and its consequences on Algeciras Bay. It recalls that on 12 August 2007 a collision close to Gibraltar between a double-hulled oil tanker and the bulk carrier New Flame resulted in the sinking of the latter. At present the New Flame, lying on the seabed and containing 42000 tonnes of load and at least 27000 tonnes of scrap metal, could affect water quality, adding to the concentration in the area of heavy metals of an uncertain nature unknown to the public, and it is therefore difficult to determine the total environmental impact.

Parliament calls on the Commission to forward to Parliament all the information on the case of the New Flame provided by the competent authorities, especially that referring to the request for additional means, such as anti-pollution vessels to be provided by the Community aid mechanism in the field of civil protection assistance interventions established by Council Decision 2001/792/EC. This aims to put at the disposal of the Member States anti-contamination ships dependent on the European Agency for Marine Security.

Members believe that the Government of Gibraltar, the UK and the Spanish authorities have shown their willingness to collaborate in the most effective way in order to manage the accident and its consequences for the maritime and coastal environment. They also underlines the swiftness and efficiency of reaction of the European Maritime Safety Agency following the request for assistance from the Spanish authority immediately after the acciden. Members stress that Parliament has constantly advocated increased operational and financial means for the Agency, and that more vessels will be available for assistance in the various maritime regions of the EU.

Parliament goes on to underline that the Third Maritime Package, still under first reading in Council, on which Parliament adopted its position more than a year ago and is willing to move forward and conclude the seven legislative procedures, provides the EU with all necessary tools for the prevention of a maritime incident and the management of the consequences of such an incident. It insists on the need to ensure efficient cooperation between neighbouring ports.

Members ask the Commission to call on the competent authorities to provide information on the content of the cargo as well what the plans and time schedules are for removal of the vessel from the Bay and for monitoring the risk of pollution which could stem from the cargo, and to forward this information to Parliament.

The Commission is urged to do the following :

-to call on those Member States which have not yet done so to ratify the 2001 International Convention on Civil Liability for Bunker Oil Pollution Damage (Bunker Oil 2001 Convention) and to ensure enforcement of the EU legislation on this subject;

-to submit a proposal to Parliament and the Council as soon as possible in order to ensure that bunker oil for engine fuel in new ships is stored in safer, double-hull tanks;

-to propose an EU directive on improving the quality of maritime fuels. Parliament welcomes the recent agreement at the IMO on such a proposal being introduced by 1 January 2010;

-to propose improvements to the legislation on the protection of environmentally sensitive crossborder marine areas, including stronger (satellite) surveillance and monitoring of ships;

Lastly, Parliament suggests that the Commission intervene with the competent national and regional authorities to reach an agreement on a public performance protocol in the area of the Straits of Gibraltar and particularly in the Bay of Algeciras, similar to the existing bilateral and regional agreements concluded between coastal states, which would provide mutual assistance in the event of a maritime pollution incident.