Agreement for co-operation in dealing with pollution of the North Sea by oil and other harmful substances (Bonn Agreement): extension of its material and geographical scope of application

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PURPOSE: to approve amendments to the Agreement for cooperation in dealing with pollution of the North Sea by oil and other harmful substances (Bonn Agreement) with regard to the extension of its material and geographical scope of application.

PROPOSED ACT: Council Decision.

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: Council may adopt the act only if Parliament has given its consent to the act.

BACKGROUND: the Bonn Agreement aims to combat pollution in the North Sea Area and safeguard coastal areas from maritime disasters and chronic pollution from ships and offshore installations. The European Union is a Contracting Party to the Agreement. Amendments were made to the agreement in 1989. These amendments entered into force on 1 April 1994.

On 7 October 2019, the Council authorised the Commission to negotiate, on behalf of the Union, an amendment to extend the scope of the Bonn Agreement with a view to improving cooperation on surveillance with regard to the requirements of Annex VI to the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (the "MARPOL Convention") and the extension to the Kingdom of Spain under Article 20 of the Agreement.

The amendments are now submitted for conclusion by the Union.

CONTENT: the proposed Decision provides that the Council authorises the Commission to conclude, on behalf of the Union, the envisaged amendments to the Bonn Agreement relating to the extension of the material scope of the Agreement as regards Annex VI to the MARPOL Convention and the accession of the Kingdom of Spain to the Agreement.

The amendments envisaged are the following:

The 'MARPOL amendment' – amending the substantive scope of the Agreement

This amendment seeks to improve cooperation and coordination between the Contracting Parties in combating unlawful air emissions caused by shipping in order to limit the negative consequences of the combustion of marine fuels with high sulphur or nitrogen content for human health, biodiversity and the entire marine environment. The adoption of the decision to conclude the amendment on the extension of the mandate of the Bonn Agreement in relation to Annex VI to the MARPOL Convention would improve joint surveillance, monitoring and reporting of ship emissions in the North Sea area.

The 'Spain amendment' – amending the geographical scope of the Agreement

This amendment extends the geographical scope of the Agreement to cover the area between the zone of joint responsibility of France and the United Kingdom and the new zone of responsibility of Spain in order to close any gaps between the old boundary of the Bonn Agreement and the new zone of responsibility of Spain. France has accepted the introduction of a new zone of responsibility of France.