Resolution on chemical residues in the Baltic Sea, based on Petitions Nos 1328/2019 and 0406/2020

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The European Parliament adopted by 660 votes to 8, with 25 abstentions, a resolution on chemical residues in the Baltic Sea, based on Petitions Nos 1328/2019 and 0406/2020.

At least 50 000 tonnes of conventional and chemical weapons containing hazardous substances (such as mustard and tear gas and nerve and choking chemical agents) have been dumped into the Baltic Sea since the end of the Second World War. These munitions degrade slowly and leak toxic substances into the water, posing a danger to human health by contaminating food and causing severe burns and poisoning upon direct contact, damaging marine ecosystems and biodiversity.

Owing to its geographical situation, the Baltic Sea is a semi-enclosed sea with a slow turnover of water and very low self-cleaning capacity. It is considered one of the most polluted seas in the world, with oxygen levels falling in its deep waters, which is already putting marine life in danger.

Parliament underlined that the environmental and health dangers posed by the munitions disposed of in the Baltic Sea after the Second World War is not only a regional, European issue, but a serious global problem with unpredictable short- and long-term transboundary effects.

The resolution called on the Commission and the Joint Programming Committee of Interreg Baltic Sea Region to secure adequate financing for research and actions required to resolve the dangers posed by the munitions dumped in the Baltic Sea. It regretted that none of the EUR 8.8 million allotted under the European Neighbourhood Instrument was used for the 2016-2019 Decision Aid for Marine Munitions (DAIMON) and 2019-2021 DAIMON 2 projects under the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme.

The resolution urged all sides concerned to:

- declassify information about the dumping activities and their exact locations and allow the countries affected, the Commission and the European Parliament to access it as a matter of urgency;

- comply with international environmental law and provide additional financial contributions to the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme for 2021-2027.

Parliament called on the Commission to:

- establish an expert group with the Member States affected and other stakeholders and organisations, tasked with the following mandate: (i) studying and mapping the exact locations of contaminated areas; (ii) proposing suitable environmentally friendly and cost-effective solutions for monitoring and cleaning the pollution; (iii) developing reliable decision-making support tools; (iv) conducting an awareness-raising campaign to inform the groups affected (such as fishers, local residents, tourists and investors) of the potential health and economic risks; and (v) developing emergency response guidelines for environmental disasters;

- engage all the relevant EU agencies and institutions, including the European Defence Agency, to utilise all the available resources and to make sure that the problem will be reflected in all the relevant EU policies and programming processes, including the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and the Maritime Security Strategy Action Plan;

- ensure that the issue of munitions dumped in European seas is included in the horizontal programmes in order to enable the submission of projects covering regions affected by the same problem (the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, North Sea and Baltic Sea) and facilitate the exchange of experience and best practices;

- devote concerted efforts to tackling pollution in the Baltic Sea and to foster all types of regional, national and international cooperation to this end, including through its partnership with NATO.