Maritime safety: standards in respect of shipping using Community ports, package Erika I

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The Council took note of progress in the discussions on the Directive proposed by the Commission. It instructed the Permanent Representatives Committee to step up proceedings on that dossier so that the Council could reach an agreement at its October meeting and thus advance the codecision procedure with the Parliament. Furthermore, the Council adopted conclusion on maritime safety. In relation to these conclusions, the Council: - reaffirms its resolve to pursue and step up a maritime safety policy at international, Community and national level to reduce the risk of accidents, thus avoiding loss of human life and preventing pollution of marine environment; - recognises that acceptance, by any part of the shipping industry, of substandard practices affects protection of people and the environment, vessel safety and fair competition and that the elimination of such practices will be beneficial for all parties involved and help bring about a universal culture of safety and quality; - calls on the Member States to evaluate the situation and, where necessary, to tailor human resources and means required to the various tasks to be carried out by them and to introduce a quality management system; - points out the need to develop exchanges of experience between the Member States on organisational matters and working methods in particular by a better coordination of the activities of Vessel Traffic Services, with a view to establishing improved procedures and requirement levels; - supports the development and extension of the EQUASIS information system so as to bring greater transparency of information of the safety and quality of merchant vessels worldwide; - realising that the improvement of maritime safety requires fully qualified crews and good shipboard working conditions; - considers that special heed should be paid to seaborne trade of oil and other hazardous substances. The Council also urges the Member States, bearing in mind the importance of involving non-EU countries as well, strongly to support work under way within the IMO that should result in a quick and adequate revision of Annex I to the MARPOL Convention so as to eliminate the risk of shipping in single-hull oil tankers. In addition, the Council calls on the Commission and the Member States to pursue the objective of increasing the ceiling for compensation per accident laid down by the International Fund for Compensation for Oil Pollution Damage (IOPCF) with a view, in particular, to providing better coverage for damage to the environment, and to work for that purpose with non-EU countries as well. The Council requests the Commission to consider developing, when appropriate, a European database on accidents and incidents at sea. In conclusion, it points out that pursuit of maritime safety policy depends on proper, effective application of existing legislation, including general Community measures on health and working conditions applicable to the maritime sector. It reiterates the aim of maintaining and promoting seafaring occupations in Europe, by means of increased interest in such work on the part of young Europeans and appropriate jobtraining. To this end, it calls on the Commission to submit a communication on the recruitment and training of seafarers, bearing in mind in particular the suggestion made by the social partners.