Role of flags of convenience in the fisheries sector

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Patricia McKENNA (Greens/EFA, IRL) on the role of flags of convenience (FOCs) in the fisheries sector. It called for a firmer attitude on the part of the EU with a view to launching a broad counter-attack against fishing by vessels operating under flags of convenience, while taking account of the various players involved. The report called on EU Member States to complete ratification of the UN Fish Stocks Agreement and implement the FAO International Plan of Action on Illegal Fishing. Member States were urged to refuse to remove vessels from their shipping registers if they were being exported to countries which offered FOCs. The committee welcomed the action taken by countries such as Japan, Taiwan and South Africa · the latter having banned the landing of illegal catches · but condemned others for temporarily including in their register vessels known to have engaged in FOC fishing, which it said was tantamount to "laundering" their products. The report also said that action needed to be taken by the Commission - for example, amending the Control Regulation, particularly as regards the conditions for allowing landings of fish catches. The Commission should also propose measures banning natural or legal persons in the Community from trading in fish or fish products derived from FOC fishing and adopt trade and customs legislation to seal off all the Member States' markets against the products of illegal fishing. In the interests of transparency and legal certainty, the Commission should also include in its internal rules the list of FOC states and territories drawn up by the regional fisheries organisations. This would help eliminate the payment of subsidies to joint ventures involving ships which were to be registered in countries on that list.