Improving safety at sea

2003/2235(INI) - 21/04/2004 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Dirk STERCKX (ELDR, B) on improving safety at sea. (Please see the document of 05/04/04). Parliament called for a comprehensive and cohesive European maritime policy, which would have as its objective the creation of a European maritime safety area. This policy should be based on the following measures: - the banning of substandard vessels; - the drawing-up of joint protocols on prevention, action and reparation in the event of disasters; - the introduction of a system of liability covering the entire maritime transport chain and the public authorities responsible for safety at sea; - the improvement of living and working conditions and training for seafarers. Parliament also asked the Commission to investigate the scope for introducing mandatory insurance for vessels in European waters so that damages and costs of places of refuge as well as social and environmental costs in the event of an accident can also be recovered from the owners of vessels. There should also be a proposal on the introduction of an EU-wide common method for disaster assessment, with a view to facilitating, as in the US, compensation for social or collective damage to the natural heritage, including the deterioration of commercially non-viable marine and land biodiversity. Considers that the insurance system to be established must cover not only the value of the cargo but also risks of potential environmental damage in the light of the nature of the cargo. Parliament was concerned the limited progress made by certain new Member States in implementing European and world rules on maritime safety. There is particular concern about the following new Member States: the Baltic States, Malta and Cyprus. It called for the establishment of special zones within environmentally sensitive and navigationally difficult areas of the Baltic Sea, particularly the Kadet Trench, the Skagerrak /Kattegat, the Great Belt and the Sound, which ocean-going vessels, in particular oil tankers, may no longer negotiate without a pilot. There is a need for radical changes at the level of structure and responsibilities to the complex nexus of businesses (vessel and ship owners, freight contractors, oil companies, classification societies, insurers, etc) that controls international maritime traffic, as well as its relations with flag-of-convenience states. This nexus is an obstacle to the efficient inspection of the condition of vessels, the introduction of the necessary safety measures, vocational training, action to secure adequate working and living conditions and wages for crews, and compliance with fiscal obligations. The Commission is asked to make a full analysis of this crucial problem and to submit a report to Parliament and the Council. This report should, in particular, deal with the relations between EU businesses and flag-of-convenience states.