

# Sea pollution: Prestige accident, improving safety at sea

2003/2066(INI) - 23/09/2003 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report by Dirk STERCKX (ELDR, B) improving safety at sea. (Please see the document dated 08/07/03.) With 336 votes in favour, 171 against and 14 abstentions Parliament asked for a temporary committee to be set up that will deepen investigations into the causes and consequences of the Prestige disaster. The committee will also assess maritime safety standards more generally and seek to ensure better implementation of existing EU law. In spite of efforts by the Spanish authorities, Parliament regretted that, almost a year after the accident, the wreckage - which still contains more than 14,000 tonnes of fuel - is still leaking. Parliament called on the Commission to do the following: -to submit proposals for financial compensation for safe havens and to study the possibility of establishing a financial liability regime for ports refusing to give access to ships in distress; -to arrange for EMSA to take an inventory of the different command structures and authorities responsible in maritime emergencies (such as the French 'Prefecture maritime' and the British Secretary of State's Representative), and to submit recommendations for exchanging best practice, promoting cooperation between Member States and introducing European guidelines or minimum requirements; -to submit a proposal to ensure that bunker oil for engine fuel in new ships is also stored in safer, double hull tanks since freight or container ships often contain heavy fuel as engine fuel in their bunkers, the quantity of which may considerably exceed the cargoes of smaller oil tankers; -extend the ban on the entry into EU ports or anchorages of single-hull vessels carrying heavy fuel oil or dangerous cargo in general by the creation of a specific EU law, to ships in transit through Community waters; -to submit a proposal to strengthen port state control by reducing the intervals between the inspection of vessels of greater risk, by expanding the reporting requirements of pilots also to include vessels in transit off the coast of Europe and by applying the 25% target (percentage of ships inspected) to each port that has 'significant maritime traffic' instead of to the country as a whole. The definition of 'significant maritime traffic' should relate to the volume of the traffic as well as to the quantity of dangerous and polluting cargo being carried; With regard to economic aspects, Parliament wants to step up shipowners' shares in financial liability by way of an internal IMO amendment to the provisions concerning international rules on damages and liability. If this is ineffective, the Commission is asked to submit a proposal for a damages and liability scheme for the wider EU. Finally, Parliament asked for an amendment to the EU directives relating to sulphured heavy fuel No 2. The latter is banned from use within the EU but is nonetheless produced in, and transported through, Europe and its ports and is exported to other countries as an energy source. The production of this type of hydrocarbon should be banned.