Resolution on the export of toxic waste to Africa

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The European Parliament adopted a joint resolution on the export of toxic waste to Africa. It pointed out that around 500 tonnes of chemical waste have been dumped in several areas in the neighbourhood of Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, where 5 million people live. Eight people have died so far and some 85 000 have been taken to hospital for treatment for nosebleeds, diarrhoea, nausea, eye irritation and breathing difficulties. The consequences of this dumping of toxic waste may be far-reaching, including soil contamination and surface and groundwater pollution. This poisoning has affected between 9 000 and 23 000 children, who will need medical assistance and health care and other measures to clean up the environment where they live will be required. The toxic waste in question was dumped by a Greek-owned, Panamanian-flagged tanker leased by Trafigura Beheer B.V., a Netherlands-based company. The company had the opportunity to dispose of the waste in a legal and safe manner in Europe, but chose a cheaper alternative in Côte d'Ivoire. Parliament felt that Africa is a dumping ground for all kinds of hazardous waste and most African countries do not have strong regulations to protect the environment and the livelihood of their populations against hazardous waste.

Parliament called on the Commission, the Netherlands and Côte d'Ivoire to investigate this case fully, to establish responsibility at all levels, to bring to justice those responsible for this environmental crime and to ensure full remediation of the environmental contamination, as well as compensation for the victims. The EU institutions and the Member States must take all necessary measures to provide full assistance to the population affected and in particular to children, by using all available means of support, cooperation and civil protection.

Both Community legislation and international conventions were clearly violated in the case of the exporting of hazardous waste to Abidjan, and Parliament therefore called on the Commission and the Member States to take all necessary measures to ensure full enforcement of the existing waste shipment legislation. In addition:

-the Commission and the Member States concerned must make public all the bilateral agreements they have concluded with non-OECD countries for the shipping of waste;

-the Commission was asked make legislative proposals to close the loopholes in the current regime on hazardous waste so as to end shipments to non-OECD countries of waste electrical and electronic equipment and obsolete ships and vessels;

-the Commission should collect information on the illicit trafficking in, and dumping of, such hazardous wastes and products in African and other developing countries, and make proposals to counter it. It is called upon to produce annually a list of countries and transnational corporations engaged in the illicit dumping of toxic waste and products in African and other developing countries.