Question for written answer E-007643/2016
to the Commission
Rule 130
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Subject: Export of high-sulphur fuel to Africa

Recent reports by NGOs such as Public Eye in Switzerland have revealed that several European oil companies – exploiting the less stringent legislation there – export to African countries diesel with a sulphur content which can be hundreds of times higher than European permitted levels. There is no longer a market for high-sulphur diesel in developed countries, so the companies maximise their profits by mixing in cheap high-sulphur diesel for export to Africa.

The mixing of different types of fuel is not in itself illegal, but it is certainly irresponsible. The companies argue that they are complying with the standards of the purchasing countries. High-sulphur diesel damages emission-reduction technology even on new cars after only a couple of fillings, and the cars then emit not only sulphur dioxide but also harmful particulates. Air pollution is one of the greatest risks to health worldwide. Emissions from motor transport account for a large proportion of this.

The maximum permitted sulphur content in EU countries is 10 ppm. Last year, the East African countries of Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi introduced a limit of 50 ppm. In some African countries a sulphur content over 5 000 ppm is permitted. BP has exported diesel with up to 3 600 ppm to African countries.

Is the Commission aware of these activities by European companies, and what measures does it propose to take to prevent, in future, the irresponsible export to Africa of high-sulphur fuel, which is harmful both to human health and to the environment?