

WRITTEN QUESTION P-3604/08
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to the Commission

Subject: Gdynia and Szczecin shipyard restructuring plan

According to expert opinion the outlook for the shipbuilding industry in Poland is good. However, requiring the Gdynia and Szczecin shipyards to pay back state aid they have received could well result in that industry having no outlook at all. The two yards are currently Poland's leading shipbuilders. In 2006 the orders on the Szczecin shipyard's books accounted for 0.54% of world ship production, while the shipyard was ranked in fifth place among shipbuilders in Europe. The orders currently in production guarantee jobs at all of the shipyard's slipways until 2010. In 2007 the Gdynia shipyard had the fullest order books of all European shipyards. Both shipyards have a specialised, highly qualified workforce and are able to build ships meeting their customers' requirements and high quality standards. They also have extensive construction, engineering and research facilities. This potential should not be squandered. To require them to pay back state aid would be to force them into bankruptcy, resulting in the discontinuation of shipbuilding, the laying off of the workforce and the sale of the shipyards. Closure of the shipyards would entail additional costs, with, for the example, the state being required to pay off their debts and provide welfare benefits to the workers. Those costs are put at as much as PLN 10 billion. The bankruptcy of both shipyards would also have a major social cost. The two shipyards, which provide 12 000 jobs, are among Pomerania's largest employers. The closure of the Gdynia shipyard alone would double unemployment in the area. The bankruptcy of the shipyards would also entail a loss of earnings for suppliers and firms connected with the shipbuilding sector, resulting in thousands of job losses, given that each job in the shipyards generates between three to six ancillary jobs outside. According to our information, firm offers have already been made to buy the shipyards. Completion of the privatisation process is thus only a matter of time. However, restructuring is a complex operation that requires careful preparation. It is not something that can be rushed into. Reliable investors need to be found, and that takes time. Accordingly, might the Commission's decision on the repayment of state aid by the Szczecin and Gdynia shipyards not be deferred until at least the end of this year?