

Shipping disasters in the Kerch Strait in the Black Sea

European Parliament resolution of 13 December 2007 on the shipping disasters in the Kerch Strait in the Black Sea and the subsequent oil pollution

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on maritime safety, in particular its resolution of 21 November 2002 on the Prestige oil tanker disaster off the coast of Galicia¹ and its resolution of 23 September 2003 on improving safety at sea in response to the Prestige accident²,
 - having regard to the first and second maritime safety packages "Erika I" and "Erika II",
 - having regard to the seven legislative proposals on maritime safety (the third maritime safety package) submitted to it by the Commission in November 2005 (COM(2005)0586 to 0593),
 - having regard to its positions adopted at first reading on 29 March 2007³ and 25 April 2007⁴ on the third maritime safety package,
 - having regard to the set of priority measures established in 2005 by the High Level Transport Group, focusing on the five major trans-national axes connecting the EU with the neighbouring countries to the north, east and south-east, as well as around the Mediterranean and Black Sea regions,
 - having regard to the shipping disaster in the Kerch Strait in the Black Sea which occurred on 11 November 2007,
 - having regard to Articles 71, 80 and 251 of the EC Treaty,
 - having regard to Rule 103(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas 10 vessels (tankers and cargo carriers), including the Volganefit-139, which was not designed to withstand severe weather at sea, sank or ran aground in the Kerch Strait and the northern Black Sea region during a severe storm,
- B. whereas, according to provisional information, six seafarers died and more than 2 000 tonnes of fuel oil and sulphur were spilt into the sea, causing an environmental disaster and killing over 15 000 birds,
- C. whereas violent storms dispersed oil pollutants, affecting communities in the region as well as the environment, and whereas the oil and sulphur pollution, in addition to causing human casualties, also directly affected fauna and flora, with possible long-term impacts on the ecological quality of the natural habitats affected,

¹ OJ C 25 E, 29.1.2004, p. 415.

² OJ C 77 E, 26.3.2004, p. 76.

³ Texts adopted, P6_TA(2007)0093 and 0094.

⁴ Texts adopted, P6_TA(2007)0146 to 0150.

- D. whereas the Black Sea is becoming one of the main routes for the increasing oil exports in the region,
- E. whereas the human loss and ecological disaster in the Black Sea highlights the need to speed up deliberations in the Council on the remaining legislative acts in the third maritime safety package,
- F. whereas, with the accession of Romania and Bulgaria, the EU has become a major player in the Black Sea region, which is of geo-strategic importance in terms of energy security and the diversification of EU energy supply routes, given its proximity to the Caspian Sea, the Middle East and Central Asia;
1. Expresses its solidarity and reiterates its support for the victims of the disaster;
 2. Calls on the Council and the Commission to monitor closely the situation in the Black Sea and to take concrete action to help to reduce the ecological impact of the disaster;
 3. Calls on the Member States to ensure the rigorous application of existing Community legislation, especially legislation on ship standards, for example Port State Control;
 4. Notes that several measures, such as a temporary ban on river-to-sea vessels from the high seas, have been taken by the Russian authorities as a result of the recent series of shipwrecks in the Kerch Strait and underlines the fact that these measures should only be lifted after in-depth investigations and a situation assessment;
 5. Calls on the Member States and the Commission to promote the principles of the Integrated Maritime Policy for the European Union in the Black Sea region, as proposed in the communication from the Commission thereon (COM(2007)0575);
 6. Stresses that the strictest observation of maritime navigation rules is an essential feature of maritime safety and urges the Member States and the neighbouring countries of the EU to ensure that vessel crews and maritime administrations ignore alerts or storm warnings under no circumstances;
 7. Underlines the fact that the Black Sea disaster should draw the attention of the neighbouring countries of the EU - principally Russia, which has announced plans for a several-fold increase in its oil transshipment and export capacities on the Black Sea coast - to the issues of modernising maritime fleets and banning the use of obsolete single-hull tankers;
 8. Acknowledges the proactive role played by the Commission as long ago as November 2005, when it presented the third maritime safety package to strengthen European maritime safety legislation, without waiting for another maritime accident, and to prevent further environmental disasters and marine pollution;
 9. Points out that it completed its first reading of the seven proposals in the third maritime safety package in April 2007, and considers that the seven legislative proposals are closely interrelated and therefore need to be approved as a package;

10. Stresses that accidents such as that which occurred in the Black Sea region should speed up the Council's deliberations and calls on it to adopt common positions on all seven legislative proposals immediately;
11. Stresses the importance of the Paris Memorandum of Understanding and of the Black Sea Memorandum of Understanding and calls on the Council and the Commission to reinforce cooperation with non-EU coastal states as regards the implementation of measures to lessen the threat of environmental pollution from shipping accidents, including through action taken in the context of the International Maritime Organisation and the Paris Memorandum of Understanding;
12. Highlights the key role that regional organisations, in particular the Organisation for Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), can play in ensuring better management of and cooperation in seafaring on the Black Sea;
13. Points to the fact that environmental pollution, as caused by the recent oil spill, is an increasing problem in the Black Sea region, which can be tackled only through joint efforts by all states in the region; calls, therefore, upon the states in the region to foster existing models of cooperation and to come up with new cooperation mechanisms, such as cooperation with a view to cleaning up after events like the recent oil spill;
14. Calls on the Commission and on the Member States to utilise to the maximum possible extent the new European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument as a tool for addressing Black Sea environmental problems and to utilise the new Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance to address environmental issues in the states in the Black Sea region;
15. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission and the government and parliaments of the Member States.