



Costa Concordia: our first thoughts are with the victims

On 13 January, the Italian cruise ship, *Costa Concordia*, ran aground after hitting a reef off Isola del Giglio, Italy, with more than 4,000 passengers and crew on board. With 16 confirmed deaths and more than 20 people still missing, the human tragedy may be followed by an environmental one, as over 2000 tonnes of fuel must be pumped out of the *Concordia* to avoid a huge oil spill. Members of Parliament's Transport committee debated the issue with Commissioner Siim Kallas on Tuesday.

"Our first thoughts are with the victims and their families," Committee chair Brian Simpson said, stressing the importance of cooperating with the Italian authorities, responsible for the investigation and waiting for the results. He praised the crew who ensured more than 4,000 people were evacuated, as well as the efforts of all those involved in the rescue.

Investigation incumbent upon Italian authorities

"Were the existing rules followed or not?" Kallas asked, citing safety standards overseen by the International Maritime Organisation and the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, the primary international treaty on the safety of merchant ships, introduced in 1914 after the sinking of *Titanic* in 1912.

"What actually happened on the ship?" asked Italian Socialist David-Maria Sassoli. "It seems that the black box is broken, but how can it be that there is only one black box? We'll never know the details of what happened."

"The problem is probably not the fact that there were no rules, but that they were not respected," said Italian EPP member Carlo Fidanza. "Before taking any action we must wait for the results. The cruise sector has given excellent results and must be defended, as well as the people working on it."

Construction, number of passengers, distance from the coast: the right balance?

"The ship was sailing very close to the coast, we need to talk about distance," Italian Socialist Debora Serracchiani said.

"Size itself poses problems," Kallas said, adding, further work is needed on setting safe passenger limits.

Italian Liberal Giommara Uggias said, "this is not an Italian tragedy, most of the victims are not Italian, it's a European tragedy...there were too many people on board".

The human element

"Nearly 80% of transport accidents are due to human error. It is the human element on board the ship that can either provide the skills that may prevent a disaster, or the frailty or plain lack of competence that can cause one. And while the capability, complexity and sheer power of technology seems to be accelerating exponentially, the human element remains a basic component with all its strengths and all its weaknesses. That is why the international maritime community has now evolved from an approach which traditionally seeks technical

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solutions to safety-related problems, and is focusing instead on the role of human factors in maritime safety," according to the Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping Convention, IMO.

Seafaring tradition holds that the captain should be last to leave a sinking ship, but this is not going to be put into legislation, commissioner Kallas confirmed.

Role of the European Maritime Safety Agency

One of the European Maritime Safety Agency's key tasks is to make additional at-sea oil recovery resources available to assist member states responding to large scale incidents. EMSA-contracted stand-by Oil Spill Response Vessel Salina Bay is on the site of the Costa Concordia to assist the salvage operation, including bunker removal and pollution response operations. The Salina Bay is equipped with several oil recovery systems, such as booms, skimmer, sweeping arms and a dedicated radar slick detection system, and will be, as a precautionary measure, on stand-by during this operation over the next weeks.