

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2152/99

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to the Commission

Subject: Interest subsidies for the purchase of maritime vessels

The Commission's long-term objective has been to subsidise the European shipping fleet as being more environmentally friendly and safety-conscious (Community Guidelines on State Aid to Maritime Transport – 97/C 205/05). It was also stated in the minutes of the Finnish accession negotiations that it was not possible for the whole of Finland to continue with the tax-free trade. Instead the EU promised to take into account Finland's remote situation and weather conditions in deciding on its objectives for maritime transport policy for the continent as a whole.

The Finnish transport ministry has notified the Commission of its interest subsidy programme for the purchase of maritime vessels, the aim of which is to promote the purchase and renovation of the safe and environmentally acceptable freight vessels, adapted to icy conditions, which are essential in the Nordic countries. There is a broad national consensus in the Finnish parliament on this matter, which is also shown by the fact that the parliament, on its own initiative, increased the appropriations for purchase orders in the 1999 budget.

The Commission's officials are determined to interpret this programme as aid to shipyards, even though the programme has no effect on the shipyards' competitiveness, because the ship which receives the subsidy may be ordered from any country. According to the letter of 4 August 1999 this was also stated by officials in the Commission's DG VII, when drawing attention to the fact that this subsidy had no connection with EU shipyards.

How does the Commission propose to ensure the development of the environmentally friendly and safety-conscious Nordic maritime industry if it does not permit the use of the action framework it has itself set up? How can a Member State create a maritime policy if it cannot rely on the guidelines approved by the Commission? How has the Commission taken into account the comments on maritime policy in the minutes of Finland's accession negotiations?