

WRITTEN QUESTION E-3546/02
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to the Council

Subject: Creation of a fleet of European coastguard ships

After the sinking of the Erika, the Prestige oil spill on 19 November 2002 off the coast of Galicia, Spain has shown us the serious inadequacies in the control and monitoring of ships at sea.

The Commission must act as quickly as possible in the face of environmental disasters like these. The decision taken at the Franco-Spanish Summit in Malaga, in accordance with Article 56 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, to limit access for the most dangerous oil tankers to the exclusive economic zone (EEZ), less than 200 nautical miles (360 km) from the coast, gives cause for hope.

However, the crisis that an oil spill presents for local communities and the local authorities and its consequences for the environment and sectors of the economy such as fishing and tourism, requires that new rules concerning the transport of high-risk goods, as well as new monitoring measures, are drawn up on a European scale.

The precautionary principle means that the setting up of a European police force of the seas must now be considered. The creation of a fleet of European coastguard ships would allow maritime law to be enforced more effectively.

There are many arguments in favour of a new administrative body, which could be placed under the control of the European Parliament and under the responsibility of the maritime authorities of the Member States. On the eve of the next enlargement of the European Union, this would send a strong message in favour of a Europe of the sea. What is the Council's view on this?

Is the Council willing to make proposals that would serve as a common basis for a European campaign for safety at sea, with emphasis on the strict monitoring of the ships in circulation?