

WRITTEN QUESTION E-4435/07

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to the Council

Subject: Safety of Community vessels fishing off the coast of Somalia

Incidents of piracy occurring off the coast of Somalia are continuing to affect Community fishing vessels that operate in the Indian Ocean in order to catch highly migratory species such as the bonito. According to the International Maritime Organization, Somali waters are among the most dangerous in the world.

There are currently 27 Spanish tuna boats in the area, along with other Community vessels, the nationality of which we cannot say. Although they are fishing many miles off the coast, several vessels have been attacked by armed men on speedboats, creating a dangerous situation for their crews.

In its answer to Written Question E-4780/05, the Commission observed that 'Somalia was clearly unable to police its coastline owing to the fragility of the transitional government and the lack of resources'. Community fishing activity in these waters falls outside the Community's legal framework as there is no fishing agreement with Somalia owing to the lack of an administrative structure that could operate the relevant cooperation mechanisms, which means that, year after year, the Commission is unable to ensure the safety of European fishermen. However, the Commission undertook in its answer to endeavour to solve the problem by supporting those institutions working to rebuild the security sector.

Given that warships from some Member States operate in the area, including to assist and protect their fishermen:

Would the Council be willing to put in place, in cooperation with the Commission and the Member States concerned, arrangements for mutual assistance that respond to the legitimate concerns of Community fishermen, regardless of which country they are from, to ensure that any Member State warship in the area also supports, through its presence, fishing vessels from other Member States?