WRITTEN QUESTION E-0609/10
by Edward Scicluna (S&D)
to the Commission

Subject: Extension of Terminal 1 at Malta Freeport in Birzebbuga

Significant works involving the extension of Terminal 1 at Malta Freeport in Birzebbuga (Malta) were approved by the Malta Environment and Planning Authority Board (MEPA) on 21 January 2010. The board, which had refused the application in February 2009, reviewed its decision 'given that significant progress had been made by the operators of the Freeport to address environment operational concerns and adopt mitigation measures in the public interest'. The application includes dredging works and the construction of a new quay for container storage.

As a result of the terminal extension, ships will be berthed across the street from the nearby resident population, literally a few metres from the nearest group of houses. During the February 2009 hearings it transpired that the noise impact had been evaluated for the proposed construction phase only. Residents and recreational users of the nearby beach were not considered as sensitive receptors. An assessment of the social impact on the resident population of Birzebbuga was deemed unnecessary. Thus the noise impact and the social impact on the resident population were not evaluated in accordance with the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive (2003/35/EC[1]).

Does the Commission believe that the MEPA's actions in overturning a previous decision in the absence of any new surveys relating to the mapping of noise and social impacts are contrary to the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive (2003/35/EC)?

In view of the expected significant effects on noise levels for the nearby residents of Birzebbuga, which will in turn affect their quality of life, their health and the value of their property, does the Commission accept that a project requiring a full environment impact assessment may not be deemed to comply with Directive (2003/35/EC) if such studies are not carried out?

[1] OJ L 156, 25.6.2003, p. 17.