

WRITTEN QUESTION P-2552/08
by Josu Ortuondo Larrea (ALDE)
to the Council

Subject: Hijacking of the Playa de Bakio in Somalia

The fact that piracy off the coast of Somalia continues to affect Community fishing vessels which, every year, sail to the Indian Ocean to catch highly migratory species such as the bonito, is reflected in the hijacking of the Basque tuna trawler Playa de Bakio in Somalia on 20 April 2008.

In its answer to written question E-4780/05, the Commission warned of Somalia's problems in patrolling its own coasts, owing to the fragility of the transitional government and the lack of resources. The same applies to the answer to written question E-4436/07 from Mrs Miguélez Ramos and myself, in which the Commission acknowledges that, at present, the maintenance of security in waters off the coast of Somalia cannot be adequately ensured by the Somali authorities.

Several states have deployed warships off the Somali coast in order to strengthen security at sea. The Commission takes the view that a coordinated approach to the military protection of EU merchant and fishing vessels could form part of European Maritime Policy. However, the Commission asserts that this is a matter for the Council to decide, as it also relates to European Security and Defence Policy.

In this respect, the Council, in its answer to written question E-4435/07 recognises that the key to stabilising the situation in Somalia is further deployment of troops to Amisom (African Union Mission in Somalia), which will require additional EU support, including financial contributions.

Therefore, given that there are European military vessels in the area, would the Council not consider it possible and necessary to draw up a European protocol of action enabling those vessels to protect not just trawlers from their own country, but also all other Community vessels?

What action plans does the Council think should be set in motion in order to retrieve hijacked vessels such as the Playa de Bakio?

How many vessels have to be hijacked before an action plan is set in motion under the European Security and Defence Policy?