

Opinion on the proposal for a Council Decision concerning the conclusion of a cooperation agreement for the protection of the coasts and waters of the North-East Atlantic against pollution⁽¹⁾

(93/C 201/16)

On 12 February 1993 the Council decided to consult the Economic and Social Committee, under Article 130 S of the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community, on the abovementioned proposal.

The Section for Protection of the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Affairs, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its Opinion on 4 May 1993. The Rapporteur was Mr Margalef Masia.

At its 306th Plenary Session (meeting of 26 May 1993), the Economic and Social Committee adopted the following Opinion by 93 votes to seven, with six abstentions.

1. Introduction

1.1. One of the main consequences of the entry into force of the Single Act has been that the Community has assumed responsibilities in new areas. While in the early years it was concerned almost exclusively with commercial, agricultural, transport and some social issues, over time other issues have been added, such as economic and social cohesion, new technologies and, after much effort, the environment. Accidents involving oil tankers highlight the need for adequate measures to protect the marine environment.

1.2. It is of the greatest importance in this context to stipulate that vessels carrying dangerous goods or pollutants use particular routes designated to comply with the highest, technically feasible safety standards.

1.3. To achieve this, the Committee urges the Member States to carry out proper consultations, in accordance with Community procedures and with the Commission's assistance, with a view to submitting the necessary proposals to the International Maritime Organization, including whatever amendments to the international legal instruments [International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (Solas), International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (Marpol)] may be required.

1.4. The more general topic of maritime safety would be better dealt with in the Opinion currently being drawn up on a common policy on safe seas⁽²⁾.

2. General comments

2.1. The Committee approves the proposed Council Decision.

2.2. The Lisbon Convention is regarded positively. Its Articles examine the various measures required today to tackle the problem of marine pollution at international level (prevention, planning, coordination, response, etc.).

2.3. In this respect point 2 of the explanatory memorandum is especially clear where it refers to the Council Resolution of 26 June 1978 setting up an action programme on the control and reduction of pollution caused by hydrocarbons discharged at sea, in line with EC environmental objectives as laid down in Article 130s of the EEC Treaty.

2.4. International Conventions are a suitable instrument for encouraging international cooperation. In the present case Article 10 of the 1990 International Convention on oil pollution preparedness and response (OPPR-90) explicitly urges regional cooperation as an effective and practical way for countries in the same geographical region to tackle marine pollution, particularly in the case of accidents.

2.5. The Lisbon Agreement rounds off the international measures taken by the Community to combat

⁽¹⁾ OJ No C 56, 26. 2. 1993, p. 13.

⁽²⁾ COM(93) 66 final.

accidental marine pollution: the Baltic Sea, the North Sea and the Mediterranean are already covered by the corresponding instruments (Helsinki Convention, Bonn Agreement and Barcelona Convention respectively), leaving only the North-East Atlantic which will be adequately covered by the Lisbon Agreement.

2.6. The inclusion of Morocco and its waters will make for additional maritime safety and protection in the event of an accident on the Community's southern frontier.

2.7. The inclusion of the Atlantic archipelagoes is also viewed positively.

2.8. The financial provisions of the Agreement are correct and the expenditure fairly divided.

2.9. The Committee would, however, recommend that the Community's voluntary contribution be on a three rather than one year basis so as to ensure that the International Centre functions smoothly.

2.10. The Committee recommends rapid ratification of the Agreement by the Community and the Member States so that the Centre can start operations and thus complete the protection system for all European coasts and waters.

Done at Brussels, 26 May 1993.

The Chairman
of the Economic and Social Committee
Susanne TIEMANN

APPENDIX

to the Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee

Defeated amendment

The following amendment, which received more than 25 % of the votes, was examined and rejected during the discussion:

Delete paragraphs 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4 and replace with the following text:

'1.2. The ESC expresses its concern regarding the safe transportation of hazardous and noxious substances in the Community. In that respect it recalls its relevant Opinion on the draft directive on the minimum requirements for vessels entering or leaving Community ports carrying packages of dangerous or polluting goods (October 1989, OJ No C 329/20), and will re-examine the issue shortly in the context of its forthcoming Opinion on the « Communication on a common policy on Safe Seas »'.

Reason

Self-explanatory.

Voting

For: 23, against: 61, abstentions: 2.
