

Media alert – NGO warns EU Ship Recycling proposal will not stop the dumping of toxic ships

2012-03-22 18:03:41 Shipbreaking

Brussels, 22 March 2012 – A day before the European Commission presents its proposal for regulating the dismantling of toxic end-of-life ships, the NGO Shipbreaking Platform, a Brussels-based coalition of environmental, labour rights and human rights organisations was invited to meet European Environment Commissioner Janez Potočnik. During the meeting the Platform reiterated its call on Europe to stop the unjust practice of dumping toxic ships on the poorest communities of South Asia [1] and already identified important areas in the upcoming proposal that will need to be strengthened. Since 2006, the NGO Shipbreaking Platform has actively called on European policy makers to find solutions that will improve enforcement of the current European Waste Shipment Regulation – a law that forbids the export of toxic ships to developing countries. Last week during a ship recycling conference in Singapore, the European Commission announced its intention to propose a new regulation on ship recycling, which will transpose the International Maritime Organisation's Hong Kong Convention on Safe and Environmentally Sound Ship Recycling - and, at the same time, remove ships from the current European Waste Shipment Regulation. Today, Commissioner Potočnik informed the Platform that the new regulation will seek to regulate only ships sailing under a European flag. The Platform is concerned that the proposal, which will be published tomorrow, will do little to reverse the current trend of unsafe beach breaking with no care for waste management in developing countries. *"With no economic incentive to change current shipping and shipbreaking practices, and faced with the reality that there are few, and probably will be even less, European flagged ships at end-of-life, the Commission's proposal effectively rids Europe of its responsibility - and opportunity - to provide a sustainable solution to stop toxic ships from poisoning workers and the environment in some of the world's most vulnerable countries,"* said Ingvild Jenssen, Director of the NGO Shipbreaking Platform. The Platform believes that the Hong Kong Convention provides for weak grounds on which to settle a solid regulatory framework and therefore applauds the introduction of stricter requirements at the European level both with regards to clean ship building and environmentally sound ship dismantling. But, while the Commission claims that the upcoming European proposal goes beyond the Hong Kong Convention in taking a clear stance against the beach breaking method [2] and only allowing EU flagged vessels to be sold to recycling facilities approved by the EU, in reality these requirements will only affect a small number of ships. Whereas 40 percent of the world fleet is owned by European-based companies, only a small percentage is sailing under a European flag at end-of-life [3]. In 2011 almost two-thirds of all European-owned vessels sold for breaking in South Asia were registered under non-European flags. The majority of these flags, such as St Kitts and Nevis; the Bahamas; Comoros; and St Vincent and Grenadines, are well-known for sustaining substandard practices, their lack of transparency and weak enforcement of international maritime legislation. The Platform and international trade union organisations have repeatedly stated that the flag state system - and its so-called flags of convenience (FOC) – provides for legal loopholes and cheap disposal routes for the dumping of hazardous wastes. To counter concerns with lack of enforcement only relying on flag state implementation, proposals to introduce economic mechanisms such as port taxes or insurance schemes were initially supported by Commission expert reports [4]. In today's meeting with the NGOs the Commission was unable to justify why these proposals have not been included in the final regulatory proposal. In the coming weeks, the Platform will produce a deeper analysis of the Commission proposal and will continue its advocacy work during the co-decision procedure in the European Council and the European Parliament. **Contact** Ingvild Jenssen Director NGO Shipbreaking Platform ingvild@shipbreakingplatform.org +32 (0) 485 190 920 www.shipbreakingplatform.org **Notes** [1] 80 percent of the global end-of-life ships are broken in Bangladesh, Pakistan and India on tidal beaches whose soft sands cannot support crucial safety measures such as heavy lifting or emergency response equipment and which allow pollution to seep directly into the delicate coastal zone environment. No country in the developed world allows ships to be broken on their beaches. While shipbreaking can be done in a safe and clean way with proper technologies and infrastructure, and enforced regulations, most ship-owners choose to sell their ships for significantly greater profit to substandard yards operating in countries without adequate resources to provide safeguards and infrastructure to manage the dangerous business. On the South Asian shipbreaking beaches, vulnerable migrant workers, many of them children, break apart massive and toxic ships by hand, often without shoes, gloves, hard hats or masks to protect their lungs from asbestos, and poison fumes. The International Labour Organization (ILO) considers shipbreaking on beaches to be among the world's most dangerous jobs. [2] For more information on the four fatal flaws of the beaching method, see www.offthebeach.org [3] Using data from shipping database IHS Fairplay DG Environment calculated that in 2009, 1.299 ships were sent for dismantling, out of which 349 (or 27 percent) were owned by European companies. The majority of these 27 percent were however registered under non-European flags: 252 out of 349 (72 percent). The proposed EU Regulation on ship recycling would only concern the remaining 28 percent of EU-flagged and EU-owned ships, adding also a smaller number of ships owned by non-European companies, but registered under an EU flag. Out of the 1.299 ships sent for breaking in 2009, 197 ships were sailing under a European flag (about 15 percent). It must also be taken into account that many of these vessels were dismantled under already acceptable conditions in the OECD. [4] See Milieu/COWI for DG Environment "Study in relation to options for new initiatives regarding dismantling of ships" (October 2009) - Ship Dismantling Fund: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/waste/ships/pdf/fund_note.pdf