

European Maritime Safety Agency: further development

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The Council discussed the state of play as regards a proposed modification of the current regulation on the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA), providing for an extension of EMSA's tasks, on the one hand, and some changes to its governance structure, on the other.

The great majority of delegations can in principle accept a limited extension, but stressed that new tasks should only be introduced if a clear added value can be demonstrated, and that duplication of work already undertaken by national administrations or other EU bodies needed to be avoided. Many Member States also emphasised that the agency should focus primarily on its core business, which is maritime safety. The possible budgetary consequences of an extension were also a matter of concern; some Member States considered that any new tasks would need to be funded within the agency's current budget and without creating new posts at the agency.

As regards the extension of EMSA's competence to interventions in the event of pollution from oil and gas installations, and not only from ships, as under the current regulation, some delegations stressed that in such cases EMSA should intervene only at the request of the Member State concerned.

Further new tasks proposed by the Commission include increased cooperation with neighbouring countries and closer involvement of EMSA in EU maritime research, an enhanced role in the development of an EU maritime surveillance network, and contributions to other EU policies related to its field of expertise, such as "motorways of the sea" or the European maritime transport space without barriers.

With respect to the governance of EMSA, the text proposed by the Commission intends in particular to clarify the role of the different actors in the organisation of visits and inspections carried out by EMSA, in order to avoid conflicts of interest. Many Member States, however, are critical of what they see as a shift of competences from the agency's administrative board, where Member States are represented, to the executive director and the Commission. Some delegations prefer to maintain the present governance structure, while several Member States support adapting it, on condition that the competence of the agency's administrative board is fully respected, so as to ensure that member states have their say in EMSA's decision taking, in particular when it comes to the appointment procedure for the executive director.