

European Maritime Safety Agency: further development

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The Council agreed on a general approach on modification of the current Regulation on the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA), slightly extending EMSA's tasks and clarifying some governance issues.

The compromise proposal tabled by the Presidency was accepted by all delegations, after the text had been amended to take account of budgetary concerns by clarifying that it is up to the Council and the European Parliament to decide on the agency's resources.

EMSA's competence: under the new draft regulation, EMSA's competence will be extended, in particular to enable the Agency to intervene, upon request from the Member States concerned, in the event of pollution from oil and gas installations, and not only from ships, as under the current regulation. EMSA will also be asked to contribute to other EU policies and projects related to its field of expertise, such as "motorways of the sea" or the European maritime transport space without barriers. In addition, the agency will provide assistance for technical work in international and regional organisations, and cooperation with neighbouring countries will be enhanced.

Tasks of the Agency: there will be a clear distinction between the agency's core and ancillary tasks.

The core tasks are strictly linked to the agency's core business, that is, maritime safety and security and prevention of, and response to, marine oil pollution.

The ancillary tasks will be entrusted to the agency only on condition that they provide real added value, without duplicating work undertaken elsewhere, and do not infringe on Member States' rights and obligations. These tasks include: (i) environmental issues such as greenhouse gas emissions from shipping and the environmental status of marine waters; (ii) the development of an information sharing system; (iii) specific tasks related to inland waterway transport, namely inspecting classification societies for inland waterway vessels and exploring the possibility of interlinking maritime and inland waterway information systems, or contributions to other EU policies.

Governance of EMSA: the revised text clarifies the role of the administrative board on which Member States are represented, in particular as regards the procedure for the appointment of the agency's executive director. The text also provides for multiannual planning concerning the agency's strategy and staff policy, and for an independent external evaluation of the implementation of the regulation at regular intervals, at least every five years.

The European Parliament, whose approval is also required for the adoption of the regulation, has not yet established its position at first reading.