**Follow up to the European Parliament non-legislative resolution on chemical residues in the Baltic Sea, based on Petitions Nos 1328/2019 and 0406/2020**

1. **Resolution tabled pursuant to Rule 227(2) of the European Parliament's Rules of Procedure**
2. **Reference numbers:** 2021/2567 (RSP) / B9-0224/2021 / P9\_TA-PROV(2021)0123
3. **Date of adoption of the resolution:** 27April 2021
4. **Competent Parliamentary Committee:** Committee on Petitions (PETI)
5. **Brief analysis/ assessment of the resolution and requests made in it:**

The resolution highlights the potential threats to the marine environment and humans posed by underwater chemical munitions that are to be found in the Baltic Sea (amounting to approximately 50 000 tonnes of conventional and chemical weapons containing hazardous substances). It calls upon the EU, the Member States and the international community to cooperate and provide resources for appropriate actions to tackle the potential threats posed by underwater chemical munitions.

In particular, the resolution calls on the Commission and the Joint Programming Committee of the Interreg Baltic Sea Region to secure adequate financing for research and actions required to resolve the dangers posed by the munitions dumped in the Baltic Sea. It also recalls the valuable work made by the Helsinki Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea (HELCOM) and various Interreg projects for the Baltic Sea, such as CHEMSEA, DAIMON and DAIMON 2 (**paragraph 3**). In that regard, it regrets the fact that none of the EUR 8.8 million allotted under the European Neighbourhood Instrument was used for the DAIMON or DAIMON 2 projects under the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme (**paragraph 9**).

In terms of resources, the resolution calls on the Commission to engage all the relevant EU agencies and institutions, including the European Defence Agency, and to make sure that the problem of chemical residues and dumped munitions in the Baltic Sea will be reflected in all the relevant EU policies and programming processes, including the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and the Maritime Security Strategy Action Plan (**paragraph 10**). In order to enable the submission of projects covering regions affected by the same problem (the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, North Sea and Baltic Sea) and facilitate the exchange of experience and best practices, the resolution also calls on the Commission to ensure that this issue is included in its horizontal programmes (**paragraph 11)**.

In view of tackling pollution, the resolution asks the Commission to deploy concerted efforts and to foster all types of regional, national and international cooperation, including through its partnership with NATO (**paragraph 12**).

More specifically, to achieve its zero pollution ambition, the resolution calls on the Commission to establish an expert group with the Member States affected and other stakeholders and organisations, tasked with the following mandate: (i) studying and mapping the exact locations of contaminated areas; (ii) proposing suitable environmentally friendly and cost-effective solutions for monitoring and cleaning the pollution with the ultimate aim of removing or fully neutralising hazardous materials where extraction is impossible; (iii) developing reliable decision-making support tools; (iv) conducting an awareness-raising campaign to inform the groups affected (such as fishers, local residents, tourists and investors) of the potential health and economic risks; and (v) developing emergency response guidelines for environmental disasters (**paragraph 8)**.

1. **Response to the requests and overview of the action taken, or intended to be taken, by the Commission:**

With respect to **paragraph 3**, the Commission would like to highlight that the Interreg Baltic Sea region programme is implemented under the principle of shared management, under which it is the responsibility of the Member States and the Joint Monitoring Committee´s (JMC) to select the projects to be financed (e.g. through calls or other instruments). The Commission, in close collaboration with the Member States, negotiates and agrees the main priorities and objectives of each programme, and the relevant programme authorities ensure that the selected projects are in line with the programme objectives.

The 2021-2027 Baltic Sea region programme has not yet been adopted, as the adoption of regulatory basis for Interreg programmes was delayed. However, the current informal draft of the programmes builds on the achievements of previous programmes and focuses on Policy Objective 2 on Greener Europe, under which the aim is to also invest in sustainable water management to make the Baltic Sea and the inland waters cleaner, and to enable sustainable use of marine resources adapting to the changing climate. Under this priority actions to introduce procedures to remove hazardous substances from the sea, including marine litter and hazardous submerged objects, can also be financed.

The future Interreg Baltic Sea region programme will focus on further application of solutions and tools already developed in CHEMSEA, DAIMON and DAIMON 2 projects by national and regional authorities and with other sources of funding. In addition, the “project platform” instrument of the Interreg Baltic Sea region programme 2021-2027 can provide means to support research and actions also related to the issue of resolving the dangers posed by the munitions dumped in the Baltic Sea, by linking thematically related projects from various programmes, bundling their results and facilitating a streamlined access to knowledge. The aim is to help users looking for results in a specific thematic area and to create synergies across EU funds, projects and research areas.

With respect to **paragraph 10**, the Commission would like to highlight that the issue of dumped chemicals and munitions in the marine environment is tackled under the EU Maritime Security Strategy Action Plan (EUMSS AP). Through this plan, the Commission promotes exercises and training programmes to optimise the disposal and, where possible, the elimination of sea-dumped chemical munitions and unexploded ordnances, and to improve the emergency procedures in the case of accidental recovery of such munitions. Furthermore, in January 2021, the European Commission launched a specific study to map the dumped munitions, to improve coordination in monitoring and tackling them, to determine a set of common procedures and response models in dealing with accidental munition recovery and to identify best practices for removal, thereby limiting harmful impacts to the marine environment. The study will be completed by the end of 2021.

In addition, under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive[[1]](#footnote-1) (MSFD), dumped chemicals and munitions are considered as a potential source of chemical contamination and marine litter in the marine environment, which thus has to be monitored by the Member States and taken into account in their marine strategies, including in the definition of their programmes of measures[[2]](#footnote-2). In particular, it is necessary to: i) monitor the chemical pollution of the dumping areas, ii) estimate the status of chemical ammunition and containers; iii) further surveying threats of this pollution to the environment. The recently adopted Zero pollution action plan[[3]](#footnote-3) (ZPAP) also provides a supporting framework to address this issue by proposing a new integrated approach to better prevent, remedy and monitor pollution from marine waters.

With respect to **paragraph 11** of the resolution, the Commission agrees that cooperation at regional level is of particular importance to tackle this issue in a coherent manner between the Member States and neighbouring countries sharing the same marine waters, and to develop international standards and best practices. In this regard, cooperation on submerged weapons and munitions is already taking place between the Baltic Sea EU Member States and Russia through the relevant regional sea convention – the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (HELCOM). Its technical group ‘Submerged’ in particular aims to map, monitor and if possible clean up dumping sites for the protection of human health and the marine environment[[4]](#footnote-4). As a contracting party to this Convention, the European Union, represented by the Commission, has traditionally supported those efforts. The adoption of the HELCOM updated Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP), in October 2021 at the next HELCOM Ministerial Meeting, should contribute to strengthen those efforts, with specific actions related to this issue. Strong commitments were also taken at “Our Baltic” Conference[[5]](#footnote-5) in September 2020 by the Ministers of the Environment, Fisheries and Agriculture of the Baltic Sea EU Member States, to achieve a clean and healthy Baltic Sea, notably by addressing all types of pollution from hazardous substances included dumped chemicals buried in the sea.

With respect to the suggestion made in **paragraph 8** to establish a dedicated expert group with a clear mandate for action, the Commission believes that work should continue to be carried out within the regional context described above, also to include Russia as an important partner necessary to addressing this issue.

Finally, with respect to **paragraph 12** related to international cooperation, the Commission would like to point out that this issue has been addressed in many different fora, such as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the London Protocol of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) as well as the United Nations General Assembly, which adopted a resolution 68/208 on 20 December 2013 relating to “Cooperative measures to assess and increase awareness of environmental effects related to waste originating from chemical munitions dumped at sea”. Through the EUMSS AP, the Commission is mainstreaming maritime security into bilateral agendas with international and regional organisations, e.g. the United Nations (UN) system, including through the EU-UN Strategic Partnership, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), as well as with third countries. Specifically, in the context of unexploded munitions at sea, the EUMSS AP promotes cooperation with regional organisations such as HELCOM, to optimise the disposal and the elimination of sea-dumped chemical munitions and unexploded ordnances, to improve relevant emergency procedures in the case of accidental recovery, and to contribute to an EU database of incidents and reporting systems.

1. Directive 2008/56/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 June 2008 establishing a framework for community action in the field of marine environmental policy (Marine Strategy Framework Directive), OJ L 164, 25.6.2008, p. 19–40 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. COM(2018)562 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economy and social committee of the regions. COM(2021) 400. Pathway to a Healthy Planet for All EU Action Plan: 'Towards Zero Pollution for Air, Water and Soil' [communication\_en.pdf (europa.eu)](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/pdf/zero-pollution-action-plan/communication_en.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Cf. 2013 report, including recommendations for action <http://helcom.fi/Lists/Publications/BSEP142.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. [Our Baltic Ministerial Declaration DRAFT v0 (europa.eu)](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/ministerial_declaration_our_baltic_conference.pdf), in particular paragraph 12 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)