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ERIKA, PRESTIGE, NUNCA MÁS!

Regions of the **Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe (CPMR)** met in Santander on 13 and 14 April 2007 at the invitation of Mrs **Dolores GOROSTIAGA SÁIZ**, Vice-President of the Government of Cantabria (ES), and Mr **Javier DEL OLMO ILARZA**, Chair of Santander Port Authority, to reiterate their commitment to delivering maritime safety policy in Europe.

"Cantabria Region," stated Mrs Dolores GOROSTIAGA SÁIZ, "is one of the regions most exposed to the risk of accidents. Santander is a port with much traffic and the whole of the Atlantic Arc is a very busy shipping route. Furthermore, the weather conditions are not always easy... We need to be vigilant and cooperate between countries, particularly within the major sea areas. At present, there is a great deal of diversity from one country to another in the responsibilities delegated to them by the States for preventing and controlling pollution caused by maritime transport. Although this diversity means that we must exclude seeking a common model to be applied across the board, it does not limit exchanges of experiences or cooperation actions on technological progress, or partnerships between Regions located within the same sea area."

Maritime safety is of ongoing concern for the CPMR. Ever since the Amoco Cadiz oil spill in 1978, which washed up over 200,000 tonnes of oil on the coasts of Brittany, the CPMR has always been concerned with stepping up safety at sea. *"Since the Erika disaster in December 1999 and the Prestige in November 2002, we have had other causes for concern and anger,"* affirmed **Christel LILJESTRÖM**, President of the CPMR's Baltic Sea Commission and President of the Regional Council of Itä-Uusimaa in Finland. *"Coastal authorities are the first to be affected by breakdowns in the safety system resulting in these accidents. These effects are felt not only in economic and environmental terms, but also from a financial and political point of view. The Regions are called upon to bear the material and financial burden of salvage and emergency response operations. We must also explain to our electorate why these accidents arise and why we are powerless to do anything about it."*

The CPMR is seeking to promote a European maritime policy, build partnerships with international and EU bodies responsible for maritime safety and use cooperation instruments to initiate cross-border, interregional and transnational maritime safety projects. These are the three lines along which the Santander seminar was organised. The CPMR also wishes to applaud the European Commission's determining role in tightening maritime safety measures over the past few years through the Erika 1 and 2 packages. However, the maritime Regions expressed their concern over the time taken to adopt the Erika 3 package and urged the Member States and European Parliament to ensure a rapid adoption of this package. Is it because there has been no oil spill for over four years that the Member States no longer consider the adoption of these measures to be a matter of urgency?

The EU Institutions were represented by Mrs **Rosa MIGUELEZ RAMOS**, MEP, **Mr Bernardo URRUTIA**, (DG TREN - Maritime Safety) and Mr **Antonios VIDALIS** (Task Force - DG Fisheries and Maritime Affairs) representing the Commission, and finally Mr **Emilio MARTÍN-BAUZA**, Head of Unit at the Maritime Safety Agency in Lisbon, who took part in the debates. After been granted observer status with the *IOPCF (International Oil Pollution Compensation Fund)* - represented at the seminar by Mr **José MAURA**, head of claims - the CPMR appealed to the European Commission and

Member States to authorise EMSA to extend the scope of its action beyond the strict framework of its mission to provide technical assistance to the States only. In this context, the delegates requested in the final declaration that *“in its capacity as representative of levels of governance with certain competences in this area, the CPMR might be granted the status of observer or associate member on EMSA’s administrative board.”*

The debates also underlined the importance of the social dimension of maritime policy insofar as the majority of accidents can be attributed to human causes. *“Despite the fact that 80% of accidents at sea are the result of human error,”* stated Mrs **Rosa MIGUELEZ RAMOS** on behalf of the EP, *“and that employment in the maritime sector, including the fishing industry, has considerably dropped, measures are still needed to train crews and improve living conditions on board. However, a true maritime safety culture does not only rely on standards, but also on people. Coordination in the event of risk is made difficult because of the wide ethnic and social diversity of crews, despite the obligations imposed by international standards.”*

Mrs **Consuelo CASTRO**, the Spanish government’s barrister in charge of the PRESTIGE case, finally made her contribution to the proceedings. *“Civil and criminal liability in maritime accidents is a problem that needs to be addressed at European and international level,”* declared the legal expert. *“Five years after the event, the Prestige ruling is still open and our main difficulty is linked to the fact that maritime law, like international law, fails to be enforced: there are standards but no real sanctions! The Prestige sailed under the flag of the Bahamas and unfortunately the Spanish government can do nothing to obtain compensation from this country! If there were an EU maritime policy representing 27 countries and not just Spain, perhaps we could have more influence at international level and a greater chance of achieving legal results.”*

Prior to the seminar, Mr **Agustín IBÁÑEZ**, delegate of the Government of Cantabria, Mr **Felipe MARTÍNEZ** and Mrs **Pilar TEJO**, Chair and Director of **SASEMAR** (*Sociedad Estatal de Salvamento Marítimo*-Spanish Maritime Safety Agency) inaugurated yesterday in the presence of **Xavier Gizard**, Secretary General of the CPMR, the **Santander strategic rescue and maritime safety base**. This is a 4000 sq. m. platform designed to combat sea pollution and which will serve the regions of Asturias, Cantabria and the Basque Country.

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