

WRITTEN QUESTION E-0294/03

by Rosa Díez González (PSE), Pedro Aparicio Sánchez (PSE), María Izquierdo Rojo (PSE) and Fernando Pérez Royo (PSE)  
to the Commission

Subject: Sinking of the lighter Spabunker IV in Algeciras Bay

Although the surface area of the Mediterranean Sea amounts to just 1% of the total surface area of the world's oceans, 20% of the world's petrol tankers and 28% of its oil transit through its waters. The situation calls for especially protective Community and international rules. Algeciras Bay, with the port of Gibraltar, is a particularly vulnerable enclave owing both to its high density of oil traffic and its special legal status. It is estimated that in recent years it has seen over forty major oil spillages. The last of these followed the sinking of the lighter Spabunker IV, which was carrying over a thousand tonnes of fuel oil.

Can the Commission indicate:

1. whether bunkering (the transfer of fuel from one vessel to another) and the 'floating refuelling stations' habitually found in Algeciras Bay are permitted under international and Community rules, and whether Gibraltar and the Member States are complying with these rules;
2. whether it will gather information on the sinking of the Spabunker IV and establish whether the accident involved any non-compliance with the rules? In any event, will the Commission tighten up the legislation as it stands?