

**Question for written answer E-004509/2012  
to the Commission (Vice-President / High Representative)**

Rule 117

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Subject: VP/HR - Illegal maritime shipments

Maritime transport flows are the dominant means of moving a range of commodities that can prolong and inflame conflicts, derail democratisation processes and even foster the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. According to a study recently published by SIPRI, more than 60% of the ships involved in cases of sanctions-busting or the illicit transfer of drugs, arms and other military equipment are owned by companies from countries belonging to the EU, NATO or the OECD. Maritime transport is the preferred mode of this clandestine trade, not least because the high seas are very difficult areas of our planet to monitor or regulate. Despite advances in satellite and ship monitoring technologies, there is no authority capable of effectively controlling such a vast territory.

In addition, jurisdiction over merchant shipping in international waters rests with a vessel's flag state and, as a result, ships suspected of carrying illegal commodities cannot be boarded –and the commodity seized – without the prior agreement of the flag state. In fact, the majority of ships involved in the reported transport of illegal military equipment, dual-use goods and narcotics sail under so-called flags of convenience and are registered in flag states with limited regulation and control of their merchant fleets. Port state control (PSC) inspections in most cases are the only occasions when state authorities have the right to board a ship without consulting the flag state. At international level, information sharing on suspect vessels between governments, maritime administrative entities and relevant PSC authorities could be enhanced. In particular, the Member States should create an information-sharing mechanism with a view to compiling a list of suspect ships and shipments, which could be integrated into other EU systems, such as those under the authority of the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA), as part of a holistic approach to maritime security and the enforcement of EU arms embargoes.

Given the situation described above:

1. is the High Representative/Vice-President aware of the fact that the majority of ships involved in reported cases of sanctions-busting or illicit transfer of arms, drugs and other military equipment are owned by companies registered in countries belonging to the EU and NATO?
2. is the High Representative/Vice-President considering establishing an EU mechanism for sharing information on suspect shipments and ships, with the aim of improving global human security?