Commissioner Georgieva on-board oil spill response vessel

On 14 October, Kristalina Georgieva, Commissioner in charge of International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response, paid a visit to EMSA in Lisbon. A tour was first organised on board the Ria de Vigo, one of the vessels that EMSA can mobilise in case of maritime pollution incidents. Ms Georgieva saw a demonstration of oil recovery equipment, and talked with experts and crew. A subsequent tour of EMSA focused on the EMSA-managed monitoring systems such as SafeSeaNet, the EU LRIT Data Centre and CleanSeaNet.

New tasks come knocking at EMSA’s door

Following the publication in May of EMSA’s five-year strategy, the European Commission adopted on October 28 a detailed proposal to amend EMSA’s basic regulation (1406/2002) in a number of ways. The full document is far too long to summarise here, but we’ll try! The general emphasis is on continuity and clarification: the Agency is now in a consolidation phase, and so the proposal envisages keeping up the good work, and some pinpoint-targeted extensions towards new tasks. Among these tasks are: actions linked to implementing the third maritime safety package; analysis of research projects; an enhanced maritime surveillance role; pollution response tasks linked to oil spills caused by offshore oil installations; an amended role in technical cooperation with neighbouring countries; assistance in the development of implementation of EU policies such as Motorways of the Sea, e-maritime and the environmental aspects of shipping including climate change; and a clarified role in the area of maritime security inspections. Read the full proposal on Eur-Lex.

EU LRIT data passes first IMO exam

Long Range Identification and Tracking (LRIT) is how merchant vessels, according to IMO rules, communicate their position via satellite worldwide. IMSO, the LRIT Coordinator checks that LRIT data centres, which manage these ship-broadcasted messages, are performing properly. IMSO recently audited the EMSA-operated EU LRIT Data Centre for the period June 2009-June 2010. Auditors verified sample data - all LRIT transactions recorded in a single month - to check that requirements were met. Results were very positive: the LRIT Coordinator will now submit a comprehensive audit report to the IMO’s Secretary-General, and a summary to the IMO Maritime Safety Committee meeting in November.

Training on ballast water

In October EMSA hosted a first training event to help Member States prepare for ratification of the IMO’s Ballast Water Management Convention. This was attended by lawyers, PSC officers, policy officials and environmental experts from 19 Member States. It covered issues such as methodologies involved in implementing the Convention, problems likely to be encountered, and methods to solve these problems.

EU parliament eyes EMSA role in offshore oil drilling safety

Europe is responding to the aftermath of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. An EU Parliament resolution of October 7 envisages comprehensive EU legislation on oil platforms. In addition, a Commission Communication on the safety of oil and gas activities proposes a role for EMSA. These initiatives are likely to extend the Agency’s marine pollution activities beyond a focus on ship-sourced pollution to include oil spills from offshore drilling platforms (see related article, top right).