

Finland Permits Illegal Export of Hazardous Waste

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Sources recently confirmed that the vessel formerly known as the Onyx (recently re-named Kaptain Boris) has steered towards the shipbreaking beaches of Pakistan, Bangladesh or India for breaking in contravention of the Basel Convention and European Waste Shipment Regulation. The Finnish Environmental Institute (SYKE) classified this vessel as waste in 2007 and issued a transport ban that was in effect for two years. However, in November 2009, SYKE lifted the transport ban and allowed the ship to leave the port of Vaasa, Finland with a stated destination of Dubai. The vessel arrived in Dubai in late April, five months after its initial departure. Upon its arrival, it was immediately sold, re-named and reflagged to Sierra Leone. The vessel has since then disappeared, embarking, according to reliable sources, on its final voyage in contravention to international and European waste law. The Onyx, built in 1966, contains hazardous materials such as asbestos and PCBs within its construction. The Finnish Environmental Institute lifted the transport ban in November 2009 based on assurances from the then owner, Attar Construction, that the vessel would not be scrapped abroad, but rather that it would be repaired and would continue use as a cargo vessel. Attar Construction has seemingly committed fraud in the face of the Finnish Environmental Institute and the international and European rules governing the transboundary movement of hazardous waste. The new owners, Red Line Shipping Ltd, was only recently founded and registered in the Marshall Islands, most likely a shelter company for this single transaction. Jim Puckett, Executive Director of the Basel Action Network, a member organization of the NGO Shipbreaking Platform, said, "This is a familiar story. Environmental authorities quickly accept false claims, but when the vessel lands on a beach in South Asia, authorities deny responsibility. It is time for someone to take a stand to uphold their environmental pledge. Finland now has that opportunity to set an example and correct their misstep." Under the European Waste Shipment Regulation, it is illegal for an EU Member State such as Finland to allow the transport of toxic ships to developing countries without having them first pre-cleaned of their hazardous materials. Finland permitted the illegal export of the Onyx, otherwise classified as waste, from the port of Vaasa and therefore bears the responsibility to take immediate corrective action. Ingvild Jenssen, Director of the NGO Shipbreaking Platform, states that "Europe must clean up the act of its own shipping industry – it is scandalous that toxic ships are allowed to leave EU ports with false documentation and disappear under new names and new flags to end up, a few months later, on the beaches of South Asia where they are broken by exploited migrant workers and severely pollute sensitive coastal zones."