

Media Alert – NGOs call on Bulgaria: don't be an exporter of toxic ships

2012-10-23 15:10:39 Shipbreaking

After escaping Germany, the NORTHERN VITALITY is now headed for Bulgaria Brussels, 23 October 2012 - In a letter sent last week to the Bulgarian Ministry of Environment and to the Bulgarian Executive Environment Agency, the NGO Shipbreaking Platform, a global coalition of environmental, human rights and labour rights organisations, calls on Bulgaria to prevent the export to India of the toxic ship NORTHERN VITALITY, a 15-year-old containership that is likely to contain hazardous materials such as asbestos, refrigerants and mercury within its structure and electronic equipment; operational oily wastes such as sludge and oil residues; and stores including paint tins and heavy cleaning agents. Under European waste law it is illegal to export an end-of-life ship containing toxic materials to India.

"We expect Bulgaria to step up to the plate and do the right thing: refuse to be a toxic waste dumper and ban the export of the NORTHERN VITALITY to a developing country", said Patrizia Heidegger, Executive Director of the NGO Shipbreaking Platform. *"The ship should be sent to a facility in the EU or Turkey where she can be recycled in an environmentally sound and safe manner."* The NORTHERN VITALITY left Germany on the 10 October after local authorities had held her for more than a month in the port of Wilhelmshaven, and is now about to enter the Mediterranean Sea. On 6 September, the Platform had alerted Germany and the European Commission that the ship's departure from German waters had to be prevented and the EU Waste Shipment Regulation had to be enforced. The regulation prohibits the export of ships at end-of-life to developing countries, including India. Probably to evade public scrutiny, the then-owners of the NORTHERN VITALITY, the Norddeutsche Vermögen Holding, sold her to another German company, Erste Roland Shipping, which stated that the ship would be repaired in Bulgaria. According to data acquired by the NGO Shipbreaking Platform, the VITALITY should drop anchor in Varna around 4 November. However, the Platform doubts that the repairs in Bulgaria will be little more than a halt for the ship on her way to the shipbreaking yards of South Asia. Two sister ships of the NORTHERN VITALITY, the NORTHERN DIGNITY and the NORTHERN FELICITY, which were reported as sold for breaking by the industry at the end of August, were both beached in Alang, where they now await their disastrous fate. Both ships' names and flags changed during their last voyage. Every year, about 1,000 ocean-going ships are broken to recycle steel and other items, but the majority are simply left on the tidal beaches of Pakistan, Bangladesh and India where little or no consideration is given to proper management of the hazardous wastes they contain. Proper training and personal protection equipment is lacking. Accidents and lethal injuries remain common in the shipbreaking yards. Twelve workers died this year while working in the Alang yards. On 6 October, six workers were killed in a fire that broke onboard a beached ship, the Union Brave, a British-owned ship. For the first time, the Indian authorities arrested the shipbreaking yard owners. In July, India's Supreme Court held that all ships imported for breaking should be pre-cleaned of the hazardous wastes they contain. *"There is a need to end this transfer of toxic waste to India and other countries and it's time that the countries responsible for creation of the waste take on the responsibility of cleaning and disposing off the same,"* said Ritwick Dutta, a lawyer from New Delhi-based Legal Initiative for Forest and Environment and a member of the NGO Shipbreaking Platform. *"It should be the shipowners, not the environment or the workers, who should pay for the management of end-of-life ships' hazardous wastes."* Last March, the European Commission presented a proposal for a regulation on ship recycling, deemed to bring an end to the export of European toxic ships to sub-standard facilities. The NGO Shipbreaking Platform is now working with the European Parliament and the European Council to strengthen the proposal. Download the press release in Bulgarian: [Неправителствени организации призовават България: „Не бъдете износители на токсични кораби!“](#) Download the press release in German: ["Pressemitteilung - NGOs rufen Bulgarien auf Export des Schrottfrachters nach Indien zu verhindern"](#) CONTACT: Patrizia Heidegger Executive Director NGO Shipbreaking Platform patrizia@shipbreakingplatform.org +32 2 6094 419