

At the last Transport Council of 9th March 2004, the Vice-President of the Commission, Mrs Loyola de Palacio, expressed its satisfaction concerning the recent adoption of the International Ballast Water Convention by the IMO.

Mrs de Palacio thanked the Presidency for having made possible this is great success for the protection of the marine environment by ensuring an effective coordination of EU Member States at international level.

The agreement achieved at the IMO is fully in line with the precautionary principle of the article 174 of the EC Treaty and with the Convention on Biological Diversity to which the Community is a contracting party. Therefore, the Commission hopes that Member States will express their willingness to ratify rapidly this Convention.

The Commission is aware that there is a need for further developments at scientific level. Indeed, it is important to make available the required technology to allow a smooth implementation of the standards fixed by the Convention. In this context, the Commission considers that research projects, as MARTOB and SEAM, can provide a significant contribution for developing the appropriate equipments needed by the shipping industry.

Finally, I would like to mention that the Commission is considering the possibility to ensure a coherent and harmonized implementation of the provisions of this Convention within the European Union. This could be achieved, for example, by incorporating the provisions of the Convention into Community law, possibly within the Commission's legislative work programme of 2005.