

EMSA Inaugurates its Headquarters in Lisbon

The official inauguration of the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA) was held on 14th September in Lisbon in the presence of José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, Portuguese Prime Minister José Socrates Carvalho Pinto de Sousa, Secretary General of the International Maritime Organisation Efthimios Mitropoulos, Jacques Barrot, Commission Vice-President and Commissioner for Transport and high level representatives from the host country Portugal, EU and EFTA Member States, candidate countries, the maritime industry and international and European organisations.

"I feel very pleased and privileged with the high number of attendees today, which shows that the European Maritime Safety Agency has found its place. The great support from the European Commission, the European Parliament, Member States and the maritime industry will enable the Agency to continue its work in strengthening maritime safety. Together, we will come closer to our goal of attaining safer and cleaner shipping in the European Union," said EMSA Executive Director Willem de Ruiter.

Background

The inauguration took place at the EMSA headquarters and at a nearby conference centre in the presence of high level representatives of many maritime organisations, countries and international and European organisations. Over 400 invitees attended the event. The Portuguese government was well represented at all levels, underlining the good relationship between the Agency and its host country.

To mark the occasion, European Commissioner and Vice-President Jacques Barrot unveiled replicas of a maritime astrolabe and a portolan chart, linking the opening of the EMSA building in Lisbon to the rich maritime history of Portugal. He also gave a press conference in the wheel house of the EMSA contracted oil recovery vessel "Ile de Brehat."

At the opening ceremony, attendees were reminded of the three main areas in which the Agency works, which are:

- supporting the European Commission with the monitoring of the implementation of EU maritime safety legislation and providing technical assistance to new legislative initiatives;
- facilitating technical co-operation between Member States and between Member States and the European Commission, and;

For more information, please contact EMSA External Communications:
Louis Baumard (louis.baumard@emsa.eu.int)
Andrew Stimpson (andrew.stimpson@emsa.eu.int)



- providing Member States and the European Commission with technical and scientific assistance in the field of accidental or deliberate marine pollution by ships and supporting, on request, the pollution response mechanisms of Member States.

Located in a new building in the EXPO 98 area of Lisbon, EMSA today employs around 120 people and its budget is €44.6 million for the 2006 financial year.

The EMSA contracted oil pollution response vessel "Ile de Brehat," which was present at the inauguration day celebrations, is undertaking a visit to the Iberian Peninsula to demonstrate its capabilities in exercises with the Spanish search and rescue authorities (SASEMAR) off La Coruña, north-west Spain, and with the Portuguese Navy south of Lisbon.

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