



Resolution 1612 (2008)¹

Chemical munitions buried in the Baltic Sea

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Allies (the United States of America, the United Kingdom, France and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)) inherited chemical munitions that had not been used by Germany during the Second World War. These stocks amounted to a total of approximately 300 000 tonnes, some 65 000 tonnes of which were harmful military substances – including 39% of yperite (mustard gas), 18% of tabun (a nerve agent), 11% of tear gas and 9% of phosgene (a choking chemical agent). In all there were 14 kinds of hazardous chemical agents.
2. At the 1945 Potsdam Conference, the Allies decided to transport the chemical munitions to the Atlantic Ocean and dump them in deep sites. The task was shared between the Allies, according to each one's capacity. The United Kingdom received approximately 65 000 tonnes, the USSR received 35 000 tonnes and the remainder was left to the United States.
3. The requirement in the agreement to transport the chemical munitions by boat to the Atlantic Ocean and dump them at depths of more than 1 000 metres was not complied with. It is now known that the chemical munitions were dumped in the North Sea and the Baltic Sea, at depths of sometimes only tens of metres.
4. The Allies agreed to classify this information and not to make it public for fifty years. In 1997 the Ministry of Defence of the United Kingdom and the US Department of Defense extended for a further twenty years the classified status for information relating to the data on the operations carried out between 1946 and 1947. Regrettably, international law does not at present oblige states to provide detailed information on the location of dumped chemical munitions.
5. It is therefore extremely difficult to determine the current condition of these chemical munitions and the risks that they pose to the marine environment.
6. The Parliamentary Assembly recalls in this context [Recommendation 1571 \(2002\)](#) on reducing environmental risks by destroying chemical weapons and [Resolution 1295 \(2002\)](#) on the state of the environment of the Baltic Sea, both texts referring, inter alia, to chemical munitions dumped in the Baltic Sea after the Second World War.
7. It also recalls the Baltic Assembly's recommendation on observation of chemical munitions dumped into the Baltic Sea (2003) and its resolution on the dangers connected with the construction of the gas pipeline in the Baltic Sea (2005), as well as the appeals made by the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference as part of the resolutions adopted at Reykjavik in 2006 and Berlin in 2007, for an evaluation of the feasibility of the gas pipeline that is both transparent and in compliance with international obligations, and for an environmental impact assessment study of the project.
8. The greatest contribution to the studies on the current condition of the dumped chemical munitions was made by the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission (the Helsinki Commission, HELCOM). The report published in 1995 provides an analysis of the kinds and amounts of dumped chemical munitions and specifies the dumping areas, the characteristics of the chemical munitions and their present condition as well as possible threats to the environment and human health posed by them. It also contains guidelines and recommendations to fishermen on their conduct upon encountering chemical munitions at sea.

1. *Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 29 May 2008 (see [Doc. 11601](#), report of the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs, rapporteur: Mr Jakavonis).*



9. HELCOM believes that chemical munitions should not be retrieved from the bottom of the sea and should remain where they are. The majority of experts who have studied the issue also share this opinion.
10. The Assembly draws attention to the current plan to construct a gas pipeline on the seabed of the Baltic Sea, linking the Russian Federation to Germany, which may pose new and considerable dangers. The construction company claims that the chosen route for the gas pipeline and its actual construction will not in any way affect the possible munitions present along the route, and that the gas pipeline will be constantly monitored even after it has become operational.
11. The Assembly regrets that no detailed study on the dumping sites of chemical munitions and their current condition were carried out before the decision was made to construct the gas pipeline.
12. The Assembly recalls that all Baltic states recognise the importance of the problem of dumped chemical munitions in the Baltic Sea. They are currently undertaking surveillance and research operations, as far as financial and scientific resources allow, and are taking part in international projects. Indeed, international co-operation is vital for solving the problem.
13. The Assembly encourages European countries – above all those which will benefit from the construction of the gas pipeline – to demonstrate genuine solidarity, including from the financial point of view, with the Baltic riparian states, which do not necessarily have sufficient resources to deal with environmental problems.
14. The Assembly points out that the Espoo Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context obliges the parties to evaluate at the planning stage the impact on the environment of certain activities, and to notify and consult on any project that is likely to have an adverse transboundary impact on the environment.
15. The Assembly welcomes the fact that since November 2005, the international project financed by the European Union, “Modelling of ecological risks related to sea-dumped chemical weapons” (MERCW), has been in development. Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Latvia and the Russian Federation are among the participants in the project, which aims to study chemical munitions dumping sites in the Baltic Sea and to assess the resulting risks for marine ecosystems and human health.
16. The Assembly therefore invites the member states and observers of the Council of Europe to:
 - 16.1. strengthen co-operation to find a global solution to the problem of dumped chemical munitions on the Baltic seabed;
 - 16.2. draw up specific action plans to locate every site where chemical munitions have been dumped;
 - 16.3. take the necessary measures to monitor chemical munitions dumping sites on an ongoing basis in order to prevent any danger to the environment;
 - 16.4. decide on precise measures for immediate implementation in the event of chemical munitions causing a danger to the environment;
 - 16.5. take every precaution in the construction of the gas pipeline on the Baltic seabed;
 - 16.6. undertake a reliable assessment of environmental risks, especially those resulting from the presence of chemical munitions along the gas pipeline route.
17. To this end, the Assembly urges the United Kingdom and United States governments and NATO to declassify immediately military information on the location of all chemical munitions dumping sites present in the Baltic Sea.