

(English version)

Priority question for written answer P-002650/24
to the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
Karin Karlsbro (Renew)
(25 November 2024)

Subject: Protection of critical undersea infrastructure

In recent years several initiatives have been taken at EU level to enhance cooperation and strengthen the protection of critical infrastructure. The recent suspected sabotage of undersea cables in the Baltic Sea once again underlines the importance of intensified efforts by both the EU and NATO to deepen the cooperation between their member states to improve the protection of critical infrastructure. Meanwhile, the presence of shadow fleets and other vessels that could be involved in hybrid warfare poses a growing threat to European security in the Baltic Sea.

1. What steps does the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy intend to take to further deepen and coordinate cooperation on the protection of critical undersea infrastructure in the EU?
2. What steps does the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy intend to take to improve supervision over vessels operating in the Baltic Sea that could pose a security and environmental threat to EU Member States?

Submitted: 25.11.2024

Answer given by Executive Vice-President Virkkunen on behalf of the European Commission
(15 January 2025)

The directive on the Resilience of Critical Entities ⁽¹⁾ and the directive on measures for a high common level of cybersecurity across the Union ⁽²⁾ provide the legal framework for the security and resilience of critical undersea infrastructure.

Following the Council Recommendation on an EU coordinated approach to strengthen critical infrastructure resilience ⁽³⁾, the Commission works with Member States and the High Representative to enhance preparedness, response and international cooperation, in particular with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, as recently stated in a Joint Statement on the damaged electricity and data cables in the Baltic Sea investigation ⁽⁴⁾.

Maritime domain awareness, in line with the revised EU maritime security strategy ⁽⁵⁾ and the Common Information Sharing Environment ⁽⁶⁾ has included, since mid-2024, connecting national maritime authorities' systems.

For energy, Member States are following up the results of a stress test conducted in 2023, along with Protective Security Advisory missions ⁽⁷⁾ and dedicated training activities.

For digital, in July 2024, Member States recommended ⁽⁸⁾ assessing cables' criticality, resilience and redundancy and improving threat detection. The EU is investing in the connectivity backbone in the region via the Connecting Europe Facility ⁽⁹⁾.

Following the recommendation on Secure and Resilient Submarine Cable Infrastructures ⁽¹⁰⁾, mitigating measures, as well as an EU submarine cable governance system and a dedicated repair and maintenance fleet, are under consideration.

⁽¹⁾ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2022/2557/oj>

⁽²⁾ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2022/2555/oj>

⁽³⁾ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32023H0120%2801%29>

⁽⁴⁾ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/joint-statement-european-commission-and-high-representative-investigation-damaged-electricity-and_en

⁽⁵⁾ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/10/24/maritime-security-council-approves-revised-eu-strategy-and-action-plan/>

⁽⁶⁾ <https://www.emsa.europa.eu/cise.html>

⁽⁷⁾ https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/internal-security/counter-terrorism-and-radicalisation/protection/eu-protective-security-advisors-eu-psa_en

⁽⁸⁾ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/risk-assessment-report-cyber-resilience-eus-telecommunications-and-electricity-sectors>

⁽⁹⁾ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/activities/cef-digital>

⁽¹⁰⁾ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/recommendation-security-and-resilience-submarine-cable-infrastructures>