

CRUISE SHIP POLLUTION – UNPRECEDENTIAL CONVICTION



The captain of a giant cruise ship, the MS Azura, was convicted last Monday of using fuel oil that is much more polluting than allowed by the current legislation. This is the first conviction of this type although the industry has often been singled out for its environmental impact.

The Azura, which travels the Mediterranean for Carnival, the American cruise giant, was pinned last March. During its stopover in Marseille, the vessel had received the visit of inspectors who had found a sulphur level of 1.68% in the fuel oil in the tank, whereas the authorized limit is 1.5%.

The Marseille Criminal Court imposed a fine of 100,000 euros on the captain for this breach of the law, 80% of which will have to be paid by his employer, Carnival. The man, a 58-year-old American who did not appear at the trial, "knew well that the fuel oil was irregular," the prosecutor said, and Carnival "did not wish to apply the legal standard.

The consumption of a city of 6,000 people

The investigation showed that the Azura's fuel oil came from the port of Barcelona, where the master had called shortly before. The latter has shipped 900 tons of dirty fuel oil for a saving of 21,000 euros compared to cleaner fuel, the prosecutor calculated. Carnival "preferred to save money in defiance of everyone's lungs, in a context of major air pollution caused in part by cruises," accused the prosecutor at the trial.

The city of Marseille is particularly sensitive to the problem of pollution linked to this sector of the tourist industry, which is booming, particularly in the Mediterranean. The port of the Phocaeen city must accommodate 88 of these giant tourist ships for a total of 513 calls. However, ships prefer a fuel that is not very refined, and therefore very polluting, to support the high cost of consumption of these marine mastodons, which corresponds to that of a city of 6,000 people.

In July 2017, France Nature Environnement (FNE) estimated the number of fine particles in the air to be up to 100 times higher in the vicinity of the port than elsewhere in the city. The inhabitants of Marseille, as well as those of other port cities such as Nice, Toulon or Corsica, regularly protest against the nuisances caused by these ships.

Very dynamic tourism sector

Aware of the problem, several companies have committed to reducing the consumption of their vessels and developing technologies to reduce pollution.

The Italian group Costa, European leader in cruises, whose 27 ships are owned by Carnival, will in particular, in partnership with the city's port, deploy gas cleaning technologies to remove up to 97.1% of sulphur dioxide and around 90% of fine particles.

In addition, the Group has committed to deploying vessels powered by liquefied natural gas (LNG). The first is expected in the port of Marseille in April 2019. Indeed, it is difficult for the Phocaeen city to deprive itself of such a windfall: it expects 1.75 million tourist passengers this year, compared to 1.45 million last year.

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