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Mr Alyn Smith MEP
European Parliament
Rue Wiertz 60
1047 Brussels

Dear Mr Smith,

Thank you very much for your letter of 3 September concerning the reported sales of conflict oil by ISIL.

My understanding of the situation, based on reports by the EU Head of Delegation to Iraq, Ms Jana Hybášková, as well as other EEAS sources, is that Iraqi oil currently controlled by ISIL has in some cases reached markets outside Iraq, mostly in adjacent countries. This is because ISIL is making use of illicit oil smuggling routes through Turkey and the Kurdistan region of Iraq which predate the arrival of ISIL in Iraq. It is very difficult to trace this illicit oil and the paths it follows once it has left Iraq. As a result we cannot entirely exclude the possibility – but nor are we certain – that some of this oil has travelled beyond the adjacent countries and has reached Member States of the EU. However, these circumstances cannot be reasonably described as "sanctions busting" by entities in the EU Member States and even less as "systematic sanctions busting". I am confident, in view of the sanctions in place, that entities in the EU Member States are not deliberately purchasing ISIL controlled Iraqi oil, if indeed any such oil is reaching the EU. I fully agree with you that any deliberate purchases of ISIL controlled oil by entities in the EU or third countries, were they to be confirmed, would be totally unacceptable and require immediate remedial action, including penalties.

Maintaining and tightening the implementation of the sanctions regime is a major priority for us and our diplomatic engagement with countries in the region is a key factor in this. At the same time, I should point out that it appears ISIL is generating the vast majority of its income from oil through sales within the Iraqi territory it holds and not through sales abroad.

Please rest assured that the EU is following this issue closely and is seeking to address the underlying problems.

Yours sincerely,



Catherine Ashton