

Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2006/.../EC laying down technical requirements for inland waterway vessels

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(2006/C 325/20)

On 16 November 2006 the Council decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 95 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the abovementioned proposal.

On 25 October 2006 the Committee Bureau instructed the Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society to prepare the Committee's work on the subject.

Given the urgent nature of the work, the Committee appointed Mr Rusche as rapporteur-general at its 431st plenary session, held on 13 and 14 December 2006 (meeting of 13 December), and adopted the following opinion unanimously

1. Conclusions and recommendations

1.1 As it has already made clear in the past, the European Economic and Social Committee attaches great importance to harmonising technical requirements for inland waterway vessels.

1.2 As it noted in its opinion on Directive 2006/.../EC on technical requirements for inland waterway vessels, which is to be amended, the Rhine is the busiest waterway in the world. The conditions and technical requirements for this waterway are regularly updated by the Central Commission for Navigation on the Rhine (CCNR) in accordance with Article 22 of the Revised Convention for Rhine Navigation. The CCNR involves representatives of civil society, i.e. ship owners, trade unions, shipyards and suppliers, in the process of developing the relevant requirements by seeking the views of international non-governmental organisations.

1.3 To avoid distortions of competition and to ensure the required safety standard, the requirements developed in this way should as a matter of principle be incorporated into the provisions of Directive 2006/.../EC on technical requirements for inland waterway vessels.

1.4 If this is to happen soon, it is necessary, as the Commission is proposing, to adopt the amendments to Directive 2006/.../EC on technical requirements for inland waterway vessels.

1.5 In addition, the European Economic and Social Committee recommends that the committee established by the amendment of Directive 2006/.../EC grant the CCNR observer status so as to ensure coherent further development of the technical requirements.

2. The Commission proposal

2.1 The proposed directive is designed to ensure that, by way of a comitology procedure, the work of other international orga-

nisations, in particular that of the CCNR, can be taken into account more quickly and more easily when adapting the technical requirements for inland waterway vessels.

2.2 To facilitate this, it is proposed that procedural articles of the directive and of Annex II thereof be amended to allow for flexible adaptation of EU law to the requirements for obtaining an inland navigation certificate under Article 22 of the Revised Convention for Rhine Navigation.

3. General comments

3.1 The European Parliament has on several occasions made clear the importance it attaches to close cooperation between all international organisations responsible for inland waterway navigation. This is especially true of cooperation between the EU and the CCNR.

3.2 The Member States and the Commission believe that cooperation between the EU and the CCNR should be as effective and close as possible. Giving the CCNR observer status in the EU committee would be conducive to this aim. The committee can decide for itself on an appropriate way to involve the CCNR in its work.

3.3 The recitals of the proposal for a directive and Article 20 (1) of Directive 2006/.../EC on technical requirements for inland waterway vessels emphasise the important role of the CCNR and the need to harmonise EU and CCNR rules.

3.4 In view of this, granting the CCNR observer status in the committee is advisable. It is worth noting that the European Commission already has observer status at the CCNR and may, if it wishes, take part in the CCNR's technical committees.

Brussels, 13 December 2006.

The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
Dimitris DIMITRIADIS