

Action call over EU safety rules

Slovenia pushes controversial plans on flag state compliance and civil liability

Justin Stares - Friday 1 February 2008

SLOVENIA, holder of the rotating European Union presidency, says it wants to achieve agreement on two controversial maritime safety directives before the summer recess.

There should be a political agreement on the directives for flag state compliance and civil liability for shipowners before July, says Slovenian Minister Radovan Zerjav.

He told the European Parliament transport committee: "We will do our utmost to be able to reach political agreements on these two proposals."

Part of a seven-strong package of maritime safety laws, they have not been discussed until this year due to opposition among governments and industry.

The civil liability directive lifts liability limits for ships flying certain flags in EU waters and introduces new guarantee requirements.

The proposal on flag state control would give Brussels the right to enforce international regulations.

At the same time the minister said progress on these directives should not stop discussion on the other five proposals, effectively splitting the package into two.

Some believe the presidency will struggle to achieve the necessary compromise among the 27 members of EU council of ministers for a political agreement to be reached.

Among the only supporters of the civil liability directive are Spain, which has suffered most from recent oil spills, and France, an advocate of strict maritime safety laws and holder of the presidency in the second half of the year.

"I would like to recall that the council has already reached a political agreement on five proposals of the same package," the minister told Euro MPs.

"As the council in the past respected the wish of parliament and commission to treat the seven proposals as a package, no common position has been transmitted to you yet.

"In the meantime, I think it became clear to everybody that we have a considerable amount of work to deal with.

"The technical complexity of some of the legislative proposals will take some time not only for our examinations in the council but also for the negotiations with the parliament.

"In order to speed the process we would like to agree with you to start with those dossiers which are ready for second reading — directive on port state control, directive on accident investigation and directive on

vessel traffic management.”

Last year’s Portuguese EU presidency held up the European Parliament’s second reading in the hope that all seven proposed laws could be forwarded together.

“We just want to speed the closing of the package by starting the second readings,” Mr Zerjav continued.

“Recent accidents in other parts of the world show us that risks are still high and that we should do everything to avoid repetition of similar accidents in our waters and coasts.”

Time limits apply to second readings, meaning that some proposals are now likely to become law while others are stuck in the law-making system.

Brussels diplomats have already started discussing the controversial proposals, though reports suggest initial reactions were not positive.

Article from Lloyd's List:

www.lloydslist.com/art/1201788761327

Published: 1/02/2008 GMT

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