

LL 26 Sep 08

European parliament backs rejected safety laws

THE European parliament has laid down the gauntlet to European Union transport ministers by approving a series of changes to maritime safety laws that they had specifically rejected, *writes Justin Stares*.

By a large majority, the parliament's plenary session this week gave the green-light to a range of proposed directives and challenged ministers to come to the negotiating table to strike a final deal.

After reviving the controversial flag state control and shipowner civil liability directives, opposed by governments and industry, the parliament said: "It is now up to the transport ministers to act. Parliament wants a clear, formal signal that substantial progress on the whole package should be made. It therefore expressed its willingness to resume negotiations."

The two institutions have already had two rounds of talks. The third and final round, known as conciliation, could begin on October 7, the parliament said. By grouping all proposals, both controversial and non-controversial, together, Euro MPs have embarked on a risky strategy that will result in either a wide-ranging agreement covering seven different laws, or none.

Earlier this month, the chairman of the parliament's transport committee expressed confidence that the conciliation procedure would be concluded rapidly based on a compromise put forward by France, holders of the EU presidency. Drafts of this compromise have been circling in Brussels.

France is supposed to help broker a deal and the country has sided with the parliament in demanding strong maritime laws that give the Brussels institutions many new powers. On the other hand, the majority of member states want a limited transfer of sovereignty to Brussels.

One source, who has seen the compromise, said the presidency's draft softened the parliament's hardline stance but was too legally complex to express a firm judgment on.

Another source close to the majority council position complained that the parliament "did not want to co-operate".

This article is copyright Informa plc. and is reproduced with permission. Reproduction, retrieval, copying or transmission of this article is not permitted without the publisher's prior consent. Informa plc. does not guarantee the accuracy of the information contained in this article nor does it accept responsibility for errors or omissions or their consequences.