

EU turns tide on waterways exemption

Costa contradicts earlier claim that inland waterways will be excluded from passenger liability laws, writes Justin Stares - Monday 30 April 2007

EUROPEAN parliament transport committee chairman Paolo Costa has contradicted claims that the inland waterway industry will be excluded from Brussels' passenger liability regulation.

In last week's plenary session, Euro MPs passed six amendments removing the industry from the scope of the proposed law but approved one which left it covered, he pointed out.

"Technically speaking, I won," he told Lloyd's List. "It may seem that all these amendments went against me, but in reality the only one that passed was the important one."

The approved amendment states that inland waterways will be covered four years after the regulation becomes law. "A four-year delay was what I was proposing in the first place," said Mr Costa.

As parliamentary co-ordinator for the proposal the Italian MEP has given his personal backing to the law, which would adopt the Athens convention on passenger liability law and extend it to both inland waterways and domestic traffic.

"Initially there was opposition to the domestic traffic element as well, but since the Sea Diamond incident everyone now agrees," he said. "Do we have to wait for an accident on the Danube before everyone agrees on this inland waterway measure?"

He rejected arguments that the industry would not be able to afford increased premiums. "If they cannot afford to protect their passengers properly it is better they go out of business," he said.

His contradiction follows claims by the European Barge Union that its lobbying campaign had succeeded.

"It would seem that Mr Costa has difficulty accepting change," said Theresia Hacksteiner, its secretary-general.

This is the second time the parliament has passed seemingly contradictory amendments to the regulation. It both approved and rejected similar amendments in the transport committee.

The proposal now goes to the EU council of ministers, which is understood to oppose extending its scope. Council and parliament will negotiate on amendments and both have a right of veto.

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