

Concessions bring an end to Erika 3 wrangling

TALKS on the content of the Erika 3 package of European Union maritime legislation have been completed, the chairman of the European parliament's transport committee said on Tuesday, ending years of sometimes bitter conflict between the EU institutions, writes *Justin Stares*.

Last-minute concessions by national governments had satisfied the parliament that the package of seven maritime drafts can now become law, said chairman Paolo Costa.

The parliament and EU governments, represented by the Brussels-based Council of Ministers, have agreed that the Athens convention on passenger liability should be extended to cover a wider range of vessels.

Rather than just large "class A" vessels, the convention would cover smaller "class B" vessels on cabotage routes within a member state, said Mr Costa, though delays to the introduction of the extended scope were possible.

The European Commission has also been asked to propose — by 2013 at the latest — measures for extending the scope yet further, to class C and D vessels.

The Brussels regulation, which makes the Athens convention legally binding within the EU, will come into force by 2012 "and not later," Mr Costa told *Lloyd's List*.

Carriers will be obliged to take out insurance of around €300,000 (\$387,000) per passenger.

Inland waterways are not part of the scope of the proposal, though the European Commission will look separately at insurance regimes for rivers, Mr Costa said.

These were the final points in lengthy talks on a package of measures designed to prevent oil spill disasters. Agreements on the other measures, including a tightening of flag state audits and ship insurance requirements, had already been reached as part of a tie-breaking mechanism known as conciliation.

"We have concluded talks and the pack-



Erika: sparked anguish among politicians.

age is ready for parliamentary approval," said Mr Costa. "It is a matter of pride for the EU institutions that we have successfully worked together."

The agreement on the package of laws, if approved by the parliament and council of ministers (as seems likely) will then in most cases need to be transposed into national law across the EU.

This is the third package since the notorious *Erika* oil spill. Negotiations were difficult because EU member states fought efforts by the parliament and European Commission to transfer sovereignty from national capitals to Brussels.

The *Erika* spill sparked anguish among EU politicians, who laid blame at the doors of what they thought was an under-regulated maritime industry.

But memories of the spill have faded in Brussels and member states have since begun to object to new sovereignty grabs that they consider unjustified by maritime safety concerns.