

Barrot rebukes states over EU safety package

By Justin Stares in Brussels - Friday 9 March 2007



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GREECE, Malta and Cyprus are “dragging their feet” over the latest package of European Union maritime safety legislation, according to Brussels transport commissioner Jacques Barrot.

The three nations are the “least inclined” to accept the seven new proposed laws because of the size of their maritime industries, said Mr Barrot.

The impromptu comments, made to French newswire Agence France Presse ahead the last European parliament transport committee meeting, also included a warning that unnamed flag states were “hiding mediocre ships” and would have to “get their houses in order.”

Brussels will not wait for another oil spill “catastrophe” before taking steps to improve safety, Mr Barrot said in comments probably aimed at a French audience and which were reportedly denied – though not to Lloyd’s List – following the meeting. They show the commissioner’s growing frustration at the level of resistance to his proposals.

“It’s true that some member states are dragging their feet a little,” Mr Barrot told AFP. “States like Cyprus, Malta and Greece have made maritime transport a pillar of their economies. They are the least inclined to accept changes,” he said. “But we’re not going to wait for a third catastrophe before we take the necessary steps. Member states who are hiding mediocre ships under their flag will have to put their house in order.” His reference to a “third” catastrophe is thought to refer to the Erika and Prestige oil spill disasters.

When asked to confirm the commissioner’s thinking, the commission’s transport ministry said on Friday: “The commissioner regretted that a number of member states, including the three mentioned in the dispatch, were reticent to follow the commission proposal in the third maritime package.” The countries’ position was “in contrast with the position expressed by the European parliament,” a transport spokesman said.

France, where the high profile Erika spill trial is now in its fifth week, has been the prime supporter of EU maritime safety legislation. There is however increasing evidence that other countries are tiring of the seemingly endless waves of European commission proposals.

Three of the package of seven proposals now under examination by the Brussels institutions have proven so controversial that successive EU presidencies have refused to begin discussions in the council of ministers – to the frustration of Paris.

Proposed laws on flag state control and shipowner liability are facing heavy resistance; talks have yet to begin on the classification society directive and a fourth proposal on “independent” oil spill prevention authorities along the UK Sosrep model also risks being gutted by member states.

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