

**COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION  
GENERAL SECRETARIAT  
Brussels, 17 September 2008  
Speech by the Presidency**

**Plenary session of the European Parliament  
23 September 2008  
Final version 22/09**

---

*General discussion – Maritime transport*

---

Mr President,

Mr Commissioner,

Ladies and Gentlemen Members of Parliament,

**INTRODUCTORY SPEECH**

- **Tomorrow, you will be voting on the third legislative package on maritime security. Maritime transport is an important economic sector employing about 3 million people in our European Union.**
- **There were 7 legislative proposals making up the package, passed on by the Commission early in 2006. They aimed to implement preventive measures to avoid accidents at sea and to determine what steps to take after an accident, that is to say analysing their causes and compensating any victims.**
- **The priority of the package is the security and quality of maritime transport while respecting the environment, and the improvement of the competitiveness of the European maritime sector.**
- **The Council, the Parliament and the Commission all share the aim of promoting maritime security. At the 2002 European Council in Copenhagen, the Council had welcomed the efforts undertaken to reinforce maritime security and recalled the determination of the European Union to "adopt all the necessary measures to avoid the recurrence of maritime disasters." The Council can moreover support unreservedly the many demands expressed by the Parliament in its resolution of 27 April 2004.**
- **However, as you said, concerning the third maritime package, certain differences persist and will require more consultation between the parties.**
- **Since the presentation of the package by the Commission, through the work of several presidencies the Council adopted 6 common positions on the following proposals: post-accident enquiries, classification companies, state control of ports vessel traffic monitoring and the Athens convention, while taking into account the opinions of the European Parliament as adopted in April last year.**

- From the beginning of its term, the French presidency has made considerable efforts to find an agreement during the second reading with the Parliament of these 6 texts, whose common positions were passed on by the Council in June 2008. During the informal contacts with the rapporteurs over the summer months, with the Chairman of COREPER, real progress was recorded on each case, in order to reach a rapid agreement on the texts. In a recent letter, President Costa, you qualified this as "substantial progress".
- Moreover, as you know and in compliance with the commitments I made last April, the Presidency has reopened, with strength and with feeling, the debate in the Council on the last two texts, concerning "civil liability" and "Flag State requirements". Reopening the debate was essential for maritime security, and also met, Mr Commissioner, the constant demands of your Commission.
- You know that this item was on the agenda of the informal meeting at La Rochelle at the beginning of this month, to which I had invited the representatives of the European Parliament, President Costa and Gilles Savary who did us the honour of attending. You know that we are actively continuing work on a technical level to enable the Transport Council to take up the issue on 9 October.
- Given the process now set in motion, I will tell you quite frankly that the Presidency would have wished to avoid resorting to conciliation.
- It is now essential not to lose this momentum, by feeling like the progress and efforts were all for nothing, which would be regrettable. That is why, in parallel with the work of the Council on the last two texts, the Presidency remains available to continue the informal contacts with each rapporteur on the first six texts in order to reach agreement on the substance.
- I wanted to inform you about this analysis. I shall inform the Council at its meeting on 9 October, and they will examine the last two texts on the same day. The Council will decide on its position regarding the conciliation on the first six texts.
- Mr President, I express the fervent wish that Parliament, the Council and the Commission will find a way to cooperate closely on these cases, as this cooperation is so necessary if we are to reach a final agreement, which we are all hoping for.

Thank you.

## **FINAL REMARKS AND CONCLUSION**

- I draw much encouragement from your speech. As almost all of you have expressed, agreements should be reached quickly on the first 6 texts.

I am of course a little disappointed that we have to take the route to conciliation, but I feel very encouraged to continue our dialogue, to bring this to a successful conclusion.

- **I have heard your messages: you are committed to the responsibility of States, the need to be able to lead enquiries in a large number of cases and the ratification of conventions, of the IMO in particular.**
- **And above all you have repeated forcefully that the package was not to be split up.**
- **I understand this and I will repeat it to the Council when it meets on 9 October. You know that the discussions will be complicated, and you have emphasised elsewhere the time it has already taken to get to where we are today.**
- **But our determination is strong and intact. I hope that together we can succeed in setting up a full, coherent system, which will guarantee the responsibility of each of its actors. Maritime security in Europe depends on it.**
- **It is therefore necessary to make progress on these last 2 proposals.**

**We are working at it and we will continue to do so up to the last minute of our presidency. And to take up the word of a compatriot of Mr Tajani and Mr Costa, Mr Antonio Gramsci, I will say that, for these discussions, we are seeking to counterbalance the pessimism of our intelligence by the optimism of our determination.**

- **Thank you in advance for everything you can do to foster this optimism.**