

Inland waterways from Rhine to Brussels

In view of the new elections of the European Parliament all members of EU should realize that over 60% of national regulations are influenced by EU legislation. The revision of EG 82/714¹ will include passenger ships on all inland waters of Europe and EMH should beware of fluvial heritage.

The only internationally agreed regulations for inland shipping are the so called “Rhine-rules”, agreed by Germany, France, Belgium, Switzerland and the Netherlands. A revision of chapter 15, concerning passenger ships, is under revision at this moment. In the “Rhine-rules” there are still exemptions for old ships, the so called grandfather clauses, but no exemptions nearly no exemptions for small passenger ships and not at all for traditional ships. Where ever traditional passenger ships are sailing in inland waters niches in national law are created to make it possible to earn an income for the upkeep. Inland water sailing is enjoyed and no one is worrying about the future.

The revision of EG 82/714 will probably take place in the fall of 2004. As there is no other source of knowledge the text of the Rhine-rules will be taken over into the new guideline. But in the current drafts only the text will be taken over and not the grandfather clauses or they will be ended in 30 years from now. Although not immediately this means that traditional ships in the long run will disappear from the inland water.

Some people in the Netherlands and Germany do worry already a long time and try to influence this process. Already in 1998 an amendment from two Dutch Euro parliamentarians was accepted and a new chapter 15a concerning sailing passenger ships will come in the Rhine-rules and in the EG guideline. But in view of the disappearing grandfather clauses this is not enough. A better start would be an exemption for traditional ships. Off course safety regulations for traditional ships will be necessary, but these should be applicable for this special kind of ships. Existing rules in the period of active duty must be respected and passengers should be allowed on board also on ships that where no passenger ships originally.

To influence the very rapid process towards a new European guideline it will be necessary that national bodies influence their administrations as soon as possible. To coordinate this process a special committee of EMH could be established. For further information on this topic please contact mrs Dörte Münstermann in Germany (muenstermann@web.de) or mr Hendrik Boland in the Netherlands (h.boland@planet.nl)

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¹ http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/nl/consleg/main/1982/nl_1982L0714_index.html