# Safe seas: ro-ro passenger ships, specific stability requirements

2002/0074(COD) - 25/03/2002 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE : to lay down a uniform level of specific stability requirements for ro-ro passenger ships. CONTENT : this is the first legislative proposal of the Communication on passenger ship safety, and introduces specific stability requirements on ro-ro passenger ships operating on international routes to /from EU ports by 1 October 2010 at the latest. The proposal flows from the fact the stability of passenger vessels following a collision is of key importance for the safety of ro-ro passenger ships. The longer a ship remains afloat in case of serious damage, the more efficient will be the evacuation of passengers and crew. The size of ro-ro ships serving Community ports is escalating and the number of passengers they carry is increasing. One of the main dangers for a ship with an enclosed ro-ro deck is the effect of a build-up of a significant amount of water on that deck. The stability of ro-ro ships has been addressed by the International Maritime Organisation and specific standards have been established on the basis of the SOLAS 90 Convention. Following the Estonia disaster, eight European countries (Denmark, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom) decided in February 1996 to require higher standards of damage stability for ro-ro passenger ships than those prescribed by SOLAS 90. These were introduced in the context of the Stockholm Agreement (SA). According to the logic of the Agreement, the residual freeboard of the vessel and the significant wave height of the area where the ship operates determine the height of water on the car deck that would arise following the occurrence of accidental damage. Consequently, a ship should be designed to withstand the significant wave heights that prevail in the areas where she operates. The result is that a vessel should resist capsize even with a flooded ro-ro deck up to a level of 0.5m. The maps indicating significant wave heights values that appear on SA are based on all year round statistics. The Commission has studied the SA and the suitability of extending its scope of application to European waters not covered by it. The European Parliament, in its resolution following the "Express Samina" incident, stated that it awaited the evaluation of the SA. The Commission concludes that the application of the SA to all EU waters is justified. The proposed directive will result in the introduction of the SA in the Community framework and its extension to the Southern European waters and the Atlantic coast. New ships will comply with the specific stability requirements as from 01/10 /04, while a phasing-in period is introduced for the compliance of existing ships. This is necessary in view of the structural modifications the existing ships will have to undertake. A final deadline for compliance has been set for 01/10/10, the same as for SOLAS 90. Certificates of compliance will be issued by the flag State Administration. There are additional provisions for the specific treatment of ro-ro passenger ships operating only on a seasonal basis in an area where the significant wave height during such season is of a lower value than for a year round operation in the same area.