Safety management of roll-on/roll-off (Ro-ro) passenger ferries

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The committee has adopted the report of Mr. Mark Francis WATTS (UK, PES) on the Commission proposal for a Council regulation on the Safety Management of Ro-Ro Passenger Vessels. The number of accidents at sea continues to be high. From 1980 to 1994, more than 12.000 people have lost their lives and since 1986, the number of ships involved in accidents worldwide is around an average of 230 vessels per year. According to the rapporteur, the hue and cry after each disaster has only had a temporary effect and the same situation has carried on as before. The recent tragic accidents in the port of Ramsgate in September 1994 and on the ferry-boat Estonia in September 1994 in the Baltic Sea have drawn once more the attention of public opinion on the need to take measures on the safety of passenger ships. Rapporteur WATTS: "It is clear that the lessons of the Scandinavian Star and of the Herald of Free Enterprise have not been learnt after all these years later and these were unfortunately not the last accidents to passenger vessels as we believed at the time". In order to proceed quickly towards the solution of the safety problems of the Ro-Ro passenger ferries operating to or from ports in the EU, the Commission proposes the setting-up of a Regulation which establishes at EU level rules for the safety management of these vessels. This aim is to be accomplished by the incorporation in the Community legal order of the International Safety Management Code (ISM Code) to apply anticipatively, simultaneously and on a mandatory basis to ferry services as well as ports throughout the EU. In order to achieve this within short time-limit, the ISM Code will apply directly in the Member States two years before the ISM regime of the IMO, the International Maritime Organization. The amendments proposed by the rapporteur this morning are mainly technical improvements of the text. He and the Committee welcomed the proposed regulation which ensures a more uniform implementation of the safety rules and is always better than an individual approach by the Member States. But Mr. WATTSS also stressed that the ISM Code still needs to be completed, to include, for example all Ro-Ro vessels as well as goods only ferries or the next generation vessels of catamarans. A system of incentives is needed to attract shipowners to build new ships in European yards, to modern technical and safety standards. Each Ro-Ro vessel must have a Safety Management Certificate, which shall only be valid for 5 years from the date of its issue provided always that a verification of the document of compliance shall take place once every year, in order to confirm the proper functioning of the safety management system.