

Maritime safety: registration of persons sailing on board passenger ships

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The Committee wants to bring the shuttle trains in the Channel Tunnel under the scope of the Directive on the registration of persons aboard passenger ships operating to or from ports in the EU. Rapporteur Mark WATTS (PES, UK), who received the committee's support for his draft recommendation for second reading, announced that he would retable the amendment that "under-sea rail tunnels" like the Eurotunnel should register passengers. The directive requires that all passengers be registered on an inventory before a ferry or passenger vessel leaves a port, by name, age, sex and - if applicable - disability, on journeys of over 20 miles. Mark WATTS said that the Commission's original proposal would significantly enhance safety standards on cross-Channel routes but added that port authorities and some ferry companies believed it would seriously distort competition, given the fierce competitive situation vis-à-vis the shuttle operation in the Channel Tunnel. An assesment had therefore to be made of both the competition and the safety issues. The rapporteur had consulted widely and had witnessed the operational situation at both Dover and Calais as well as on board a cross-Channel ferry. He said the the Transport Committee had received evidence on two occasions after the serious and near-fatal fire in the Channel Tunnel and that he was not convinced that the tunnel was now completely safe. Mr WATTS said that bringing the shuttle under the scope of the directive could be achieved by amending the Commission proposal or even by proposing a separate directive for the shuttle and having both directives enter into force simultaneously.