Motor vehicles and trailers: recognition of the distinguishing sign of the Member state of registration

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By adopting the report by Mr Fernand LE RACHINEL (F, NI), the Committee endorsed the Commission proposal for recognizing throughout EU territory two options for plates borne by vehicles and their trailers registered in an EU country. (MEPs welcomed this proposal under the codecision procedure, which seeks to remedy a lack of harmonization between national laws on the recognition of number plates on vehicles driven outside their countries of origin. Some member states are parties to the 1968 Vienna Convention, which requires an oval sign composed of black letters on a white background to show the state in which the vehicle is registered but some of them do not recognize the Community sign and fine foreign vehicles bearing the Community sign only. Other member states have introduced the indication of the state of registration in the lower left-hand corner of the number plate. The distinctive oval sign was introduced by the Vienna Conference in 1968. Article 37 of the Convention provides for this sign to be placed at the rear of the vehicle. It may comprise no more than three letters on a white background and may not be incorporated in the number plate. The sign incorporated in the number plate (Community model) was developed in collaboration with national experts, following an EP resolution of 1988 calling for the incorporation of the European flag in registration plates. Some countries have introduced such plates, either on a compulsory (Portugal and Ireland) or on an optional basis (Germany and France). Recognition of the two types was considered a positive step since it removed the risk that EU nationals driving a vehicle in other member states would be fined because their vehicles or trailers bear a sign not recognized by the country they are visiting. The Committee could approve the proposal, provided that the state of registration is clearly visible. It was felt that European citizens with their national sentiments saw no reason to abandon such indications which to them are a traditional means of identification. It will now appear in combination with the European symbol.