

Inland waterway transport: Community fleet capacity policy

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Since 1989, measures have been introduced aiming at reducing the structural overcapacity in the inland waterway transport market. These measures were twofold: scrapping premiums with a view to reducing the capacity of the active fleet combined with measures designed to curb investment in additional vessels during the coordinated scrapping scheme, the so-called "Old for new" rules. National scrapping funds have been set up in the Member States directly involved, to which Austria was included after its accession on 1 January 1995. Rapporteur Agnes SCHIERHUBER (EPP, A) notes that the total cost of the scheme between 1990 and 1996 amounted to approximately 206 MECU, financed by the industry, the member states and the Community budget. For the same period, some 1.940.860 tons of capacity have been scrapped and 736.620 tonnes of new capacity were brought into service. It is thus clear that the reduction in capacity has been accompanied by an increase of the fleet capacity of the fleet, and hence an improvement in productivity which is more evident as far as tanker capacity is concerned. Mrs SCHIERHUBER welcomes the success of this coordinated action and notes that the aim to withdraw 10% of the dry-cargo vessel fleet capacity and 15% of the tanker fleet from the market has been achieved. In the same context, she underlines that the latest scrapping programme for the years 1996 to 1998 has, by recent indications, reduced the capacity of the Community fleet by a further 15% approximately. The conclusion is that the scrapping scheme was successfully completed and resulted in a better balance between supply and demand in the inland waterway sector. But in view of the opening up of the market in this sector, a crisis mechanism should be able to put into effect as soon as any serious disturbance would threaten the smooth functioning of the balance of supply and demand. An amendment has been tabled aiming at restoring the scrapping scheme as the main measure of the proposed Regulation, to be gradually phased out within a maximum period of five years, together with the phasing -out of the "old for new" rule. Other amendments aim at a clear distinction between the fleet restructuring plans, which will be gradually abolished within a period of no more than 5 years and the triggering of the crisis mechanism which will only be applicable after this period of five years and after the abolition of the scrapping or "old for new" rules.