Maritime safety: establishing a Community vessel traffic monitoring and information system

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The committee adopted the report by Dirk STERCKX (ALDE, BE) amending - under the 1st reading of the codecision procedure - the proposed directive establishing a Community vessel traffic monitoring and information system:

- the aim of the directive should include enhancing port and maritime security;

- whereas the Commission was proposing that fishing vessels over 15 metres long should be equipped with the Automatic Identification System (AIS), the committee said that this should be required only of ships over 24 metres long;

- fishing vessels equipped with AIS should keep the system operational at all times, "except when international agreements, rules or standards provide for the protection of navigation data". Moreover, in accordance with the IMO Guidelines for the onboard use of AIS, the system may be switched off "where the master considers this necessary in the interests of the safety or security of his vessel";

- a new article 6b was designed to incorporate into Community legislation the progress made in the IMO on long-range identification and tracking of ships (LRIT);

- each Member State should designate an independent authority empowered "to take decisions on its own initiative concerning the accommodation of ships in distress" with a view to the protection of human life, coastal protection, the protection of the marine environment, safety at sea and minimising economic damage;

- Member States should respect the IMO Guidelines on the fair treatment of seafarers in the event of a maritime accident in relation to the crew of a ship in distress in the waters under their jurisdiction;

- Member States should ensure that, when they are cooperating within regional agreements or cross-border, inter-regional or transnational projects, the information systems or networks developed comply with the requirements of the directive and are compatible with the European SafeSeaNet information and management system;

- the SafeSeaNet system should become fully operational on 1 January 2009.