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DRAFT RECOMMENDATION

on the draft Council decision authorising Member States to become party, in the interest of the European Union, to the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Fishing Vessel Personnel, of the International Maritime Organization (15528/2014 – C8-0295/2014 – 2013/0285(NLE))

Committee on Employment and Social Affairs

Rapporteur: Sofia Ribeiro
Symbols for procedures

* Consultation procedure
*** Consent procedure
***I Ordinary legislative procedure (first reading)
***II Ordinary legislative procedure (second reading)
***III Ordinary legislative procedure (third reading)

(The type of procedure depends on the legal basis proposed by the draft act.)
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(15528/2014 – C8-0295/2014 – 2013/0285(NLE))

(Consent)

The European Parliament,
– having regard to the draft Council decision (15528/2014),
– having regard to the request for consent submitted by the Council in accordance with Article 46, Article 53(1), and Article 62 and with Article 218(6), second subparagraph, point (a)(v), and (8), first subparagraph, of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (C8-0295/2014),
– having regard to Rule 99(1), first and third subparagraphs, and (2) and Rule 108(7) of its Rules of Procedure,
– having regard to the recommendation of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (and the opinion of the Committee on Fisheries) (A8-0000/2015),

1. Gives its consent to the draft Council decision;

2. Instructs its President to forward its position to the Council and the Commission and the governments and parliaments of the Member States.
SHORT JUSTIFICATION

Background to the decision

The International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Fishing Vessel Personnel (hereinafter the ‘STCW-F Convention’) was adopted by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) in London on 7 July 1995; the 74 participating governments included those of 22 of the present EU Member States. The STCW-F Convention has been ratified by four Member States to date (Spain, Denmark, Latvia, and Lithuania).

The object of the STCW-F Convention is to ensure that personnel sailing on fishing vessels are qualified (as evidenced by official certificates) and fit for the job (on the strength of a medical certificate), so that potential threats to safety of life and/or property at sea or to the marine environment can, wherever possible, be minimised when operations are being carried out on seagoing vessels. The STCW-F Convention stipulates that personnel must have basic knowledge of given subjects and must have worked aboard a vessel for a set minimum period. The aim is thus to establish and maintain fair performance standards in the fisheries sector, thereby encouraging vocational training and helping to reduce casualties.

The provisions are mandatory only for vessels not less than 24 metres long and with propulsion power of 750 kW or more; they apply to skippers, officers, engineer officers, and radio operators. Governments are, however, encouraged to organise training for seafarers on vessels of that length, given that basic safety training is compulsory for all fishing vessel personnel.

The EU as such cannot ratify the STCW-F Convention, the power to do so being accorded solely to Member States. However, following the precedent set by the Court of Justice as regards external competence (AETR), Member States are not allowed to ratify the STCW-F Convention without EU authorisation, since the provisions on the recognition of regulated professions which EU nationals carry on aboard fishing vessels affect the exercise of the EU’s exclusive competence.

The decision under consideration is intended to enable Member States to ratify the STCW-F Convention without encroaching on the EU’s exclusive competence regarding the recognition of regulated professions pursued by EU nationals on board fishing vessels.

However, and given that they have to comply with Union law, including Directive 2005/36/EC, the draft decision requires Member States, if they have ratified the STCW-F Convention before the decision enters into force, to deposit a declaration with the IMO Secretary-General by way of acknowledgement that Union law would take precedence should any dispute arise in relations between Member States.

The proposed decision should therefore encourage Member States to take all necessary steps without delay to ratify the STCW-F Convention.
Additional remarks

Fishing is the occupation with the highest accident rate; an estimated 24 000 lives a year are lost during fishing operations.

The mandatory provisions of the STCW-F Convention apply only to fishing vessels 24 metres long or more and with power of at least 750 kW; the Convention merely encourages signatory countries to apply training rules to seafarers on vessels of the same length, but less powerful; and it does not specify any mandatory basic knowledge for fishing vessels less than 24 m long.

It should be stressed that the IMO is encouraging signatory countries to adopt their own laws on training and certification standards for crews of small vessels, the fleet segment in which accidents at sea occur most frequently.

In addition to training, a mainstay of maritime safety, minimum standards for working conditions and safety on board should be laid down with a view to preventing work-related injuries; such standards, which should be based on international safety recommendations, should accordingly be made uniform for all Member States and should also have to be observed by vessels operating in EU waters.

Standardisation along those lines, meeting basic requirements of equal treatment at work, has been called for by the Committee on Fisheries, in its opinion referred to in this document, and by the social partners in the fisheries sector.

In the light of the foregoing, and of the fact that a minimum level of training needs to be established in the EU, Parliament believes that the scope of the STCW-Convention should be widened or, at least, regulations adopted at EU level for vessels of less than 24 metres; the Commission should be called upon to produce the necessary legislation.

This would not entail any increase in the Member States’ training costs, as the EU is already providing financial support for training in the fisheries sector under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund.