



Info

Parliament adopts report on rules on fireworks

The EP gave its strong backing (by 575 votes to 22 with 6 abstentions) to a co-decision report on "the placing on the market of pyrotechnic articles" -- that is to say, among other things, fireworks. Every year, estimates the European Commission, up to 45,000 accidents involving fireworks take place in the European Union.

Moreover, available statistics show that a disproportionately high number of children are being hurt by it as a result of malfunction or misuse. As IMCO Chair Arlene **Mc-CARTHY** (PES, UK) put it during an earlier committee debate -- alluding to scenes of mayhem witnessed in many European cities during New Year's Eve celebrations -- "we have young people using fireworks in urban guerrilla warfare."

Moreover, pointed out rapporteur Joel **HASSE FERREIRA** (PES, PT), national laws on pyrotechnic articles are different across the EU: in effect, different fireworks are banned in different countries. The objective of the proposal, therefore -- aside from reducing the number and seriousness of accidents -- is to ensure the free movement of pyrotechnic products within the Union. Notably, the market for pyrotechnic articles, which also includes generators used in car airbags and seatbelt pretensioners, is currently estimated at nearly €7 billion.

Under the proposed directive fireworks would be classed in four categories according to use, purpose, hazard and -- as MEPs decided -- noise level, which should never be harmful for human health. Members also backed a system of minimum age restrictions for potential buyers or users:

- Category 1 (safest) fireworks would not be available to consumers below 12 years old.
- Category 2 fireworks: 16 years.
- Category 3: 18 years.

Category 4 fireworks -- which present a high hazard -- would only be available to persons "with specialist knowledge".

Although the directive sets out to ensure the free movement of pyrotechnics, it should allow Member States to "prohibit or restrict the possession, use and/or the sale to the general public of category 2 and 3 fireworks", MEPs decided -- but only as long as such measures are justified "on grounds of public security or safety or public order or environmental protection."

The proposed directive would also contain a number of provisions on essential safety requirements. Manufacturers would have to submit their product to a "conformity assessment" procedure, affix the CE marking, and ensure that each pyrotechnic is tested

under realistic conditions.

As Mr. Ferreira pointed out, citing 2004 figures, 96% of fireworks on the market are imported from China. It is with this in mind -- and as to ensure that products comply with EU safety requirements -- that MEPs backed an amendment whereby importers would have to ensure that their non-EU-based supplier "has fulfilled his obligations under this Directive". Otherwise, importers would have to "assume these obligations [themselves]"

With the adoption of a package of compromise amendments, the Parliament and Council have arrived at a first-reading agreement.

Noting the need for manufacturers to adjust to the new legal framework, MEPs decided to extend the Commission's proposed transitional periods for implementation. EU members, they voted, should adopt provisions necessary to comply with the directive within 30 months (as opposed to 18) of its publication. They will have 3 years (instead of 2) to apply them for fireworks of categories 1, 2 and 3 -- and 6 years (instead of 5) for category 4 fireworks, as well as other pyrotechnic articles.

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