

Professional qualifications in inland navigation

As part of its efforts to reduce transport emissions, the EU wants to make better use of inland navigation. This requires addressing the limited labour mobility and shortage of qualified workers in the sector. The proposed directive seeks to establish one competence-based system of qualifications for workers on all EU inland waterways. Ultimately, the new rules aim to make jobs in inland navigation more attractive. Parliament is due to vote on the proposal in plenary in November.

Background

While inland navigation is a cost-effective and environmentally friendly mode of transport, it is not being used to its full capacity. The EU regards it as a means to shift some traffic from roads and, therefore, invests in waterway improvements, innovation and river information services. In parallel, it seeks to address the human side, which includes more than 40 000 boatmasters, helmsmen and boatmen. The workforce in the sector is ageing, new entrants to the profession are few and labour mobility is low. This is in part due to earlier legislation, which created a system of two different inland navigation certificates, one for the Rhine and the other for the rest of Europe. While the 'Rhine patent' was valid on all EU inland waterways, the national EU boatmasters' certificates were not automatically recognised for Rhine navigation.

European Commission proposal

In February 2016, the Commission [proposed](#) conditions and procedures for the certification of the qualifications of all deck crew, not just boatmasters, and recognition of these qualifications in other Member States. The certificates would be based on proven competence. In addition, boatmasters must hold a specific authorisation for sailing in situations with a particular safety hazard and, to get one, prove additional competences. Based on harmonised criteria, Member States would identify waterways with a maritime character or specific risks for navigation, define the additional competence required and the means to prove that this requirement is met. For national waterways not connected to the network of another Member State, certificates would not be compulsory.

European Parliament position

The Committee on Transport and Tourism (TRAN) adopted its [report](#) on 10 November 2016, largely supporting the proposal. It introduced changes concerning the assessment of competence for navigating on stretches with specific risks, recognition of certificates delivered by third countries, examination of competences and easing entrance conditions for seafarers and fishermen. It asked for additional competences for boatmasters regarding traffic regulations, carriage of dangerous goods and a command of basic English. Negotiations between the Council and Parliament [concluded](#) in June 2017. All Member States will recognise competence-based professional qualifications certified in line with this directive (as well as certificates issued by third countries, if based on identical requirements and if that country recognises EU certificates). On national inland waterways not linked to a navigable waterway of another Member State, EU certificates need not be compulsory (but will allow access to navigation there). Many specific issues have been clarified, such as the validity of the current certificates, validation of the time served on board and training programmes and examinations (including on simulators). The text is due to be subject of a first-reading vote during November.

First-reading report: [2016/0050\(COD\)](#); Committee responsible: TRAN; Rapporteur: Gesine Meissner (ALDE, Germany). For further information, see our '[EU Legislation in Progress](#)' briefing.

