



European Economic and Social Committee

INT/200

**Motor vehicles - restraint
systems**

Brussels, 10 December 2003

OPINION

of the European Economic and Social Committee

on the

Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Council Directive 77/541/EEC on the approximation of the laws of the Member States relating to safety belts and restraint systems of motor vehicles

COM(2003) 363 final - 2003/0130 (COD)

On 3 July 2003 the Council decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 95 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the

Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Council Directive 77/541/EEC on the approximation of the laws of the Member States relating to safety belts and restraint systems of motor vehicles
(COM(2003) 363 final – 2003/0130 (COD)).

The Section for the Single Market, Production and Consumption, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 12 November 2003. The rapporteur was **Mr Ranocchiari**.

At its 404th plenary session (meeting of 10 December 2003), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 111 votes to one.

1. Introduction

1.1 The proposal under examination is part of the general regulatory framework concerning type-approval of vehicles and associated devices.

1.2 The installation of safety belts and their anchorages is a technical aspect of particular importance which must be governed at Community level.

1.3 The simultaneous presentation of three proposals for a directive (COM(2003) 363 final, the subject of the present opinion, is accompanied by COM(2003) 361 final on seat anchorages and COM(2003) 362 final on anchorages for safety belts) is founded on the basic principle of total harmonisation, by means of a single set of Community rules and a single approval procedure, followed by simultaneous entry into force throughout the Union.

1.4 The need for these type-approval rules arises from the installation and use of safety belts in a broader range of vehicles.

1.5 The compulsory use of safety belts has so far been limited to passenger cars (Category M₁) and to the front seats only of lighter goods vehicles i.e. maximum weight below 3.5 tonnes (N₁). Heavier goods vehicles (N₂ and N₃), on the other hand, were excluded, together with minibuses and buses (M₂ and M₃).

1.6 Only recently has compulsory use of safety belts been extended to all categories of motor vehicles for the carriage of goods and of passengers¹.

¹

Directive 2003/20/EC of 8.4.2003, in OJ L 115 of 9.5.2003.

1.7 Since to date there has been no real Community type-approval for vehicles other than passenger cars, the Member States have been able to decide whether or not to apply at national level the three directives in force, which the present proposals set out to amend.

1.8 The provisions concerning heavier vehicles require not only installing two- or three-point safety belts, but also entail fixing them to the seats instead of the body structure of the vehicle as is the case with passenger cars. For this reason, compliance must be ensured with all three directives together.

2. **Comments by the Committee**

2.1 The EESC welcomes the legislative approach which seeks total harmonisation, in line with Treaty Article 95.

2.2 The measures set out in the proposal under examination respond to the need to ensure passenger safety, and are quite rightly included in the European Road Safety Action Programme².

2.3 The EESC raises no formal or substantive objections to the content of proposal COM(2003) 363 final on safety belts and restraint systems of motor vehicles, since it considers the amendments to Directive 77/541/EEC to be appropriate and technically irreproachable.

2.4 Neither does it have any criticism to make of the three proposed compulsory deadlines relating to type approval and subsequent vehicle registration.

2.5 The directive which the proposal wishes to amend already contains all the necessary technical and administrative rules for type-approval of vehicles of categories other than M₁.

2.6 Safety is a universal value which must be promoted by all those concerned. No effort should be spared, either economically or technically, in achieving this objective.

2.7 More specifically, the Committee calls for the fourth paragraph of point 3 of the explanatory memorandum of the proposal to be corrected, since Directive 91/671/EEC has already been amended by Directive 2003/20/EC of 8.4.2003, referred to in the introduction to the present opinion.

2.8 The Committee also calls for what appears to be a simple oversight to be corrected in the explanatory memorandum. On page 8³, the description of the content of Article 2 "Implementation" mentions, with regard to obligations relating to type-approval and vehicle registration, only two dates, whereas the text of the article contains three.

² Communication from the Commission COM(2003) 311 of 2.6.2003, on which the EESC is currently drawing up an opinion (rapporteur: **Mr Simons**).

³ Page 8 of the English language version.

3. Conclusions

3.1 The Committee fully supports the proposal's aim of introducing ever-higher levels of safety, even where the planned measures may involve higher costs, as could for example be the case with coaches. The objective of saving human lives should be pursued with the most effective means, always resulting from targeted research, especially if progress is to be made in achieving the aim of the European Road Safety Action Programme of halving the number of road accident victims in the European Union by 2010.

Brussels, 10 December 2003.

The President
of the
European Economic and Social Committee

The Secretary-General
of the
European Economic and Social Committee

Roger Briesch

Patrick Venturini
