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IRU POSITION ON THE INSTALLATION AND USE OF SAFETY BELTS IN SLEEPER COACHES

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I. ANALYSIS

- In the summer of 2004, two accidents occurred in Germany, involving Danish registered sleeper coaches. In the autumn of 2004, another accident occurred in Germany involving a Belgian registered sleeper coach.
- The German authorities have taken action against sleeper coaches. They have begun enforcing rules requiring the use of safety belts, when passengers are lying down. However, safety belts cannot be used in all seats in a sleeper position. In addition, the German authorities wish to ban sleeper seats in German registered coaches.
- The Danish authorities also wish to ban sleeper coaches. In Sweden, sleeper coach problems have received a lot of media attention. The safety of travelling by coach, as such, has been questioned. Other EU Member States may also follow suit.
- The biggest market is certainly in Denmark with 350 vehicles but several sleeper coaches have also been registered in various other EU Member States such as Germany, Sweden, Belgium, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.
- Several European coach operators have considerably invested in the sleeper coach market.
- Since German authorities are enforcing their rules on wearing safety belts more strictly, transit through Germany with sleeper coaches equipped with safety belts is no longer possible. However, it is still possible to use non-German registered vehicles, which are not equipped with safety belts, because on the basis of the three Directives, 96/36, 96/37 and 96/38, on safety belt installation, the German authorities cannot ban non-German registered sleeper coaches without safety belts from transiting Germany.
- There is a risk that actions against the sleeper coach by individual EU Member States will eventually lead to a complete ban, which could entail high costs for those operators who are very active in this segment of the market. Different rules in different Member States will also lead to legal uncertainty.

- Discussions with seat manufacturers have shown that it is possible to make sleeper seats safer by making sure that a safety belt can be worn in the sleeper position. However, such seat belts must obtain European type approval.
- Sleeper coaches are currently not included in the EU Directives on the installation of safety belts.

II. IRU POSITION

- The IRU supports any cost-effective measure to improve road safety.
 - Different national and EU figures show that the bus and coach are the safest land transport modes.
 - Banning sleeper coaches is not the right approach to improving the safety of coach tourism. Rather, seat manufacturers should come forward with technical proposals to improve the safety of sleeper coaches by ensuring that a safety belt can be worn in all seats even when in a sleeper position.
 - EU rules on the installation of safety belts in sleeper coaches are necessary.
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