

Alliance for HGV Charges throughout Europe Bündnis LSWA für Europa e.V.



News February 2011

Content:

EU: Eurovignette III...en route to a lasting agreement?

Belgium: HGVs should pay a kilometer-based charge

Poland / Hungary: from an idea to a law

Germany: The income from the HGV Charge has not met all expectations

External costs: costs to the climate

EU / Eurovignette III ... en route to a lasting agreement?

It is planned that the “Common Position” of the Council of the European Union (EU) will be officially put forward to the European Parliament on the 17th February 2011, thereby signalling the start of the second reading of the “Eurovignette III”. From then on, the clock is ticking, as Parliament has to have voted on this within four months. The issue has already been discussed by the transport committee: this took place on the 25th January. And the minister who will have responsibility has already been chosen: it is once again the Belgian Social-Democrat, Said el Khadraoui.

What are the issues?

The proposed amendment to the Eurovignette directive should enable the EU states to make Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) pay for the adverse affects that they cause (environmental and social costs). The European Parliament had wanted to implement this policy in the 2006 amendment of the external costs but did not receive a majority in favor . In the current directive, it states:

| |
|---|
| Article 11: “No later than 10 June 2008, the Commission shall present, after examining all the options including environment, noise, congestion and health-related costs, a generally applicable, transparent and comprehensible model for the assessment of all external costs to serve as the basis for future calculations of infrastructure charges. This model shall be accompanied by an impact analysis of the internalisation of external costs for all modes of transport and a strategy for a stepwise implementation of the model for all modes of transport.” |
|---|

In fact, the Commission had already presented a revised proposal in 2008 (the ‘Eurovignette III’). Admittedly, it did not take up all the cost categories mentioned above, just the noise, pollution and congestion charges. And it had a reduced upper limit - although the accompanying EU study had categorically proved the expense to the environment of lorries, with, for example, a much higher cost to sensitive mountainous areas.

In the first reading, the European Parliament changed the Commission’s proposal but not for the better. And the reaction from the Council of Ministers? A whole year went by without any whatsoever! Until finally in October 2010, the ‘Common Position’ of the Council of Ministers referred to above was approved (as described). The position however, dilutes things still further.

This second reading will not be an easy matter.

There was only a very slim majority in favor of a further hearing of the Eurovignette III in the Council of Ministers. Therefore the scope for a second reading is very limited - the complete collapse of the amendment cannot be risked. Until now, only short summaries of the ministers' standpoints have been made available. However these give us some insight into their way of thinking, along with the points raised during the Parliamentary Transport Committee's (TRAN) discussion of the 25th January 2010:

1) Vehicles affected: Germany insisted that the toll should first only be applicable to vehicles of over 12 tonnes and the Council of Ministers tentatively agreed to this. However, the Commission has suggested, and this has been accepted by the European Parliament, that the toll should be applicable to vehicles with a minimum of 3.5 tonnes. The Council also wants there to be a long-term exemption for vehicles conforming to Euro-V and Euro-VI norms.

2) Categories for external costs: The ministers are strictly against congestion costs, whereas Parliament had agreed in principle to this.

3) Use of income: Parliament approved of appropriation in the first reading and emphasized that the income should be used for roads. The Council of Ministers has rejected appropriation.

4) Additional toll charge for regions that are particularly environmentally-sensitive: If the Council of Ministers has its way, the scope and regulations for additional charges in sensitive regions will worsen.

5) Calculation methods for external costs: The potential costs for noise and pollution are to be watered down.

So there are only a few measures which we can hope to act upon. But which exactly? Just (4) and (5) - which means the typical costs for those living along the transit routes - are barely considered. And the congestion charges (2) have been ruled out as not decisive enough. So will the 'charges benefitting citizens' also be dropped? And what compromises can be reached? These are the crucial points for the next few weeks and months.

We need the public to take part again.

Perhaps, in view of the EU's diffidence, we need to get used to the thought that the Eurovignette directive will have to be amended a dozen times to reach a decent standard. However, the 'Bündnis LSVA für Europa' hasn't given up. Just a few days after the Transport Committee's debate, it started lobbying the delegates responsible. Its aim: to promote the aspects which are beneficial to the population. The greater the resonance that comes from the public, the more effective this can be. Our arguments can be read in an open letter at www.lsva.eu / www.lorry-fee-europe.org . And the names of those responsible in the Transport Committee of the European Parliament are:

| | | |
|----------------------|--|---|
| Said El Khadraoui | Socialist Representative, Belgium | said.elkhadraoui@europarl.europa.eu |
| Corien Wortmann-Kool | Conservatives, the Netherlands | corien.wortmann-kool@europarl.europa.eu |
| Dirk Sterckx | Liberals, Belgium | dirk.sterckx@europarl.europa.eu |
| Eva Lichtenberger | Greens, Austria | eva.lichtenberger@europarl.europa.eu |
| Roberts Zile | right wing, Latvia | roberts.zile@europarl.europa.eu |
| Brian Simpson | Chairman of TRAN, Socialists, UK | brian.simpson@europarl.europa.eu |
| Mathieu Grosch | Group co-ordinator of the Conservatives, Belgium | mathieu.grosch@europarl.europa.eu |
| Gesine Meissner | Group co-ordinator of the Liberals, Germany | gesine.meissner@europarl.europa.eu |

Further information:

Belgium: HGVs should pay a kilometer-based charge

Progress is still possible without a government: Belgian's regions are in the process of reforming their road charges. In 2012 or 2013, the current Vignette for HGVs above 12 tonnes will be replaced by a kilometer-based charge for vehicles of 3.5 tonnes and more. All the roads included in the current vignette system should be retained in the future system and the three regions will be able to add further roads. This is a great step forward!

At the same time, passenger cars will also be made to pay, although with a flat fee: for cars registered in Belgium, there is a yearly charge, and for cars registered elsewhere, a short-term vignette for their stay.

The scheme for cars is extremely unpopular. It is also questionable if the EU Commission, which is currently looking into the proposal, is in agreement with the differing rules for nationally and internationally registered cars. As the HGV charge and the vignette for cars are clearly coupled together, it is possible that if the car vignette fails, then the HGV charge could also be put on hold. It is all so unpredictable.

Poland /Hungary: from an idea to a law

Poland is also introducing a kilometer-based HGV charge but this will be from July 1st 2011. Vehicles of 3.5 tonnes and above will have to pay for journeys on national roads and the dues will be levied electronically. This has been agreed, it is just the amount that is yet to be revealed.

It has also been reported from Hungary that planned tolls are being set up. This means that the idea of kilometer-based tolls is becoming more and more a European success story. Now we just have to ensure that there will be a visible improvement for both the environment and the population alongside the main routes.

Germany: The income from the HGV Charge has not met all expectations

The income from the German HGV charge in 2010 was down by 370 million Euros. Instead of the 4.87 billion Euros expected, 'only' 4.5 billion Euros was collected. As the amount collected in 2009 was also lower than anticipated, there is now a one billion Euro deficit in the finances: a sum which has already been planned for in the transport infrastructure. This means that large savings will have to be made.

However, every cloud has a silver lining! The number of environmentally-damaging HGVs driving through Germany has decreased by 15% within one year, and the more modern HGVs will be placed in a cheaper group due to their lower emissions - which means that the HGV charge is having an effect! In Germany, currently 64% of lorries on the road are cleaner, with emissions that are less damaging to the environment. But we are still a long way off from having a truly clean fleet in Germany and Europe.

www.bmvbs.de

External costs: costs to the climate

130 billion dollars is the sum of compensation for worldwide natural catastrophes that the Munich Reinsurance company has calculated for. However this does not include the disastrous floods in Australia, which began in December. A total of 950 natural catastrophes are listed, 90% of which were weather-related, such as storms, hurricanes and floods. This means that last year is among the six most damaging years since 1980. www.munichre.com