Railway transport: implementation of the first railway package

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The European Parliament adopted the initiative report by Michael **CRAMER** (Greens/ EFA, D) on the implementation of the first railway package. The salient issues of the report are as follows:

Conditions for intermodal competition: given growing traffic volumes, rising emissions and limited energy resources, as well as thousands of road accident victims, MEPs state that reviving rail transport is a key objective of EU transport policy. The Commission is called upon to take account of this fact in implementing the first rail package.

MEPs consider that the "Eurovignette 2" directive is an initial step towards fair intermodal competition. The Commission is also called upon to submit a directive by 2008 (in which the Eurovignette is adjusted in line with the rail route pricing system, tolls are made mandatory for all lorries over 3.5. tonnes on all roads in the EU without loopholes, and external costs are internalised.

Noting that competition between rail and air transport is distorted, MEPs consider that exemption from kerosene tax and from VAT on international air tickets should be placed on the agenda as a matter of urgency at international and EU level.

The report underlines that the lack of network interoperability is still the main obstacle to creation of an integrated European railway area. It invites the Commission is called on to modernise and develop intermodal infrastructures, particularly junctions with port infrastructures.

The Parliament also stresses that the interoperability of rail traffic must be further improved so as to enhance the competitiveness of the railway. It calls for ERTMS to be installed rapidly and without gaps on the six corridors on which the EU has reached agreement with the railway undertakings and the Member States (A: Rotterdam-Genoa; B: Naples-Berlin-Stockholm; C: Antwerp-Basle/Lyon; D: Seville-Lyon-Turin-Trieste-Ljubljana; E: Dresden-Prague-Brno-Vienna-Budapest; F: Duisburg-Berlin-Warsaw).

The report urges the Commission to extend the good example set by state aid for rolling stock, made possible in connection with the installation/improvement of ERTMS in trains, to noise reduction in goods trucks, as this will enable savings to be made in infrastructure investments. The Commission should take action against subsidy practice whereby EU transport aid flows into Member States which use it almost exclusively to fund their road networks while neglecting the railways.

The Commission is called upon to look into the possibility of introducing better transparency and predictability of route prices, establishing the principle of a minimum of harmonisation of prices on international corridors which are the subject of investment by railway undertakings to improve interoperability.

Regulation of the separation between network and operation: MEPs consider the separation of railway infrastructure and operation to be a key issue of rail policy, given the central role of infrastructure operators for the rail industry, and in this connection regards it as absolutely essential to create an independent and transparent regulating body with adequate funding.

The Commission is invited to adapt the rail systems currently confined within national borders in such a way that each rail undertaking which meets the necessary legal and technical requirements in a Member

State is permitted to operate across the whole European network (cross-acceptance), thus promoting not only trans-European but also regional cross-border traffic.

The report states that the railways' share of the freight market has been stabilizing since 2001 in EU-25 and the best performance, disregarding the Baltic States which benefit from their very special geographical location and the kind of goods transported, can be seen in Member States which were first to start reforming their railway industry in anticipation of the Community Directives and the opening up of the market. In this context, developing competitiveness of the sector through market opening means supporting future investment. In addition, by contributing to the development of environmentally friendly transport, the Community deliberately opts for the development of sustainable transport. MEPs underline the importance of the European social dialogue in preventing the process of liberalisation from clearing the way for social dumping.

Lastly, the Commission is called upon to initiate legal proceedings without delay against those Member States which have not implemented the first and/or second railway package by the specified date.