

Freight transport logistics in Europe, the key to sustainable mobility

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The European Parliament adopted by 577 votes in favour to 52 against with 51 abstentions the own-initiative report drawn up by Ines **AYALA SENDER** (PES, ES) in response to the Commission communication on "Freight Transport Logistics in Europe – the key to sustainable mobility". In a compromise reached by the EPP-ED and PES groups, Parliament suggested that the use of “mega-liners” should only be allowed for certain routes by the Commission. An evaluation of the requests would have to respect factors such as the existing infrastructures and safety aspects. The use of mega-liners should, consequently, be permitted under strict conditions only.

The report begins by welcoming the Communication, and recognising the value of the link made by the Commission between logistics and co-modality. Parliament insisted that priority be given under the new Lisbon Strategy to transport, to logistics and to the development of the trans-European networks, and called on Member States to ensure that the national plans to be submitted at the forthcoming spring 2008 European Council reflect that priority.

Simplification of administrative burden: the report recognised the importance of developing "one stop administrative" shopping in the sector to increase efficiency, cut red tape and reduce costs. It welcomed the intention of the Commission to examine the details and added value of establishing a single transport document, as an EU model, for all carriage of goods, irrespective of mode. However, such a document must provide transport undertakings with clear legal certainty and replace the large number of existing transport documents. Parliament also called on the Commission to intensify its efforts to simplify short sea shipping procedures and make the concept of the Motorways of the Sea more operational, and similarly, advocated additional proposals for inland waterways under the NAIADES initiative. It called for the appointment of a European coordinator to deal with the Motorways of the Sea, which are included among the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) priority projects.

Intelligent transport systems: MEPs encouraged the use of these systems as a matter of priority within the EU, while paying particular attention to their full interoperability and ensuring equal access to them, especially insofar as SMEs were concerned.

Infrastructures and investment policy: Parliament deplored the impact of the Council's position on TEN-T funding on the development of freight transport logistics in the EU. The 2008-2009 debate on financing EU policies must be seen as an opportunity to resolve definitively the perpetual problem of the under-financing of the common transport policy, especially as regards TENs and ITS projects. The report proposed that the added value of the logistics component be taken into account in future TEN-T funding decisions. It went on to state that the serious bottlenecks which still impede free movement on account of the historical lack of adequate passes through major cross-border mountain ranges (as is the case in the Alps and the central Pyrenees) must to be relieved by means of the requisite Community infrastructure (a low-level rail tunnel).

In order to boost the revitalisation of European railways, the Commission was urged to devise a dedicated rail system focusing especially on cross-border corridors and the development of intermodal hubs. Furthermore, Parliament drew attention to the urgent need for co-modal infrastructure to be developed and for transshipment points and facilities (in particular between inland waterways and railways) and also dry ports away from coasts to be established, with a view to promoting internal European logistics. It also advocated the strengthening (inter alia) of the relationship between railways and airports in order to

maintain capacity and competitiveness in the air-transport sector as regards both intra-Community flights and long-haul flights outside the EU, with particular attention to be devoted to cargo. It called on the Commission to ensure as part of the Action Plan the dissemination of best practices in financing logistics.

Training: the report welcomes the fact that the Commission recognises training and life-long training as a priority and insists that the current lack of qualified personnel in logistics at all levels could be overcome by offering suitable training and, accordingly, enhancing the attractiveness of the profession.

Standardisation: MEPs called for an in-depth study to be prepared by the Commission on the appropriateness of various weights and measures standards in the freight transport sector in the light of technological change and current circumstances. They insisted that the Action Plan for Logistics should support innovative logistics, co-modality, and safer and sustainable mobility. Parliament proposed that the Commission only allow the use of 60 tonne goods vehicles on certain routes at the request of, and within, a Member State. It felt that, when evaluating such requests, due regard must, in particular, be paid to factors such as existing infrastructure and safety.

Security: the report insisted that the actions to be taken should ensure the highest level of security while balancing the relationship between security procedures and free movement of goods. Action should also be taken to fight organised crime, especially in cross-border areas and in international freight transport involving third countries.

Planning: the report called on the Member States to prepare national action plans for freight logistics within the overall framework of the EU Action Plan. There should be close and permanent cooperation among all relevant stakeholders in the transport and logistics sector at both national and European levels to deal, inter alia, with the practical elimination of existing bottlenecks. Parliament called on the Commission to discuss the future challenges and possible solutions to problems pertaining to freight transport logistics in Europe at an annual European logistics forum.

Statistics: the Commission must develop an updated and efficient statistical database for EU logistics which is confined to effective and essential data and does not involve any unnecessary effort on the part of the undertakings concerned and, in so doing, take care not to impose additional reporting requirements on European industry. It must increase its efforts to encourage proper implementation and enforcement of existing regulations and directives.