EC/Switzerland agreement: rail, road and combined transport of goods

1999/0105(AVC) - 04/05/1999 - Initial legislative proposal

PURPOSE: conclusion of an agreement with Switzerland regarding land-based transport. CONTENT: In the context of the overall package of liberalisation agreements negotiated with Switzerland and initialed by the parties on 26.02.1999, the Commission is proposing an agreement aimed at the liberalisation of road, rail and combined transport of freight with this country. The approach advocated by the Community is a 'global' one integrating in each of the 7 agreements concerned, a common clause on simultaneous entry into force (this is to avoid that the referendum method that operates in Switzerland to approve these agreements does not generate a partial application of the agreements). As far as land-based transport is concerned, this proposal seeks, on the basis of principles of non-discrimination, reciprocity and free choice of operator, to lay down the following general objectives: - maintain freedom of transit for road vehicles crossing Switzerland on the basis of a reasonable level of tax based on internal and external costs and on the level of taxes in operation on the main trans-Alpine routes of neighbouring countries : from 2001, Switzerland will introduce a new system of road tariffs for 40 tonne trucks undertaking a trans-Alpine crossing of 300 km. The level of charges will vary as a function of the level of pollution of the vehicles (from 145 to 205 Swiss francs, depending on the category, from 2001). By 2008, the average level of charges would be a maximum of 350 Swiss francs. Other charges would be made for 28 tonne vehicles travelling with low loads or empty (this system will cease to exist from 2005); - prevention of rerouting of Swiss traffic towards neighbouring countries; - reciprocal liberalisation of bilateral and transit road transport operations, but not of triangular operation with third countries or national transport (for the transport of passengers, the level of liberalisation would have to be equivalent to that achieved in the Community). It is also envisaged that Switzerland would accede to 'grand cabotage' for road freight (i.e. journeys between Member States of the Community). Total liberalisation of these operations will only take place in 2005; - establishment of a system aimed at limiting the negative side effects for the Community of the prohibition of night traffic for heavy goods vehicles on Swiss territory (single system of derogations); - reciprocal extension of access to the rail network, on the basis of the 'acquis communautaire' : provision of combined transport capacities sufficient to satisfy Community demand; - adoption by Switzerland of legislative acts equivalent to certain aspects of the 'acquis' in the fields of road and transport allowing for a transitional period of 2 years for rules regarding the technical inspection of vehicles; - adoption by Switzerland of a calendar for the progressive adoption of Community rules regarding weights and dimensions of vehicles : it would progressively increase the maximum authorised weight of vehicles, which would rise from its current level of 28 tonnes to 34 tonnes on 01.01.2001 and to40 tonnes on 01.01.2005. In anticipation of this last deadline, annual contingents would be opened up to 400,000 trips in 2004 for the payment of specific charges for road infrastructure use (refer to procedure COD990022 for the allocation of authorisations for Community heavy goods vehicles on Swiss territory); - respect by Switzerland for Community rules regarding state aids to road transport.