Intermodality and intermodal freight transport, services and sustainability

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The resolution on the communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on intermodality and intermodal freight transport in the European Union - a systems approach to freight transport - strategies and actions to enhance efficiency, services and sustainability was approved without debate by the European Parliament. This report by Ulrich STOCKMANN (PSE, D) draws attention to the goal of the European internal market in transport when working towards harmonisation and considers that excessive subsidiarity could cause inconsistencies. Within the fifth Framework Programme for research, it calls for transport research to concentrate on an intermodal approach and similarly calls on Member States to work towards competition on equal terms and equal tax burdens for all modes of transport and to facilitate investment for the conversion of unimodal transport to intermodal transport chains. When Directive 91/440/EEC is revised, the Parliament is keen to see appropriate action taken to liberalise the rail sector and further calls on the Commission to establish a Deregulation Authority for the railways, to monitor for example unhampered access to the track network. It would also like to see a substantial increase in investment by Member States in railways and waterways and support for short-sea and inland waterway links. The report also requests support for the introduction of automatic and rational transhipment equipment and the establishment of real-time information centres for carriers and customers at interfaces. The Commission is requested to initiate the harmonisation or coordination of national and/or modal technical, operational and administrative standards, to place particular emphasis on drawing up a door-to-door intermodal liability scheme and a corresponding transport document, and to submit a proposal for the regular production of European intermodal statistics. The Parliament further calls on the Commission to monitor the development and work to achieve the highest possible percentage of combined and intermodal traffic with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean basin and to compensate the Central and Eastern European countries' exclusion from the PACT programme through PHARE, TACIS and ISPA funding. It wishes to see encouragement of international exchanges of personnel between modes of transport, as in the KAROLUS programme, inclusion of intermodality in training course curricula, and perhaps the development of the vocation of "intermodality engineer". At administrative department level, the report calls on Member States to create focal points responsible for questions of achieving intermodality, while the Commission is requested to submit a call for tenders for a European reference centre for intermodal freight transport and to encourage the Member States and the regions to gather together all parties involved in intermodal tranport chains to discuss and resolve practical problems in round table discussions.