Road transport: charging of heavy goods vehicles and infrastructures fees

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MEPs adopted the report by Corien WORTMANN-KOOL (EPP-ED, NL) amending the Council's common position under the 2nd reading of the codecision procedure. The modifications included a number of amendments reinstated from Parliament's 1st reading which had not been taken up by the Council:

- external costs: the committee reinstated Parliament's 1st reading amendment introducing a definition of external costs: "costs being clearly caused by the road freight system, but not calculated in the market price of their services. These can include chargeable congestion costs, environmental costs, such as local and global air pollution, noise, landscape damages and social costs, such as health and indirect accident costs, not covered by insurances";

- no later than 2 years after the directive's entry into force, the Commission should present "a generally applicable, transparent and comprehensible model for the assessment of all external environment-, congestion-, and health-related costs to serve as the basis for future calculations of infrastructure charges". This model would 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 this model for all modes of transport". Moreover, if a revision of the directive is not adopted within 3 years following the presentation of the model, Member States may add no more than 60% of the infrastructure costs to reflect a minimum of external costs;

- geographical scope: the committeee amended the wording of Art. 7(1) so that tolls and user charges would be applied to the whole of the trans-European road network, in line with the Commission's original proposal, and not just "on parts of that network" as the Council would have allowed;

- with slight modifications, MEPs reiterated Parliament's 1st reading position that Member States should be able to extend the imposition of tolls and user charges to other roads of the main road network only after informing the Commission and ensuring coordination with the authorities responsible for those roads to guarantee that the proposed tolls and/or user charges are compatible with any other charging schemes operating at local or regional level;

- Member States should be allowed to exempt from tolls or user charges any part of the network where "there is a need to encourage and to maintain the economic integration of isolated or economically weak regions" or where "there is a need to avoid perverse incentives for diverting traffic";

- lorries to be covered by the directive: whereas the Council was proposing that tolls and/or user charges be applicable only to vehicles with a permissible laden weigh of 12 tonnes or more, the committee wanted lorries of 3.5 tonnes or more to be covered by the directive by 2010 at the latest;

- mark-ups: MEPs reiterated Parliament's 1st reading proposal that the exceptional cases in which the relevant authoritiesmay impose a mark-up on tolls should include not only mountainous regions but also "agglomerations within the meaning of Article 8(1) of Directive 96/62/EC" (i.e. urban areas). They added that such mark-ups should be allowed provided that they do not exceed 25% of the tolls and that the revenue generated "is sufficient to allow for cross-financing the investment costs of other environment friendlier transport infrastructures which are also of a high European interest (..)";

- compensation: the committee repeated Parliament's 1st reading position that compensation for road charges should be provided without discrimination to all hauliers from EU Member States, irrespective of the vehicles' country of registration. It added that the level of compensation must be proportionate to the level of the tolls and/or user charges paid;

- charges: as Parliament had done at 1st reading, MEPs amended the Commission's proposed table of charges in order to differentiate clearly between more polluting vehicles (in the EURO 0 and EURO I categories) and the EURO II and less polluting vehicles which are already on the market and in use (EURO III and EURO IV and others).