

Brussels, 18 October 2010

Business organisations warn of negative consequences of Council agreement on Eurovignette

Business organisations remain sceptical after the political agreement found on 15 October by Member States in the EU Transport Council. The agreement contains elements which could be very damaging to European road transport businesses, say EUROCHAMBRES, EuroCommerce and UEAPME Transport Forum.

In the Transport Council of 15 October, Member States agreed to apply the “user pays” principle to the road transport sector by suggesting to charge heavy goods vehicles (HGV) for noise and air pollution, and to allow Member States to levy a higher infrastructure charge to try to reduce congestion.

Business organisations are concerned by this approach. While congestion is no longer mentioned explicitly as an externality, the proposed variation of up to 175% will still hit their members hard. Not only are companies that rely on transport not directly responsible for congestion, which is caused by the lack of alternatives and insufficient road infrastructure, but they still have to bear the extra fuel and time costs caused by traffic jams.

Furthermore, the proposal does not offer a solution for the externalities of other modes and road users. Business organisations regret that the issue is not part of a global policy to green the entire transport sector and reject the notion that the road transport sector should effectively foot the bill for all road users and even other modes.

By abandoning compulsory earmarking of revenue to the transport sector, Member States are also missing out on an opportunity to support the sector’s efforts to green itself for the long-term. Without earmarking, national authorities are free to divert revenue to other areas of their budget unrelated to transport – leaving businesses to wonder whether the tolls are a charge or a tax. Consequently transport will be more expensive without any benefits for the environment. Taxing will not result in a shift to other modes of transport but simply in an increase of costs which businesses and consumers will have to bear.

The extension to HGV between 3.5 and 12 tonnes will also create uncertainty, since Member States would be left free to decide which vehicles they want to apply the charges to. This goes against the main purpose of this proposal, which is to introduce more transparency in EU road charging. This also means that SMEs, the main users of smaller vehicles, will be hit even harder.

EUROCHAMBRES, EuroCommerce and UEAPME Transport Forum urge the European Parliament to take the interests of European businesses into account in its second reading and ensure a balanced solution and a level-playing field for the companies that rely on transport in their everyday activities. The Eurovignette will only achieve its aim if the funds generated are earmarked to improve and to green the entire transport sector.

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EuroCommerce represents the retail, wholesale and international trade sectors in Europe. Its membership includes commerce federations and companies in 31 European countries. Commerce plays a unique role in the European economy, acting as the link between manufacturers and the nearly 500 million consumers across Europe over a billion times a day. It is a dynamic and labour-intensive sector, generating 11% of the EU's GDP. Over 95% of the 6 million companies in commerce are small and medium-sized enterprises.

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The UEAPME Transport Forum is a co-operation platform bringing together small and medium-sized enterprises operating in the transport sector as well as the transport branches of several members of UEAPME, the employers' organisation representing the interests of European crafts, trades and SMEs at EU level.