

TRANSPORT COUNCIL ON 22 MARCH 1984

Following the incidents which occurred in the month of February at some frontier posts in the Alpine region, the French Presidency took the initiative in organising a Transport Council to discuss all border problems.

The draft agenda for the meeting includes the following points:

1. Measures adapted to facilitate crossing at borders
 - a. Application of Directive 83/643/EEC on the facilitation of inspections and formalities
 - b. Freedom to provide services in respect of activities of customs agents
 - c. Duty-free admission of fuel of vehicles
 - d. Urgent measures to be taken in the field of infrastructures
2. Tax on commercial vehicles
 - a. First directive on commercial vehicles
 - b. Tax levied on vehicles crossing some third countries.

I. FRONTIER CROSSINGS

With regard to the item "application of Directive 83/643 on controls and formalities at frontier crossing points", the Commission will propose to the Council to have an exchange of views on the following points:

1. Possibilities for Greece, Italy and Luxembourg to forego the transition period until 31 December 1986 for extension of opening hours at frontier posts of up to 10 hours per day uninterrupted.
2. Earlier application of the Directive by all Member States, i.e. before the end of this year
3. New initiatives by the Commission to extend the provisions of Directive 83/643

II. TAXFREE ADMISSION OF FUEL IN COMMERCIAL VEHICLE TANKS

The Council will examine two proposals by the Commission to admit free of VAT and excise tax all the fuel contained in the normal fuel tanks of commercial vehicles crossing internal Community frontiers.

At present the minimum franchise is 50 litres, by virtue of a 1968 directive; on 1st July 1984 this will be raised to 200 litres as a result of two Council directives adopted in March 1983. Two Member States are particularly concerned by the new proposal : Germany which permits only the minimum franchise and France which admits 200 litres.

Checking the volumes of fuel in commercial vehicle tanks involves delays when crossing frontiers and further delays if taxes are levied on the excess volumes of fuel. Moreover such extra taxation only provides negligible revenues, bearing in mind the cost of checking and tax collection. It is for these reasons, taking into account the need to do everything possible to facilitate frontier crossing, that the Commission has proposed the tax free admission of total tank contents, to be applicable also to frontier zone traffic.

III. DRAFT FIRST DIRECTIVE ON COMMERCIAL VEHICLE TAXATION

The Council will reexamine the draft directive on the adjustment of national taxation systems on commercial vehicles, first proposed by the Commission in 1968 and on which an agreement in principle was reached in 1978.

This directive is a first and indispensable step towards a more general system of charging users for the cost of infrastructure. It provides methods for allocating road costs to the heavier commercial vehicles and charging these costs by way of fuel and vehicle taxes. It sets a minimum charge equal to the marginal costs allocated - that is costs which vary with the level of traffic - and it provides some guidelines for charges higher than this minimum. It also firmly establishes the principle that vehicle taxes should be levied only in the country of registration of the vehicle.

The directive was not formally adopted in 1978 because of a reservation by one Member State (Italy). . The Council will review progress made in other areas of transport policy to see whether this has been sufficient to lift the reservation.

IV. TAXATION OF ROAD VEHICLES IN THIRD COUNTRIES

The Council will discuss the taxation of road vehicles in third countries, especially in Switzerland, Austria and Yugoslavia. This item is of specific actuality since the Swiss people have decided on 26 February 1984 to introduce a new special tax for heavy road vehicles and a highway vignette for personal cars and Austria has increased its specific road taxes with effect from 1 January 1984.

The Commission will among others explain on that occasion the information gathered during the bilateral exchange of views on transport questions which took place on 9 March 1984 in Berne.

V. COMMUNITY QUOTA

The Commission hopes that the Council on 22 March will discuss the question of the Community quota.

On this topic, the Commission proposed in 1983 establishing a system of access to the road transport market between Member States, after a transition period of 5 to 8 years, and doing away with the present quota system.

This new system would be based on the individual situation of each operator in such a way that access to the market is both in accordance with his needs and compatible with the general interest.

During the transition period, the Community quota would be modified virtually automatically every year, the amount of changes made being determined by developments in the demand for road transport.

Moreover, the Commission would like to emphasize that it has recently made a certain number of proposals for liberalising road transport. They relate in particular to :

- the conditional access of non-resident carriers to certain national transport operations ;
- the use of hired goods vehicles.

V. WEIGHTS AND DIMENSIONS OF COMMERCIAL VEHICLES

The Council during its restricted meeting will continue the discussion on the compromise proposal for weights and dimensions of commercial vehicles, on which agreement was almost reached in its last meeting the 20.12.83. In particular it will examine the ways in which can satisfy the request of one delegation for inclusion in the directive of further existing technical standards to be met by the heaviest types of vehicles.

VI. ROAD SAFETY

During their restricted meeting Ministers will note that the Commission has just presented a draft Council Resolution on a Community programme for road safety. This resolution sets out the lines on which the Commission should prepare a more detailed programme of short and longer term actions in this field. Ministers will also have a general exchange of views on the subject of road safety.
