

## Information

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For the first time British ministers are this week giving evidence before committees of the European Parliament meeting in London. Up to now it has been very rare for national ministers from other European Community Governments to appear directly before European Parliament committees.

Christopher CHATAWAY, minister for Industrial Development, told the Regional Policy and Transport Committee, chaired by James HILL (Conservative, UK), that the British Government agrees with the overall approach to a Community regional policy, as outlined by the European Commission and the European Parliament. He stressed the British interest in an industrial development policy on a Community basis, above all for regions suffering economic decline through the fall in coal production and which suffered from structural unemployment. The Community countries' national policies in this field should be closely compared and coordinated, the minister told the committee, and the substantial financial resources required should be concentrated in the regions most in need of help.

Among committee members who questioned the minister, Russell JOHNSTON (Liberal, UK) expressed concern that the construction of a Channel tunnel might lead to further concentration of population and economic activity in South-East England. Mr CHATAWAY thought a new link with the Continent would benefit all parts of the United Kingdom.

John PEYTON, minister for Transport Industries, also appeared before the committee. In the UK Government's view, he said, the principles of a Community common transport policy should be as flexible as possible, and while common principles were necessary some care was needed in applying them. He cited as an example the problem of axle weights, pointing out that an increase in the maximum axle weight for heavy goods vehicles beyond 10 tons would be very damaging to the road structures and to the environment in terms of noise and public nuisance. The Irish and Danish Governments took a similar view, he stressed to the committee.

The committee also continued its discussions on establishing a common system of infrastructure charging for vehicles according to their use of the road and inland waterway system. Completion of a report is expected in September.

Operating conditions in the major Community ports were also on the committee's agenda. At the chairman's proposal it was decided to hold a meeting in early December with representatives of the major ports throughout the Community.

The members of the Regional Policy and Transport Committee, who are drawn from all nine Community countries, discussed Britain's new towns policy with officials of the Department of the Environment. This afternoon the committee is visiting Crawley New Town, Sussex.