

Road transport

MEPs discuss tachograph reform

By Isabelle Smets | Wednesday 29 February 2012

The European Parliament could back the idea of merging professional drivers' driving licence with their driver card (which provides identification and stores information relevant to their activities). The idea features in a proposal to modify legislation on the digital tachograph and is aimed at tackling fraud (unlike driving licenses, driver cards can be easily exchanged between drivers).

While several member states have strongly opposed the proposal (France, Italy, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Belgium and Sweden), rapporteur Silvia-Adriana Ticau (S&D, Romania) is in favour. Ticau's report was discussed at the Committee on Transport (TRAN), on February 29, and during the debate that followed, no firm opposition to the proposal emerged. Only Mathieu Grosch (EPP, Belgium) and Jacqueline Foster (ECR, UK) expressed doubts, but there was no opposition among other committee members, which shadow-rapporteur Jim Higgins (EPP, Ireland) said was "a very good thing".

Therefore, Parliament could fall into step with the Commission on this matter, which would likely antagonise a number of member states. Some of these - the UK, Belgium and Sweden - have issued an 11-page common declaration against the proposed merging of the cards. Significantly, these member states say that merging the two cards would not really help reduce fraud, since most cases of fraud concern the tachograph rather than the driver card.

Combining the cards would also be expensive, these countries say, and would cause problems regarding the protection of personal information (this is also the opinion of the European Data Protection Supervisor - see *Europolitics*4367). The opposition therefore comes from member states, even if the Council has not yet taken a formal position (the general position adopted in December 2011 left this issue firmly to one side).

EXEMPTIONS?

Germany, which wanted further exemptions to the obligation to be equipped with a tachograph, could find support within the TRAN committee. The Council agreed to an exemption for vehicles used within a 100 kilometre radius of a business' headquarters, a move aimed at helping companies whose main business is not transport, but which use lorries (such as construction companies). Germany called for the distance to be extended to 150 kilometres, and several MEPs backed this: Ismail Ertug (S&D, Germany), Dieter-Lebrecht Koch (EPP, Germany), as well as Grosch and Hubert Pirker (EPP, Austria). However, the rapporteur called for the exemption to be limited to 100 kilometres. The deadline for proposing amendments is 15 March.