

La politique des transports dans l'Union européenne”

12.10.2006

Distinguished Speakers,

Dear Friends,

“Keep Europe moving” is the Commission’s key phrase concerning EU transport policy. Transport policy is a late child of the marriage between Member States that is the European Union. It is a late child because although a common transport policy was called for in the Rome Treaty the Member Governments put off decisions concerning the definition or implementation of such a policy until the European Court of Justice ruled in 1985 – following a case brought by the European Parliament – against the Council for failure to act in this field. This judgment of the Court gave the Commission the green light to make proposal for a transport policy and we have seen two White Papers – one of 1992 and the other of 2001.

The Vice-President of the Commission, Jacques Barrot, and the former Transport Minister of Luxembourg, Robert Goebbels, will give us their expert views on EU transport policy, so I shall limit myself to some comments from the layman’s point of view.

What does the European Citizen require from transport policy? I think the individual transport user of passenger wants it to be: reliable, rapid and safe; and, also, comfortable and inexpensive. To what extent, one might ask, are these aims mutually compatible?

Then there is a second type of transport user – the manufacturer, the retailer and the transporter. He also requires reliability, speed and low costs. For some types of freight speed is not the most urgent need, and sea or inland water shipment can provide the answer, but for many goods road, rail or air transport are necessary.

Although waterborne transport constitutes some 42% of intra-EU transport (though not more than 1% of EU internal passenger transport), it is ROAD TRANSPORT that the European citizen sees as the key. 44% of intra-European freight travels by road and 84% of passenger traffic.

In consequence roads of all kinds are CONGESTED, causing delays, frustration and increased emissions. It seems to me that the increase mobility on the roads the solution is not so much to increase the traffic capacity of roads but to move as much freight as possible off the roads and on the trains. This will be difficult for short-distance freight deliveries but more feasible for mediums- and long distance freight transport. At present rail accounts for about 7% of total passenger transport and 10% of freight transport. I would be interested to hear the reactions of Mr. Barrot and Mr. Goebbels to this suggestion.

Transport policy does not exist in isolation. It is inextricably linked to Energy and Environmental policy. For instance, to what extent might the price of oil, the security of its sources of supply and the possibility of its replacement by other forms of energy affect the future of transport policy? More precisely, to what extent are efforts being made to replace oil by new technologies? Would this make transport more or less efficient, more or less expensive? These are increasing public concern about the danger to health and environment of CO2 emission; is, then one of the constraints on transport policy that the EU should radically reduce transport's overwhelming dependence on oil. Can, in effect, an efficient EU transport policy develop in harmony with energy and environmental policy?

Apart from raising some difficult questions – which will become all the more difficult in view of: (a) enlargement, and (b) globalization – I wish to take this opportunity of congratulating the Commission on its fastening of the Trans-European Network, treating the geographical whole of the EU as a Single Transport area, linking Northern to Southern Europe and Eastern to Western. The Commission owes much, in building these TENs, as they are called, to the finance provided by the European Investment Bank.

I shall conclude this brief introduction by underlining the importance of transport in the European Union. The transport industry accounts for about 7% of European GDP and for about 5% of employment in the EU. These figures point to the great responsibility of the Commission in keeping the transport sector vigorous and competitive. Indeed, the Commission must help to “Keep Europe moving”.

It is a very great pleasure for me to introduce Jacques Barrot, Vice-President of the European Commission. Mr. Barrot is the Member of the Commission responsible for transport policy, which is a most challenging position. Mr. Barrot has been Vice-President of the Commission since 2004. Previously he occupied a number of ministerial posts in France, including : Logement, Commerce, Santé et Travail. We look forward to an enlightening and stimulating exposé on the aims and achievements of EU Transport Policy and the problems that remain to be solved.

Mr. Barrot, you have the floor.

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Thank you Vice-President Barrot for your full and fascinating account of the EUs' transport policy. We are extremely grateful to you.

In this room there is almost no need for me to introduce Robert Goebbels since he is one of the best-known figures in Luxembourg life.

Let me remind you, however, that he has, inter alias, been Minister for the Economy and for Transport (Ministre de l'Economie et Ministre des

Transports) in the Luxembourg Government. At present he is a Member of the European Parliament and Vice-President of the Parliament's Socialist Group. Mr. Goebbels, the floor is yours.

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Thank you Mr. Goebbels for your enriching contribution to this evening's debate.

Our speakers have kindly agreed to reply to questions from the audience. Who wishes to put the first question?

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The time has come to wind up this fruitful discussion and to adjourn to the area immediately outside this room for a drink and snacks. You will have the opportunity to meet our speakers there.

It only remains for me to thank Mr. Barrot and Mr. Goebbels most warmly for their detailed and informative introductions and their full replies to questions.

The meeting is closed.