WRITTEN QUESTION E-2680/02
by Erik Meijer (GUE/NGL) to the Commission
(24 September 2002)

Subject: Ending of cross-border cooperation in the provision of public bus services between the Netherlands and Belgium in the Euroregio Scheldelmond

1. Is the Commission aware that in the Euroregio Scheldelmond, in the border area of the Netherlands and Belgium between the North Sea and the river Schelde, an integrated regional transport system was introduced at the start of the 1990s, replacing the two existing separate systems, and that as a result duplicate services were discontinued but that on the remaining cross-border routes both Netherlands and Flemish fare arrangements applied, journeys were published in both timetables and the long route 19 connecting the Netherlands towns of Hulst and Breda via Belgian territory had two stops in the city in Antwerp?

2. Is the Commission aware that, as a result of the desire on the part of Netherlands transport company Connexxion to improve the cost-effectiveness of its operations, cross-border cooperation with Flemish transport company De Lijn ceased as of 1 September 2002, and that this means that Flemish season tickets and related arrangements for the transport of young people and the elderly free of charge will no longer be valid on cross-border Connexxion routes?

3. Is the Commission also aware that passengers on the Belgian side will avoid using Netherlands buses and that the stop for route 19 at Rooseveltplaats in the centre of Antwerp will shortly be discontinued, which means that this line will no longer operate as a fast service between the Belgian village of De Klinge and Antwerp, adding an hour to journey times for some passengers in Flanders?

4. Does it consider this state of affairs, which means the end of cross-border arrangements that have operated effectively for many years, to be in accordance with the policy pursued in the EU of addressing the disadvantages suffered by border regions?

5. In what way can it help enable an agreement to still be reached between the two Member States on preserving the integrated network, accessibility and fare arrangements for this cross-border public transport service? What role can the EU’s Interreg programme of assistance play, if necessary, in addressing financial obstacles to finding a sustainable solution?

Answer given by Mrs de Palacio on behalf of the Commission
(7 November 2002)

1. to 3. The Commission is aware of the situation concerning cross-frontier transport between Belgium and the Netherlands to which the Honourable Member refers. Such detailed matters of public transport planning are not within the competence of the Community and are the responsibility of authorities within the Member States.

4. and 5. However, the Community has a role to play in establishing the right framework for public transport, including the integration of cross-border services. Regulation (EEC) No 1191/69/EEC of the Council of 26 June 1969 on action by Member States concerning the obligations inherent in the concept of a public service in transport by rail, road and inland waterway (1) obliges Member States to inform the Commission and each other before terminating cross border services covered by public service obligations.

The Commission has made a proposal for a Regulation on public services in public transport (2) that will oblige all competent authorities to take integration into account in planning services. It will also require authorities to consider proposals for integration across national borders before rejecting them, and to inform the Commission when they do so.

The ‘Conpass’ European research project, co-funded by the Commission, focused on cross-border local and regional passenger transport in urbanised areas. Special emphasis was given to public transport connections.

The Commission is launching a study of integration in public transport, to report before the end of 2003. It will cover cross-border transport. It will examine whether there is a need for further Community action.
The Commission announced in its Communication on the second railway package (3) to propose a Regulation on rail passenger rights. This will address the question of how international passengers obtain information and tickets.

The Community Initiative Interreg III under the Structural Funds, and in particular its strand A programmes for cross-border co-operation, cover the development of cross-border economic and social centres through joint strategies for sustainable territorial development. Priority topics are among others the promotion of cross-border urban development and the improvement of the transport sector by the removing of obstacles to public transport, particularly between towns near borders (point 6 of Annex II of the Interreg III Guidelines (4)).

As far as the Structural Funds are concerned, the Interreg IIIA programme ‘Grensregio Vlaanderen-Nederland’ in favour of cross-border co-operation between Flanders and the Netherlands covers a measure in the field of spatial planning and cross-border mobility (ruimtelijke ordening en grensoverschrijdende mobiliteit). Possible actions may aim at the development of a total logistic concept for the whole Grensregio Vlaanderen-Nederland, at the promotion of a common cross-border transport management and at the realisation of a better cross-border offer of public transport (verbeteren van openbaarvervoersbewijs/tickets). According to the general Structural Funds’ management rules it is up to the local and regional partners to develop project applications that will be assessed by the Joint Technical Secretariat in Turnhout and then approved by the programme’s Steering Committee.


(2003/C 110 E/091)

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2684/02
by Freddy Blak (GUE/NGL) to the Commission
(26 September 2002)

Subject: Charges on European roads

Germany has recently reached an agreement on introducing a motorway tax as from 31 July 2003. Austria has also decided to introduce a similar charge as from 1 January 2003. At the same time many other EU Member States are considering similar initiatives.

While this obviously presents opportunities for promoting a modal shift, e.g. towards the railways, the above-mentioned decisions will hit some Member States’ haulage firms harder than others.

Can the Commission, therefore, explain how these schemes are compatible with the rules of the internal market, and how they can be justified in view of their competition-distorting nature?

In addition, what initiatives are being considered with a view to the introduction of a uniform European system of road charges, fuel taxes and eco-points?

Answer given by Mrs de Palacio on behalf of the Commission
(11 November 2002)

At present, according to Directive 1999/62/EC (1), Member States can introduce or maintain tolls and user charges on heavy goods vehicles (above 12 tonnes) for the use of certain infrastructures provided that such charges are in conformity with the provisions of this Directive.

As indicated in the White Paper on the European Transport Policy (2), while the transport sector may be heavily taxed, it is above all badly and unequally taxed. For these reasons, the Commission underlined the need to develop a more effective policy in order to better inform transport users of the real costs and also to improve the balance among transport modes.