Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the ‘European Road Safety Policy and Professional Drivers — Safe and secured parking places’

(2007/C 175/21)

On 16 February 2007, the European Economic and Social Committee, acting in accordance with Rule 29 (2) of its Rules Procedures, decided to draw up an opinion on European Road Safety Policy and Professional Drivers — Safe and secured parking places.

The Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society, which was responsible for preparing the Committee’s work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 7 May 2007. The rapporteur was Mr Etty, followed by Mr Chagas.

At its 436th plenary session, held on 30 and 31 May 2007 (meeting of 30 May 2007), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 118 votes to 4, with 2 abstentions:

1. Conclusions and recommendations

1.1 For reasons of road safety, road freight crime, and health and safety of truck drivers more safe and secured parking places for professional drivers must be made available throughout the EU.

1.2 The International Road Transport Union (IRU) and the European Transport Workers’ Federation (ETF) have formulated common criteria which are well taken and practicable and which must be taken into account when such rest facilities are constructed.

1.3 The EESC welcomes the initiative taken by European Parliament and supported by the European Commission to set up a pilot project with a view to test the feasibility and to provide start up aid to create safe and secure parking areas for professional drivers.

The Committee recommends that:

1.4 the Commission include the issue of safe and secured parking places for professional drivers in the design and co-financing of the Trans European Road Networks;

1.5 idem, when approving projects on road infrastructure, co-financed in the framework of the European Regional Development Fund. The European Investment Bank should do the same when granting loans for road infrastructure;

1.6 Member States consider the issue in the framework of their implementation of the Road Safety Action Plan;

(N.B.: with respect to these three proposals, special attention should be paid to the fact that more rest facilities for professional drivers are required, especially given that transport between the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ Member States continues to grow.)

1.7 the Commission assess, in the period from now until April 2009, the role which the EU could have in legislating relevant aspects of the issue and in developing soft law in areas which are primarily the competence of the Member States. This should allow the Commission and the Member States to take quick and coordinated action after the conclusion of the pilot project mentioned in pars. 2.9, 2.10 and 2.11 here under. The assessment should be made in the light of Article 71 of the Treaty, but also take into account the link between measures relating to working time and the health and safety of workers. This could include measures on safe and secured parking areas for professional drivers;

1.8 the Commission fully involve social partners in this exercise.

1.9 The Commission should explore how they could reinforce and help implement initiatives taken by organised civil society to address the issue of safe and secured parking places and support the organisations concerned to help their members to make optimal use of existing and newly constructed rest facilities. The Commission could, e.g. help them to complete and improve information on rest facilities and to make this information more accessible for their members, also on-line. Other examples are a system for certification of safe and secured parking spaces (utilising the joint IRU/ETF criteria) and a system of daily information on still available parking spots. Jointly with Member States and the organisations concerned, the Commission could develop methods to inform drivers in time.

2. General observations

2.1 European road safety policy, including the Third European Road safety Action Programme (2003) and the European road safety action programme mid-term review (2006), aimed at a target audience consisting, amongst others, motorcyclists, pedestrians, and young people, as well as professional drivers. However, the Commission omitted several relevant issues, one of them even being crucial in the eyes of the social partners. That is, as part of road infrastructure safety, rest areas for professional drivers. And in particular; safe and secured rest areas.
2.2 Why is this such a crucial issue? Three good reasons, at least, can be given as an answer to that question.

2.3 The first is the issue of road safety. The new regulation 561/2006 on driving and rest time has recently come into force. Implicitly it recognises the importance of a sufficient number of safe and secured rest facilities for professional drivers along the EU motorway network in Article 12 (1). In addition to this consideration, relating to EU regulation, mention should be made of national legislation prohibiting the circulation of heavy lorries during weekends in certain Member States. This requires better information supply by/and improved coordination among Member States.

2.4 Secondly there is the extent of road freight crime. Although statistical data from Member States are in several respects insufficient and difficult to compare, it appears that theft (of trucks and cargo) and assaults on drivers are on the increase. Various sources indicate that in international road transport some 40 % of criminal incidents occur at parking areas alongside motorways. A study currently being undertaken by the European Conference of Ministers of Transport and the International Road Transport Union will produce fresh data on attacks and violence against professional drivers in rest areas shortly.

2.4.1 Parliament has recently (May 2007) published a study on Organised theft of commercial vehicles and their loads in the EU (2), which estimates that the loss of value caused by theft is more than EUR 8.2 billion, or a value of EUR 6.72 per loaded trip. According to the study, each year some 9 000 professional drivers are the victims of such transport criminality alongside the UE highways.

2.5 And, thirdly, health and safety of the truck drivers should be taken into account. A tired driver is a liability in terms of road safety. However, restriction of driving time is important in transport policy primarily in terms of competition. At best, this aspect only has a very modest place in its own right in current legislation.

2.6 There are also other issues. For example, professional drivers of vehicles less that 3.5 tonnes in weight are exempt from the European regulations on driving and rest periods and speed-limitation devices. This is despite the fact that transport by means of vehicles of this type continues to grow, including transport of highly valuable freight, and that the number of accidents involving them is on the increase.

2.7 And there is the whole issue of facilitating the application of the social elements in the legislation relating to lorry drivers, which has not been given sufficient attention so far.

2.8 Finally, safe and secured parking places located at adequate distances from each other along the EU motorways could also have a positive environmental impact and contribute to a better flow of traffic.

2.9 A debate is going on concerning the importance of safe and secured rest places for professional drivers. A major element in it is the recent (2006) request of employers and trade unions in the sector, IRU and ETF, to the EU and national, regional and local authorities in the Member States to develop a sufficient number of such facilities which meet a set of criteria they have jointly developed.

2.10 In Parliament, deliberations on the new Regulation 561/2006 included the element of safe and secured parking areas. An issue of special concern was road freight crime. At the initiative of Parliament, supported by the Commission, a budget of 5.5 million Euros was made available for a pilot project. This project is now under way. It includes feasibility studies and provides start up aid to create secure parking areas.

2.11 A ‘Study on the feasibility of organising a network of secured parking areas for road transport operators on the Trans European Road Network’ was commissioned by the European Commission in 2006 and completed in early 2007 (3).

2.12 The start up aid has been granted to five model projects. Main objectives are: to define common requirements for secure parking areas and to construct a few new secure parking slots in at least two Member States. Among the key issues to be investigated are models for public-private partnerships.

2.13 The European Commission will evaluate the pilot project immediately after its completion by April 2009. It will involve the parties directly concerned in this evaluation, just as it will involve them during the implementation of the project. In 2009, the Commission may come forward with policy proposals (legislation, soft law, coordination, exchange of best practices, etc.) based upon the evaluation.

2.14 Parliament has further set aside EUR 2 million for the development of a certification system for safe and secured parking areas in the 2007 budget.

(*) Article 12: Provided that the road safety is not thereby jeopardised and to enable the vehicle to reach a suitable stopping place, the driver may depart from Articles 6 to 9 to the extent necessary to ensure the safety of persons, of the vehicle or its load. The driver shall indicate the reason for such departure manually on the record sheet of the recording equipment or on a printout from the recording equipment or in the duty roster, at the latest on arrival at the suitable stopping place.

(1) Provisional version, 3.5.2007. IP/B/TRAN/IC/2006-194. The study was done by NEA Transport Research and Training at the request of the Transport and Tourism Committee of European Parliament.

(2) Provisional version, 3.5.2007, IP/B/TRAN/IC/2006-194. The study was commissioned by the European Commission in 2006 and completed in early 2007.

(3) NEA Transport Research Training, Rijswijk, the Netherlands, January 2007.
2.15 The EESC has recently addressed the issue of safe and secured parking places for professional drivers briefly in its Opinion TEN/217 (*) and in TEN/270 (**).

2.16 The issue of availabilities in parking spaces is also being addressed in Parliament’s report on Road Infrastructure Safety Management (2006/0182/COD, preliminary version) of 20 March 2007.

3. Specific observations

3.1 The Committee thinks that the Commission, by setting rules for driving and rest time has also taken responsibility for enabling professional drivers to comply with these rules. This means that suitable parking areas must be available along the main European motorways at such distances from each other that drivers can take their prescribed rest periods when required.

3.2 The criteria for such suitable parking areas, as developed by the International Road Transport Union and the European Transport Worker’s Federation in March 2006, are well taken and practicable. They adequately reflect several of the policy recommendations made in the feasibility study referred to the para 2.10 above. The criteria cover two types of rest facilities, one for the most basic provisions and another requiring more obligatory facilities for strategic hub points. IRU and ETF have proposed, additionally, other facilities or services which are highly recommendable or optional for rest area operators depending on sufficient demand. The Committee is of the opinion that the criteria strike a proper balance between considerations of road safety, security of driver and freight, and occupational safety and health of drivers.

3.3 At present, there are insufficient parking places meeting the IRU/ETF criteria in the EU, both in the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ Member States. In Central and Eastern Europe, they should be included in the planning and construction phase of new motor highways. Special attention should be paid to border crossing at the external borders of the EU, where drivers often have to cope with long waiting periods.

3.4 The European Commission and the Member States should address this situation urgently, taking into account their respective responsibilities and competences. The Committee notes with interest the initiatives taken by the Parliament and the Commission and hopes that these will lead to early activities of Commission and Member States with a view to the preparation of policies to be developed after the pilot projects, referred to in para 2.11 above, will have been completed.

3.5 The Committee is pleased to note that organised civil society, in particular the social partners in the road transport industry, have addressed the issue of safe and secured parking places in a constructive and concrete way. It encourages the Commission to explore how they could reinforce and help implement this initiative and support the organisations concerned to help their members to make optimal use of existing and newly constructed rest facilities. The Commission could, e.g. help them to complete and improve information on rest facilities and to make this information more accessible for their members, also on-line. Another example is a system of daily information on still available parking spots. Jointly with Member States and the organisations concerned, the Commission could develop methods to inform drivers in time.


The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
Dimitris DIMITRIADIS