Towards new tachograph rules

Tachographs play a central role in road transport in the European Union (EU) through making competition between transporters fairer and roads safer for all users. Moreover, they help to ensure respect of social legislation on driving times and rest periods.

Background
The EU approach to enforcing compliance with social legislation in road transport relies on three pillars: Regulation 3821/85 (the Tachograph Regulation, adapted ten times to take account of technical progress, most recently in 2009) introducing the mandatory use of tachographs, Regulation 561/2006, establishing rules on driving times and rest periods for professional drivers, and Directive 2006/22 setting minimum rules for the inspection obligations of Member States. Six million EU trucks and buses are equipped with tachographs (see box), with two types in use. Analogue tachographs were introduced in 1985 and are still used in older vehicles. A digital tachograph is mandatory for vehicles registered after 1 May 2006.

Commission proposal
In July 2011, the European Commission proposed to revise the Tachograph Regulation to take advantage of technological advances to make fraud more difficult and reduce the administrative burden on road transport companies. If adopted, the changes are expected to save companies over €500 million per year.

The introduction of a smart tachograph would allow remote communication for verification purposes (i.e. so authorities would only need to stop a vehicle for a roadside check when the data indicated a problem), as well as location recording through satellite navigation at the start and end of each daily working period. Under the proposal, the drivers’ card (i.e. a tachograph card issued to a particular driver) would be merged with their driving licence to increase the security of the system. It is anticipated that drivers would be less likely to use their driving licences fraudulently. Each year, at least 10% of workshops installing and calibrating tachographs would be subject to unannounced technical audits. A minimum degree of harmonisation of sanctions is proposed, to ensure that the highest category of penalties in national legislation applies to infringements classified in EU legislation as ‘very serious’ and as ‘most serious’.

Vehicles of under 7.5 tonnes driven by non-professional drivers within a 100 km radius of their operational base would be excluded from the rules.

Compromise agreement
In November 2013, the Council endorsed the compromise agreement reached in trilogue. According to press sources Germany opposed the agreement, favouring exemption within a radius larger than 100 km. The compromise improves guarantees relating to data protection and privacy. It clarifies that remote communication will not lead to automatic fines or penalties. The idea of merging driving licences with driver cards was considered "not to be mature enough at this stage" and was deleted from the text.

In December 2013, the EP’s Transport Committee followed the recommendation of the rapporteur (Silvia-Adriana Țicău, S&D, Romania) to approve the compromise agreement without amendments.

A tachograph is a device installed on a vehicle that automatically records its speed and distance, together with the driver’s activity and rest periods. A tachograph system comprises a sender unit mounted to the vehicle gearbox, the tachograph head and a recording medium. Tachograph heads are of either analogue or digital types. The recording medium for analogue heads are wax coated paper discs, and for digital heads are digital driver cards containing a microchip. Digital driver cards store data that can be imported into analysis software.