



Illegal waste shipments: Environment Committee backs plan to step up checks

Committees Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety [19-03-2014 - 18:58]

Draft EU rules that would require EU member states to clamp down on illegal waste shipments within the EU and to non-EU countries were backed by the Environment Committee on Wednesday. These rules, informally agreed with EU ministers, would close legal loopholes and entail more inspections. Member states would have to include in their inspection plans a minimum number of physical checks, and inspectors would be given more powers.

The draft Waste Shipment Regulation (WSR) aims to reinforce the inspection provisions of existing legislation with stronger requirements on national inspections and planning. Member states would be required to carry out risk assessments for specific waste streams and sources of illegal shipments and to set out their priorities in annual inspection plans. Inspectors would be empowered to demand evidence from suspected illegal waste exporters.

"Too many member states have been dragging their feet and have not been carrying out any real time inspections and checks on illegal waste shipments from their territories. Although the EU Waste Shipment Regulation requires that all waste exported out of the OECD countries be treated in an environmentally sound manner to protect citizens and environment, inspections have shown that approximately 25% of waste shipments within the EU do not comply with it", said rapporteur Bart Staes (Greens/EFA, BE). The agreement, negotiated with the Greek Presidency of the Council, was approved with 48 votes in favour, none against and 8 abstentions.

Stronger provisions on physical checks and public access to information

In negotiations, MEPs introduced wording strengthening the proposal and aiming to improve the knowledge base on illegal shipments. Member states must base their inspection plans on a risk assessment which identifies the minimum number of inspections required, including the number of physical checks on transports as well as intermediaries and related recovery or disposal. Member states will provide a yearly report on the outcome of inspections which is to be published via the internet, including information on enforcement measures and any penalties applied. MEPs and the Council also agreed on amendments giving inspection authorities more powers, in particular to demand evidence from suspected illegal waste exporters and to consider a shipment illegal if such evidence has not been provided or is found insufficient.

Tackling "port hopping" by illegal waste exporters

The WSR lays down rules for waste shipments both within the EU and between the EU and third countries. It specifically prohibits exports of hazardous waste to countries outside the OECD and exports of waste for disposal outside the EU/EFTA.

However, illegal waste shipments remain a serious problem. Member states are responsible for enforcing the WSR. A few of them have thorough, well-functioning inspection systems, but others lag behind. This leads to "port hopping" by illegal waste exporters seeking to export waste from those with the most lenient practices.

Next steps

The text will be put to a vote by the full House at the 14-17 April plenary session in Strasbourg. The new regulation would apply from 1 January 2016.

Press release

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