

WRITTEN QUESTION E-3563/04
by Willi Piecyk (PSE)
to the Commission

Subject: Checks on commercial vehicles at the EU's external borders and the implications for Baltic Sea ports

Following the enlargement of the EU on 1 May 2004 the German Baltic Sea ports have suffered dramatic falls in cargo volumes of up to 30% per ferry route, whereas the volume of road traffic from the Baltic region, Russia and Belarus crossing the German-Polish border has substantially increased. One reason for this would seem to lie in the discontinuation of border checks at the German-Polish border and at the EU's new external border. Various bodies have pointed out that at present at the EU's new external border no adequate checks are being carried out on permissible diesel import volumes, driving times or the technical standards which vehicles must meet. In particular, it would seem to be possible for commercial vehicles to take on enough diesel to fill their tanks (between 900 and 1 500 litres) in Russia and Belarus and to import it over the Polish border into the EU without paying duty. In contrast, at German seaports, which likewise constitute the EU's external border, every commercial vehicle entering the EU must pay duty on volumes of diesel over 200 litres. Accordingly, in the context of trade between Russia, the Baltic region and the EU road transport enjoys substantial cost and competitive advantages over maritime transport, thereby severely undermining the Commission's efforts to promote short-haul maritime transport.

1. Is the Commission aware of this problem?
2. How frequently are checks carried out at the EU's external border with Belarus and Ukraine on volumes of fuel being imported, driving and rest periods and technical standards, including load and maximum laden weights, and how effective are those checks?
3. What steps does the Commission plan to take in order to ensure that effective checks are carried out at the EU's external borders in the future and to counter the problem, outlined above, represented by the shift, in the goods transport sector, away from short-haul maritime routes in the Baltic Sea region and back to the road?