

**Question for written answer E-8134/2010  
to the Commission**

Rule 117

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Subject: Tax on cross-border rail links within Europe (SNCB)

In accordance with Articles 26, 170 and 174 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), the European Union is to ensure a border-free internal market, contribute to the development of trans-European transport networks (including rail networks) and strengthen economic, social and territorial cohesion. For more than 50 years European integration has been contributing to removing the borders between Member States.

The Belgian State Railways (SNCB) has gone against this far-reaching and sustained trend by introducing, from 23 August 2010, a system of 'administration charges' that penalises international tickets (cross-border links within Europe) bought at SNCB stations.

According to the communication from the SNCB, these 'administration charges' (including VAT) are:

EUR 7 for reservations on high-speed trains or night trains,

EUR 3.50 to buy tickets for journeys on conventional international day trains,

No 'administration charge' for short border crossings.

Hence, in contrast to buying a ticket at the station for national high-speed trains (for example Brussels-Liège or Brussels-Antwerp), buying a ticket at the station for international high-speed trains (for example Brussels-Cologne or Brussels-Amsterdam) is penalised by a disproportionate 'administration fee' of EUR 7.

Does the European Commission not consider that these 'administration charges' are tantamount to a tax on cross-border rail links and that this goes against the spirit and even the letter of the European Treaties and secondary legislation? What position will the Commission adopt in this particular case? What position will the Commission adopt if such practices proliferate?