Question for written answer P-010339/2012
to the Commission
Rule 117
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Subject: Eurostat's accounting approach to transport infrastructure financing scenarios

Over the past few years, Eurostat has developed clear rules on assessing the way in which Member States handle their accounting of public infrastructure projects. In particular, Eurostat has drawn a clear distinction between concession-type scenarios and public-private partnerships. These rules have clearly stimulated investment.

More recently, new road and rail infrastructure financing models have been developed. These seek to better spread the traffic risk burden among the various players. This novel approach, which is midway between a classic public-private partnership and a concession agreement, is currently being implemented in Portugal. It is also being considered in many other countries such as Poland (A1 Motorway project), Hungary and Estonia.

However, Eurostat’s analysis of the SCUT motorways project[1] in Portugal threatens to hamper the development of these innovative schemes, as was emphasised by the EPEC in a recent rapport[2]. According to Eurostat, the State – which would in fact be the direct recipient of the tolls paid – should enter the infrastructure concerned on the asset side of its accounts, and should also enter the corresponding liabilities, which would weigh heavily on its accounts.

Should Eurostat’s decision be used as a reference, it would be sure to stop several infrastructure projects dead in their tracks, at a time when the EU is supporting ambitious policies to boost investment across the continent (e.g. project bonds and the Connecting Europe Facility).

I should therefore like to put three specific questions to the Commission:

1. Does it consider Eurostat’s approach to this type of innovative financing to be compatible with the sound management of public finances?

2. Does it plan to ask Eurostat to assess the impact of its decision on the development of other infrastructure projects which might be financed along similar lines? If so, would a specific procedure be followed, and what timescale would Eurostat set?

3. Does it not consider it paradoxical for infrastructure investment to be hampered at a time when the EU needs this more than ever?

[1] Final findings on the EDP and dialogue visits to Portugal (17-18 January 2011 and 14-15 April 2011) – Eurostat, 18 October 2011.
[2] New Eurostat rules on contracts that fund the major part of availability payments using tolls collected by or on behalf of the government, The case of the SCUT motorway contracts in Portugal, European PPP Expertise Center (EPEC), September 2011.