



- [Home](#)
- [Content](#)
- [Policy](#)
- [Magazines](#)
- [PM+](#)
- [Thought Leader](#)
- [Dods EU Monitoring](#)
- [Editorial Calendar](#)
- [Events](#)
- [Event Coverage](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [MEP Awards 2018](#)

## 2018 ECG Annual Dinner Debate: Meeting the demands of the world's largest market consumers

Written by [Colin Mackay](#) on 4 April 2018 in [Opinion](#)

**The internal market is integral to the EU's prosperity, but it depends on a well-functioning logistics sector to thrive, reports Colin MacKay**

The 2018 ECG Annual Dinner Debate, entitled "Our Multimodal Industry and the Mobility Package – what do we need?" set out to discuss the live issues facing not simply European vehicle logistics operators but also all operators. The format centred around a lively, interactive debate, structured to extract the perspective of all stakeholders. Importantly, it gave a platform not simply to policymakers but also the drivers that sit in the cabs of Europe's trucks and transporters.

Host Dutch EPP MEP Wim van de Camp, highlighted the vital importance of the logistics sector in sustaining the free flow of goods that makes Europe's internal market operate. He explained that the growth in cross-border trade and supply chains meant the sector would increase in importance and was vitally important to current and future prosperity. Despite this, it was facing a shortfall of more than 100,000 drivers within the next five years. This, he believed, was due to a number of unattractive aspects of the job; however these were not insurmountable. This was why the European Commission's two mobility packages, launched in 2017, were vitally important. These will be the key not only to the effectiveness and efficiency of Europe's logistics but also to making it attractive as a career and helping to bridge the approaching driver shortfall.

Opening the debate, ECG President Wolfgang Göbel explained how the association serves the automotive industry, representing more than 100 members, not simply in the EU but also in Russia, Turkey and the Ukraine. It was the epitome of a modern multimodal transport sector; a new vehicle's journey from factory gate or port of entry to local dealer frequently embraced road, rail and canal en route.

ECG wants to see standardisation. Göbel highlighted the situation of permitted loaded lengths for car transporters; these could vary in length – and therefore the number of cars carried - as they crossed borders. Standardisation would dramatically improve efficiency and reduce waste.

### RELATED CONTENT

- [Karoline Graswander-Hainz wonders whether the Commission's proposals on low-emission mobility will really help Europe clean up its transport sector.](#)

- **Bas Eickhout: Clean mobility package: Disappointing CO2 targets**
- **Massimiliano Salini: EU clean mobility package is a good start**
- **Géraldine Kutas: Decarbonising transport: This is the time to get it right**
- **Henna Virkkunen: Electrification is a necessary step in decarbonising EU transport sector**
- **Matthijs van Miltenburg: Transport and climate: We need to act now**

He also touched on the need for more drivers. In Germany the average age of a driver was 47 and there was currently a shortfall of 40,000. In the UK the situation was worse; the average age is 55 with around 50,000 additional drivers needed.

The centrepiece debate was chaired by former truck driver turned author Jan Bergrath. It featured four working drivers - two from Poland, one from the Netherlands and one from Germany – who gave their opinions on the challenges they faced in their job today. Each spoke eloquently on how they had come to their profession and on the individual issues they encountered. However, clear common themes soon became apparent.

The overarching concern was driver safety; not when driving, but when stopping. There was a lack of secure truck stops where drivers could park up for their mandatory rest periods or overnight stops. The problem was particularly acute in Germany, which currently lacked around 14,000 spaces. This is despite being Europe's largest country for truck transport – 800,000 a day - with almost half of them non-German. Often, said the drivers, it was impossible to find a legitimate space to stop; a major problem if you were reaching the end of your permitted driving time. It was not impossible to address; in France, in the UK or in Russia it's rarely an issue, but in Germany urgent action was required. Indeed, with an increasing number of trucks on the road, the problem was likely to deteriorate.

The other core issue revolved around working conditions and in particular the ability to return home. Clearly, the nature of the work means drivers are away from home for extended periods, often spending around 20 days a month on the road. At the end of the working month, the truck - and the driver that had used their permitted driving time - may be far from home. The truck could continue with a new driver, but the old driver needs to return home, and the cost of that trip needs to be covered. However, it was not a level playing field; moderator Jan Bergrath pointed out that there were so-called 'letterbox' companies operating in countries like Romania. Employers were exploiting drivers, paying the minimum wage for low-income countries and shipping them to and from their assignments by minibus. He hoped that the Posted Workers Directive would help curtail such practises in future.

Jocelyn Fajardo, Deputy Head of Cabinet for EU Transport Commissioner Violeta Bulc, responded to comments raised by the drivers. He said he was "not surprised to hear of these issues; they had come through clearly in the consultation process." He believed many of these were addressed by the Commission's proposals in the first mobility package. It was now up to the European Parliament to speed up adoption of the mobility package, ideally during the current mandate. The Bulgarian EU Council Presidency was also committed to working on these issues.

*"Often, said the drivers, it was impossible to find a legitimate space to stop; a major problem if you were reaching the end of your permitted driving time"*

On the core issue of safe parking, he recognised that this was a genuine concern. While it was principally the responsibility of individual member states, the Commission was helping through calls to co-finance facilities. He also acknowledged the parliament's pilot project to identify potential sites, as well as a study underway to identify additional actions needed to provide spaces. However, he noted that "the best place to rest was at home". Although drivers were sometimes away for weeks, even months at a time, this did not breach existing EU law. This was wrong, and the proposal sought changes to plug the current legislative gaps. The 'return home' should be set at a minimum of every three weeks. He confirmed that the return home was the operators' obligation. He also touched on the issue of cabotage saying that in its proposals, the Commission has set the threshold at three days, along with rules to calculate this threshold.

A lively Q&A session probed many of these issues further. Nik Delmeire of the European Shippers' Council, wanted to know what the industry was doing to provide safe parking spaces. Wolfgang Göbel explained that they were ready and prepared to invest, but that it could not be left to the private sector alone; it needed partnerships with national or regional governments.

UK EFDD group MEP, Jane Collins - herself a qualified HGV driver - picked up on the average age of UK drivers. She wanted to know what could be done to encourage younger drivers. She suggested that there should be ways to help young drivers pass their test, helping them overcome the high cost and time barriers. Mike Sturgeon, Executive Director of ECG agreed, pointing out that "by the time drivers reach the age of 21 and are in a position to apply for their licence, many of them may have already picked another profession." ECG Board member Ray MacDowall pointed out that the UK government had subsidised training in the past in partnership with industry, and suggested that such an approach may be worth revisiting.

Polish EPP deputy Danuta Jazłowiecka was interested in knowing whether posting rules would apply to drivers. She also asked the Commission to elaborate on the three-day period for cabotage. Jocelyn Fajardo explained that this timing had come from the Commission's impact assessment. He emphasised that it was important that rules were both simple and enforceable.

*"Nik Delmeire of the European Shippers' Council, wanted to know what the industry was doing to provide safe parking spaces"*

Host Wim van de Camp gave his concluding remarks saying he believed that the current rules meant that the majority of drivers had access to good working conditions, those that did not were the exceptions. However, it was important to remember that there could only be exceptions when rules existed. Proper enforcement by member states would reduce these exceptions. He

noted that there were wage differences for drivers, but felt that was a good thing as it encouraged competition and was a basic tenet of the free market; the market would determine what was best. However, he acknowledged that parking places were a real problem; He was aware that in Germany, for example, there were numerous disused army bases that would be ideal for conversion to dedicated facilities; there was interest from a Dutch entrepreneur to invest in such a project. Smart thinking could identify solutions.

He stressed that policymakers were aware of the importance of the sector. The Commission and Parliament both recognised the value to Europe's economy and would work to ensure it had the business environment it needed to continue to thrive.

### About the author

Colin Mackay is a Brussels-based writer and editorial consultant

Interested in this content?

**Sign up to our free daily email bulletins.**

Share this page



Tags

[Brexit](#) | [Employment and Social Affairs](#) | [European Commission](#) | [Trade](#) | [Internal Market](#) | [Transport](#)

Categories

[Business and industry](#) | [Employment](#) | [Transport](#)

Related Partner Content

[Fourth Railway Package: more competition requires more social protection, says transport workers union](#)

11 July 2016

The European Parliament should reject the Fourth Railway Package's flawed and confusing trialogue compromise, argues Sabine Trier

[How can lightweight materials such as aluminium help the EU meet its CO2 emissions reduction targets?](#)

18 April 2017

EU legislation needs to recognise the advantages lightweight materials can offer in reducing CO2 emissions from vehicles, write Patrik Ragnarsson and Dieter Höll.

[Students understand the need for business-education partnerships](#)

6 December 2017

Students understand the need for business-education partnerships, says Tony Graziano.

Get more from the Parliament Magazine

**\*Free weekly email bulletins - REGISTER**

**\*LOG IN to this website**

**\*A fortnightly magazine delivered to you and packed with the latest opinion and analysis [purchase a subscription](#)**