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Item 11 of the provisional agenda

Weight and dimensions of loading units in intermodal transport:

The modular concept

New developments with “mega-trucks” on European roads

Note by the secretariat

I. Mandate

1. At its previous sessions, the Working Party considered the impact of “mega-trucks” with a maximum length of 25.5 m and weights of up to 60 tonnes on the European road network and on intermodal transport (ECE/TRANS/WP.24/115, paras. 36–38, ECE/TRANS/WP.24/117, paras. 38–46; ECE/TRANS/WP.24/119, paras. 22–24, ECE/TRANS/WP.24/121, paras 41–43 and ECE/TRANS/WP.24/127, paras. 61–63).
2. In 2008 and 2010 the secretariat had prepared documents providing an overview of policy discussions and trials with those long and heavy vehicles in several UNECE member countries (ECE/TRANS/WP.24/2008/8 and ECE/TRANS/WP.24/2010/5)
3. In accordance with the request of the Working Party (ECE/TRANS/WP.24/127, para. 64), the secretariat has prepared below a new report on the latest developments in this field, mainly within European Union (EU) countries that refers also to the so-called modular concept as stipulated in European Directive 96/53/EC.

II. New developments

4. Further to the information provided by the secretariat in 2010 (ECE/TRANS/WP.24/2010/5), the following new developments with mega-trucks on European roads have been recorded. It should be noted that the information provided below is mainly based on press releases and does not necessarily reflect the official position of the Governments concerned. Delegations may wish to provide supplementary information on mega-trucks before or during the session of the Working Party.

A. Austria

5. Austria is not only concerned about the possible weight of mega-trucks of up to 60 tonnes, but very critically views the maximum length of 25.5 m of such trucks. In addition to an increase in the risk of road traffic accidents, additional investments in appropriate road infrastructure, including reinforced safety fences, emergency rest points and tunnels, the Austrian Government fears that widespread use of such road vehicles could also lead to a dramatic shift back from intermodal road/rail transport to pure road transport with considerable negative environmental effects.

B. Denmark

6. As one of the priorities for transport policy during its upcoming presidency of the EU as of 1 January 2012, Denmark plans to achieve a modification of European Directive 96/53/EC allowing for the so-called modular concept. According to statements made by the Danish Minister of Transport, mega-trucks should be allowed in international transport among EU member States and regions that do already today permit such longer and heavier goods road vehicles in national traffic. Such permissions will be subject to certain restrictions, such as exclusion from transport on regional roads as well as in villages and cities.

C. Germany

7. Germany plans to start in 2012 nationwide trials with mega-trucks. However, at present, only 7 out of 16 German States (Länder) plan to participate in such trials, thus making East-West transport through Germany virtually impossible. During the trials, mega-trucks would be allowed to ply the German motorway network and selected secondary roads. However, the specific technical conditions of such vehicles and the circumstances for their use are not yet finally determined.

8. According to officials of the German Ministry of Transport, the trials would last 5 years to allow such vehicles to be written off by the end of this period. The trials would be regarded as successful if mega-trucks showed no negative effects on road traffic safety, on road infrastructure and on intermodal transport. Also, the use of such vehicles should not result in a modal shift from rail to road transport.

D. Netherlands

9. Following 7 years of trials, mega-trucks with a length of 25.5 m and a total weight of up to 60 tonnes are now allowed for transport within the Netherlands. Such vehicles will be mainly used for port hinterland transport of containers and for inter-city transport whereby smaller trucks are used for fine distribution within city centres. At present around 600 mega-trucks are in use in the Netherlands and the industry predicts an introduction of a further 400 such vehicles by the year 2012.

E. Switzerland

10. On 15 December 2010, the Swiss parliament decided to limit the maximum length of goods road vehicles in Switzerland to 18.75 meters. The Swiss State Council has already agreed to this bill in September 2010. Admission of mega-trucks would now require a popular vote by the Swiss people.