

EU ISSUES UPDATE

JULY 2019



OPPORTUNITIES FOR DIALOGUE

European Parliament considers compulsory low emissions zones in cities

On 17 July, the European Parliament held a debate during plenary on “Clean Air Zones in EU Cities”. During the debate, some of the political groups indicated that are planning to draft a resolution by September calling on the next European Commission to promote or mandate the setting up of low emissions zones in European cities. Commissioner Christos Stylianides told the MEPs that the Commission is actively enforcing existing clean air legislation (and pursuing 30 infringement cases against 20 national governments for persistent breaches of EU limits on nitrogen and sulphur oxides and particulate matter) but that the choice of measures implemented to address the issue remain with national governments and local authorities. During the debate:

- Peter Liese (EPP, Germany) said his center-right group did not believe driving bans are the right solution on the grounds that they impede the lives of citizens who may not be able to buy an emissions-free or low-emissions vehicle. He and others said they want the Commission to take stronger action to further address the issue of polluting cars – particularly in light of Diesel-gate – and supported retrofitting to reduce emissions.
- Christel Schaldemose (S&D, DK) called for tougher EU legislation to avoid the situation experienced in Madrid where an incoming administration attempted to revoke an existing LEZ (see past EU issue updates and below) saying that the EU needs to make it possible for member states to be able to introduce bans on petrol and diesel cars and also the possibility to go further.
- Caroline Voaden (Renew Europe, UK) supported a an EP Resolution on the issue on the grounds that this is a matter for the EU as “air pollution does not respect national borders.”

New EP Committee membership

French MEP Pascal Canfin (Renew Europe Group) has been appointed Chair of the Environment Committee. He was not an MEP in the last term but was an MEP between 2209 and 2012. Three

quarters of the Environment Committee's members are either new to the Parliament or did not sit on the committee in the last session. The S&D Group has the highest number of MEPs who previously sat as full committee members.

French Green Group MEP Karima Delli has been reappointed as Chair of the Transport Committee which like the Environment Committee is constituted primarily of MEPs who were either not in the last parliament or if they were, were not member of the Transport Committee.

German Christian Democrat Sabine Verheyen has been appointed as Chair of the Culture Committee.

INFORMATION

Court ruling upholds Madrid low emissions zone

A Spanish court has ruled that the Madrid city council must reverse with immediate effect its decision to temporarily suspend fines for drivers illegally entering the Madrid Central low emissions zone. The court ruled that the defense of the environment is an essential function of the city council and that the broader interest of protecting public health outweighs any negative impact on vehicle owners from a potential malfunctioning of the system which registers vehicle entry. The right-of-centre City Council had argued that the malfunctioning of the monitoring system required that the system of fines be suspended until these problems have been resolved. The Council was taken to Court for its actions by the environmental organisations Greenpeace Spain and Ecologistas en Acción which had argued that the city's low emissions zone is essential for Spanish compliance with EU air quality legislation and which told the court that the European Commission took into account plans for the implementation of Madrid Central when deciding not to take Spain to the European Court of Justice in 2018. At the end of July, Madrid city councillors voted "to inform the European Commission that the Council intends to maintain Madrid Central low emissions zone and introduce additional measures to ensure compliance with air quality directive emissions limits." The commitment was possible due to a division of opinion within the conservative coalition that currently controls the Council.

At the same time, the Barcelona metropolitan authority (AMB) has urged the Catalan government to "fulfil its commitments to tackling transport emissions" with measures including the conversion of existing motorway tolls into congestion charges or the creation of pollution tolls within a metropolitan low emissions zone due to come into force in January 2020.

Governments recognize exhaust fumes are not the sole problem

The UK Government is to look at harmful particulate matter produced by brake pads and tyres acknowledging that reducing exhaust fumes alone will not fully address emission concerns. The Government has noted that emissions of nitrogen oxides have fallen 29% and sulphur dioxide by 62% since 2010, but that the relative contribution of road traffic to particulate matter (PM2.5

and PM10) is set to increase and therefore wants to address the fact that particles from brake wear, tyre wear and road surface wear currently constitute 60% and 73% (by mass), respectively, of primary PM 2.5 and PM10 emissions from road transport. The move has been welcomed by transport environmental Group T & E which has noted that particle emissions from brakes, suspension and tyres are not yet covered by any European regulation – although work is underway.

At the same time, the French Government has stated that a reduction in road traffic and a switch to greener transport modes are needed to reduce air pollution in towns and cities, as cleaner vehicles alone will not be sufficient to solve the problem. A French environment and health agency report has noted that technological advances alone, such as increased use of particulate filters and a move away from diesel engines, will not lead to sufficient improvements in urban air quality and so is calling for clean air policies to also aim to reduce road traffic by improving public transport and promoting alternatives such as walking and cycling. This finding has been reinforced by a UK study by The Centre for Research into Energy Demand Solutions (CREDS) which notes that electrifying cars will not address traffic jams, urban sprawl and wasted space used for parking. The report supports government efforts to phase out petrol and diesel cars in the move towards net-zero emissions but it says the timetable is too slow, and may not be achieved anyway, notably because of the challenge of charging vehicles – especially in urban areas with no off-street parking leading to drivers possibly choosing hybrid vehicles rather than pure electric cars and so maintaining fossil fuel usage into the future. The report also raises concerns about driverless cars: it foresees a situation where car owners may choose to live far from their workplace and then use their car as a mobile office while sitting in traffic jams they have helped to create. The President of the Automobile Association (AA) noted that he shares this concern which will be compounded by an too few parking spaces with the result that owners may leave their car to drive around while they do their business until beckoned back by the owner/user. This has led him to suggest that road charging may be the solution.

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The FIVA Legislation Commission members are: Tidde Bresters (Chairman), Wolfgang Eckel, Carla Fiocchi, Lars Genild, Alain Guillaume, Johann König, Stanislav Minářík, Bob Owen, Christos Petridis, Claudio dal Savio, Leon Vrtovec and Andrew Turner of EPPA works with the Committee.