

EPP CALLS FOR CLIMBDOWN ON "ILLEGAL" UK TAX PLAN

Brussels, November 9, 2000

The EPP Political Bureau today (09/11) voted to condemn what Fine Gael leader John BRUTON called "a total affront to both the spirit and the letter of the European Union Treaties" - a proposal by British Chancellor (finance minister) Gordon BROWN to introduce a special charge on non-British hauliers using British roads.



British Chancellor Gordon BROWN's budget infringed the basic principle of free movement in exactly the same way as French fishermen who had blockaded the Channel ports in August, said Bruton.

The term "foreign" was especially offensive. He was a citizen of Europe, said Bruton: "I am not a foreigner in London and I'm not a foreigner in Brussels." Nor were European lorries in Britain "foreign." Irish hauliers travelling regularly to and from Northern Ireland would be severely affected. So would those using Britain as the landbridge between Ireland and its markets in mainland Europe.

"In view of the illegal nature of this proposal, I am demanding its immediate withdrawal," said Bruton, who contacted the European Commission to demand it intervene against "this outrageous proposal."

The EU Directive of June 17, 1999 (1999/62/EC) on the "charging of heavy goods vehicles for the use of certain infrastructures" states clearly that: "Tolls and user charges may not discriminate, directly or indirectly, on the grounds of the nationality of the haulier or the origin or destination of the vehicle."

The idea of a so-called "Brit Disc" or vignette charge was, said Bruton, "a transparent attempt to give financial support to British hauliers at the expense of haulage companies from other European countries."

Text of resolution:

The European People's Party,

- Having regard to the Treaties establishing the European Union and the legislative measures deriving from these Treaties,
 - Believing that all Member States of the Union must at all times ensure the free movement of goods and people throughout the territory of the Union,
 - Committed to the equal treatment of citizens of all Member States,
 - Aware of the proposal of the United Kingdom Government to impose charges on all non-British hauliers and haulage companies who travel in the United Kingdom,
1. Condemns the proposal of the United Kingdom Government which is contrary to both the spirit and letter of the European Union Treaties.
 2. Calls on the European Commission to intervene with the U.K. Government to ensure that this illegal proposal is withdrawn.