

A further step towards internalising all externalities in infrastructure pricing would be a reform of the Eurovignette Directive which the Commission had announced for summer 2002. At the time of writing, this proposal has not come into existence yet, "fuelling fears that the principle of charging transport its full costs is being quietly dropped from the EU agenda."¹⁴⁰

4.3.3. The Ecopoint system

In the context of trans-Alpine traffic through Austria, the Ecopoint system is another key topic. This system had initially been introduced in 1992 by an agreement of international law between Austria and the Community. Later, the system was integrated into the Austrian Accession Treaty¹⁴¹. According to the European Environment Agency, the Ecopoint system works as follows:

"It seeks to reduce NO_x emissions starting from the base year of 1991 by 60% by the year 2003. A limited number of ecopoints are attributed annually to each country in the European Community. Each heavy goods vehicle (weighing more than 7.5 tonnes, and registered in the Community) has to pay a number of ecopoints for each transit trip through Austria. The number of ecopoints depends on the emission characteristics of the truck.

As a safeguard to ensure that technical progress in the development of cleaner engines did not make the ecopoint system ineffective, the agreement also laid down a quantitative limit of 108% of the journeys made in 1991. If this limit was exceeded then the number of ecopoints made available the following year would be revised downward through a formula laid down in the agreement."¹⁴²

The ecopoint system aimed to limit pollution and the number of heavy goods vehicles transiting the Austrian Alps. A critical assessment of the system gives not very satisfactory results. First, the limitation of pollution only focused on one specific component of pollution, NO_x, leaving out all others as, for example, CO₂ and noise. In

¹⁴⁰ "Ministers reject MEP's proposals on 2004 ecopoints extension", (2003) 117 T&E Bulletin 2. This fear has been fostered recently by comments by EU's Transport Commissioner Loyola de Palacio in two German Newspapers. On 21 February 2003, she said in an interview with the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Nr. 44, p.13: "The Commission will not let the costs of environmental pollution be included in the road charging scheme, in order not to punish road transport, Europe's most efficient mode."

See as well the Article mentioned in note 139, where the European Federation for Transport and Environment asks de Palacio either to retract her comments or to resign from her functions.

¹⁴¹ Protocol No. 9 to the Austrian Accession Treaty, OJ C 241, 29 April 1994, p.361.

¹⁴² See *supra*, note 7, p.8.