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The shortage of truck drivers is a problem to German industry

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On 19 July, the Federation of German Industries (BDI) and the Confederation of German Employers' Associations (BDA) in their joint statement emphasised that the insufficient number of truck drivers in Germany is a factor that increases the pressure on rising wages, slows down the development of the logistic industry and is a challenge to supply chain of large corporations. The shortage of truck drivers has already reached 45,000. That is also the number of truck drivers who retire annually, and only 16,000 new drivers are available annually. 1.5 million truck drivers work in Germany. However, two thirds of them are over 45 years old. Thus associations representing the German economy (BDI, BDA, DSLV) oppose to further cabotage limitations in the EU through such regulations as the minimum wage, introducing stricter social regulations, and restrictions as part of the Mobility Package. They also point to the fact that part of the planned regulations are impossible to put into practice: for example, regardless of the introduction of stricter regulations concerning rest time, 50,000 foreign truck drivers in Germany have only 11,000 beds available at places which have proper parking lots.

Commentary

- German politicians under the influence of lobbying from transport firms over the past few years have introduced solutions making it more difficult for their foreign competitors to function. In 2012, Germany backed a tightening of the EU's regulations concerning rest for drivers. Three years later, an act concerning the minimum wage was passed in Germany which also covered truck drivers. This meant the need to pay the minimum wage to drivers from foreign firms for the period they spent in Germany, even if Germany was only a transit country for the goods. Furthermore, firms were obliged to submit documents proving that they comply with the Minimum Wage Act at German customs offices in German. Those failing to comply with this requirement may pay a fine of up to half a million euros. Even though the European Commission launched proceedings into breaching the freedom of the movement of services in the EU in connection with this, it has still not decided how to finally resolve this matter. Advanced work is underway at present in the EU on implementing the Mobility Package which may to a high degree negatively affect the competitiveness of firms from Central Europe due to increasing administrative and social costs.

- The fact that German politicians are focused on protecting the interests of German transport firms adversely affects the interests of other sectors of industry. While transport firms are still looking for possibilities to restrict the activity of their competitors from Central Europe through legal regulations, the largest companies are interested in efficiency of supply chain, which are necessary for them to maintain their international competitiveness. According to the Federal Office for Goods Transport, already 42.6% of shipments are carried out by foreign firms (34.2% in 2007). Polish firms account for 38% of the shipments carried out by foreign companies (10% are carried out by firms from the Czech Republic, 8% from Romania, 7% from the Netherlands and 5% from Hungary).