

Cities to the EU: help enforce traffic rules on foreign vehicles



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In a joint letter co-signed by 20 elected officials from European cities, local politicians call on the European Parliament to help cities enforce the equal application of mobility regulations to all drivers, including those from foreign countries.

The text by members of Eurocities and the Polis organisations, refers, in particular, to the application of Urban Vehicle Access Regulations (UVARs), such as congestion charges and low-emission zones.

The letter is addressed to members of the European Parliament's Transport and Tourism committee, who are currently discussing an update to the

Cross-Border Enforcement Directive

, which is meant to help fine foreign drivers breaching local traffic rules.

In its current formulation, the directive doesn't include the enforcement of UVARs offences.

At the moment, loose enforcement procedures allow foreign drivers to easily avoid paying local traffic violation fines.

For example, Milan has set up limited traffic zones and enforces a congestion charge scheme; both apply to all drivers, regardless of their country of origin. However, in 2020, 75% of foreign drivers didn't pay their traffic fines which amounted to €6 million, according to the local press.

Similar situations can be observed elsewhere in Europe: in the German city of Aachen, in 2022, 69% of unpaid low-emission zones tickets came from foreign vehicles.

Many cities fear that beyond the gap in financial revenues stemming

from uncollected fines, a lack of equal treatment between national and foreign drivers could challenge the acceptability of UVARs.

As local authorities increase efforts to improve air quality, road safety and reduce noise emissions, the letter's signatories remind EU Parliament members that

ensuring fair and equitable treatment in law enforcement is paramount to treat all European citizens the same way and to secure the support of our population.

Tackling this issue would be paramount at a time when the EU is asking cities to intensify actions against air pollution to meet EU air quality targets through the creation of new low-emission zones. The EU is also urging municipalities to step up road safety measures to reach zero road fatalities by 2050.

To resolve this unfortunate situation, signatories urge members of the European Parliament to include UVARs in the scope of the directive.

If amended, the directive will allow member states and their cities to collect technical vehicle information from vehicles entering an UVAR, offering a legal basis to process them in full compliance with the relevant data protection rules,

The Parliament vote, scheduled for 29 November 2023, will be crucial for deciding the fate of the Cross-Border Enforcement Directive.

Including UVARs in the scope of the directive would allow to move beyond the current situation. At the moment, the enforcement of traffic fines is only possible between countries that have signed a bilateral agreement allowing the mutual transfer of vehicles registration information.

Finally, the letter reminds that new technological solutions allow to apply UVARs to foreign vehicles and have been tested in cities such as Barcelona.

In March 2023, the European Commission suggested to revise the existing Cross-Border Enforcement Directive to improve road safety, introduce new driving license rules and compel the application of traffic laws across national borders.

Although the updated text didn't mention UVARs, the Commission suggested to include the following traffic offenses into the directive:

- Failure to keep enough distance from the vehicle driving in front
- Crossing one or more solid white lines
- Not respecting rules on the use of emergency corridors
- The use of an overloaded vehicle

Top photo: a street in Rome by Zhiliana Cane

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