



**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**  
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MOBILITY AND TRANSPORT

Directorate B - Trans-European transport networks & Smart transport  
B.3 - Logistics, Co-modality, Motorways of the sea & Marco Polo

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Dear Mr. Denton,

Thank you for your letter of 18 May 2011 concerning longer semi-trailers.

Article 4 of Directive 96/53/EC in its paragraphs 1 and 2 lays down the principle that Member States shall not authorise "the normal circulation within their territories" of vehicles or vehicle combinations for the national transport of goods which are not in conformity with the provisions of Annex I which relate to requirements of length, width, turning circle, distance between axles etc. However, they *may* do so if the relevant provisions which are not complied with relate instead to height or weight.

In the first case, an exception may nevertheless be permitted if

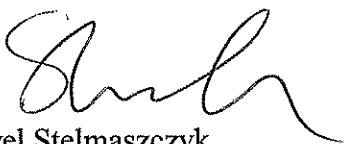
- i) a special permit is issued by the national authorities and the vehicles/vehicle combinations "carry or are intended to carry indivisible loads" (Article 4(3)),  
OR
- ii) the relevant vehicle/vehicle combination is used for national transport operations which "do not significantly affect international competition in the transport sector" (Article 4(4), see also Recital 17).

Thus in cases in which neither Article 4(3) nor Article 4(4) applies, Member States are precluded from authorising the normal circulation in their territories of vehicles or vehicle combinations which do not comply with the dimensions laid down in Annex I.

Against this background, a "vehicle combination" is in turn defined in Article 2 of the above-mentioned Directive as either a road train consisting of a vehicle coupled to a trailer or an articulated vehicle consisting of a vehicle coupled to a semi-trailer. According to point 1.1 of Annex I to the Directive, the maximum length of such combinations is set at 18.75 m and 16.50 m respectively. I would also like to emphasise that these two categories are entirely separate and that there is no provision in the Directive 96/53/EC for applying the 18.75 m road train limit to articulated vehicles.

Thus, unless the specific exceptions referred to in Article 4(3) and / or 4(4) of the Directive can be invoked, a tractor/semi-trailer combination shall be limited to a length of 16.50 m. Such interpretation is indeed in full conformity with the very objectives of the Directive, which - as noted in its third recital - are to remove differences in the standards applied to circulation of commercial vehicles in the EU Member States to avoid creating "adverse effects on the conditions of competition" in road freight transport between different Member States.

Yours sincerely



Pawel Stelmaszczyk