

State of play

Since Monday 10th February 2014, Bulgarian representatives of small and medium-sized carriers are blocking the processing of trucks at the border with Turkey in order to oppose the lack of transit traffic permits. Only cars and busses are allowed to cross the Bulgarian-Turkish border. Representatives of major carriers joined the protest on Tuesday 11 February. On Tuesday 11 February, it was reported that around 70 Turkish TIR trucks were stuck at the Kapakule border crossing point and about as many trucks remained blocked at the Kapitan Andreevo border crossing point, while a 8km truck queue obstructs the Hamzabeyli-Lesovo border crossing, according to reports of the Bulgarian National Radio (BNR).

This situation is the consequence of Turkish authorities' decision of 30 January 2014 to declare invalid the permits granted to Bulgarian carriers. On 1 February 2014, Bulgarian authorities reacted by declaring invalid the permits granted to Turkish carriers. As a result of the step, the two countries closed their borders to each other's trucks.

Bulgarian industry groups complain against discriminatory policies targeting Bulgarian drivers. These include restrictions on entering the country. The industry groups also claim to have obtained an internal directive from the Turkish customs authority, which ordered "extra checks" of Bulgarian lorries, causing further delays of shipments. On the other side, Turkish truckers complain that Bulgarian authorities had stopped allowing trucks with valid permits to pass as of Monday 10 February. Turkish authorities insist that they were promised 125 000 transit transfer permits by Bulgaria and were only granted 5000.

On 3 February 2014, Bulgarian Prime Minister Plamen Oresharski and his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan agreed on organising a meeting on 21 February 2014 in order to fix the matter and define some clarifications on the quotas of onetime transit traffic permits. Another meeting will be organised later this year, after the Turkish elections in March and the European elections in May, in order to address more matters related to the bilateral agreement between Bulgaria and Turkey.

The dispute between Bulgaria and Turkey is not a novelty but the result of months of tension regarding the question of traffic quota. You will find below the description of the matter in a few dates as well as a short analysis.

Dispute between Bulgaria and Turkey on traffic quota – Important dates

6 January 2012: Transport Ministers Ivaylo Moskovski (Bulgaria) and Binali Yildirim (Turkey) signed a Bilateral Agreement on the International Carriage of Passengers and Goods by Road during a ceremony in Sofia. The agreement is based on a model established by the European Conference of Ministers of Transport, and relies on road transportation quota system. It superseded the former agreement between the two countries, signed in 16 April 1977.

9 May 2013: Bulgarian lorry drivers blocked the two main checkpoints on the border with Turkey in order to protest against discriminatory measures applied by Turkish authorities on Bulgarian carriers. At this time, the Bulgaria's Deputy Transport Minister Albena Lazarova said that even if the blockade was lifted, the problem was so important that the risk of future blockage in the future remained.

29 May 2013: a Bulgarian MEP from ALDE, namely Metin Kazak, sent a [parliamentary question](#) to the Commission. He raised the problem of the road transportation quota system for Bulgarian and Turkish road hauliers, which also harmed free movements of goods in the context of EU/Turkey Bilateral agreement.

Commissioner Siim Kallas gave the following [answer](#): *“With respect to international carriage of goods by road from a Member State to a third country or vice versa, the EU legislation provides that necessary agreements between the EU and third countries should be concluded (Reg 1072/2009 art.1 par.2). Currently the EU does not have such agreement with Turkey and the EU-Turkey Customs Union does not cover transport which belongs to the sector of services. Besides, in the EU-Turkey Association Agreement the movement of goods is treated separately from the provision of transport services. **In the absence of an EU road transport agreement with Turkey, Member States continue to apply their bilateral agreements.**”*

30 January 2014: Turkey invalidated the permits granted to Bulgarian carriers.

1 February 2014: Bulgaria invalidated the permits granted to Turkish carriers.

3 February 2014: meeting between Bulgarian and Turkish Prime Ministers. They decided to organise a meeting on the matter on 21 February 2014.

10 February 2014: blocking of the processing of trucks at the border between Bulgaria and Turkey, despite the decision of the Bulgarian Association of International Transport Carriers to not organize it until the bilateral meeting between Bulgaria and Turkey, planned for February 21, is held.

11 February 2014: Bulgarian Deputy Prime Minister Daniela Bobeva announced that she would ask Turkish authorities to organize a meeting before 13 February 2014. According to her, the dispute has to be solved before 21 February 2014.

Analysis

The dispute between Turkey and Bulgaria regarding traffic permits is not a new one. However, the tension between the two countries has increased these last days with the decision of both sides to invalidate permits of Bulgarian and Turkish hauliers.

Since Turkey does not have a road agreement with EU and since the EU-Turkey Customs Union does not cover transport, the European Union has no competency to intervene in the dispute. Therefore the dispute has to be solved in the context of the Bulgaria/Turkey Bilateral Agreement.



A meeting between Bulgarian and Turkish authorities is planned for 21 February 2014 but recently the Bulgarian Deputy Prime Minister committed to organise a meeting before 13 February 2014 in order to resolve the situation temporarily.

It seems however that the situation is as such because of loopholes in the Bulgaria/Turkey bilateral agreement. A significant lap of time will be needed to address these loopholes and the work will unlikely be started before Turkish elections in March and European elections in May 2014.