

## PM+: EU still faces obstacles in free movement of goods

Written by Jaap Mulders on 1 June 2015 in Opinion Plus  
Opinion Plus

Europe's single market is hampered by a lack of harmonisation in cross-border delivery rules, argues Jaap Mulders of the European Express Association.



I followed with great interest, and some curiosity, the release of the digital single market (DSM) strategy by the European commission.

Interest, because we at the European Express Association (EEA) strongly support the digitisation of the EU economy, and curiosity, because the lack of efficient cross-border parcel delivery services has often been identified as a barrier for e-commerce growth.

We support the DSM strategy as it will boost the digital economy through initiatives that will allow SMEs and consumers to trade more easily across borders.

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As an industry, express provides seamless, efficient and interoperable cross-border delivery, and in the last decade it has grown by about 22.5 per cent in cross-border volumes.

The express industry provides total connectivity across Europe while contributing to the growth of e-commerce (from 3 per cent to 12 per cent growth between 2005 and 2012).

How? By Europe-wide air and ground transportation networks supported by robust IT infrastructure, ensuring full tracking and tracing of shipments from start to finish.

In this process, how to present the costs related to delivery to consumers is something that is decided upon by our customers, the e-retailers and traders.

However, express delivery is just one specific part of the parcel delivery sector, characterised by time-definite, reliable transportation services for documents, parcels, and freight as well as next-day deliveries.

There are many other ways that parcels can be transported and delivered across Europe and many other actors are involved.

Express operates in a highly competitive market and, as a consequence, the industry is focused on maximising efficiency wherever possible and on providing good customer service.

But in order to do so we cannot count only on ourselves - all parts of the supply chain need to work seamlessly.

We need smooth transportation of goods across Europe and a consistent regulatory framework from one member state to the other –a true European single market for delivery.

The reality of the internal market is that regulation across the EU often does not keep pace with industry.

Because of differing rules and procedures, express carriers have to adapt their operations country-by-country. This creates major inefficiencies for parcel delivery operators, inefficiencies that are out of their hands.

From my perspective, there are certain specific areas that the EU should be looking at: low hanging fruit that, if addressed, can have an immediate impact on the efficiency of parcel delivery.

Express delivery operators have seen a surge in regulation resulting from the postal reform introduced over the last decades.

The postal regulatory landscape is disparate across Europe, despite the process of full market opening brought about by the third postal directive.

Fragmentation across member states around key requirements such as universal postal services, authorisations and licensing regimes and conditions connected to the provision of delivery services in effect negates the overall efficiency benefits that EU rules originally sought to create.

There are also increasing demands on delivery operators from member state national authorities to systematically provide data on goods that are in free circulation in the EU.

Such measures directly impact the amount of time required to move EU goods between member states creating additional inefficiency and cost.

For road transport, a lack of harmonised rules between member states in, for example, road charging systems, cabotage rules, driving and resting periods and other administrative requirements also has a significant detrimental impact on efficiency.

These examples may not be headline grabbers, but the current patchwork of regulations across the EU creates significant obstacles to the free movement of goods.

If the EU is truly committed to improving the free movement of goods, then it must start with ensuring effective implementation of existing rules first and foremost.

## About the author

Jaap Mulders is chair of the European Express Association (EEA)

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