

## **European Parliament approves 'blank cheques' for unviable transport projects**

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New financing rules for Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-Ts), approved yesterday by the European Parliament, will cause billions of Euros to be spent on transport infrastructure projects regardless of economic feasibility or environmental impact according to CEE Bankwatch, Friends of the Earth Europe and Transport and Environment (T&E).

Existing mechanisms designed to protect misuse of transport funds are failing, as illustrated by recent developments in the case of the Messina Bridge project in Italy. The Commission called the Italian government to account in a letter last week over claims they failed to produce a valid Project Impact Assessment with regard to two Special Protected Areas. The issue only came to light after a formal complaint from WWF-Italy was sent to the Commission in 2003 (1).

MEPs have rejected the need for independent assessments despite massively increasing European investment in transport infrastructure in a resolution adopted last June that called for the quadrupling of so-called 'Priority Project' funding to EUR 20.490bn for the next budget period (2).

The NGO coalition is deeply concerned that key amendments calling for independent assessment of project viability and cost benefit analyses (CBA) were rejected, while a Commission proposal to raise the percentage of EU investment in cross-border projects from 20% to 50% was approved.

Markus Liechti of T&E said, "The Parliament is more than happy to spend tax payers' money but has failed in its duty to get value-for-money. It will now be even easier for blank cheques to be written for projects, regardless of whether or not they are viable."

Anelia Stefanova of CEE Bankwatch commented: "The Messina case is by no means unique, but clearly shows the need for independent analysis of the viability of projects and thorough environmental assessments. It is especially important for new member states where transport infrastructure is booming. We need more double checks, and no more blank cheques".

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### **Notes:**

(1) WWF Italy Press Release - 25 October

[http://www.panda.org/about\\_wwf/where\\_we\\_work/europe/what\\_we\\_do/policy\\_and\\_events/epo/news.cfm?uNewsID=24255](http://www.panda.org/about_wwf/where_we_work/europe/what_we_do/policy_and_events/epo/news.cfm?uNewsID=24255)

(2) Böge Report on Policy Challenges and Budgetary Means of the enlarged Union 2007-2013 (2004/2209(INI)) – EP Vote 8 June 2005