

## INTERVIEW WITH KLAUS SCHIERHACKL, IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT, ASECAP **“Motorway toll market can’t be created just with directives”**

By Olivier Mirguet in Dubrovnik

The delegates of the 20 member countries of European Association with tolled motorways, bridges and tunnels (ASECAP), representatives of the motorway companies that operate toll systems, have held their 40th annual congress in Dubrovnik, Croatia. Europolitics interviewed Klaus Schierhackl, immediate past president of the association.

### What are the issues in your profession?

Merchandise transport is a good indicator of how healthy the economy is. Motorways are being used less, especially in countries in Southern Europe. In a bid to help the economy recover, the European Commission tried to impose interoperable payment systems, just like for mobile telephony. It wasn't the right solution. The market isn't ready for it. Directive 2004/52/EC on the interoperability of electronic road toll systems in the Community – followed five years later by Decision 2009/750 EC – had set October 2012 as the deadline for interoperability. But nothing has happened. A market cannot be created just with directives.

### You wanted to start over with a similar project, but on a regional scale.

Yes. The EU was too big a scale for a trial run. The concessionaires are ready, the technology is there, but there is no market. Our project would be a collaboration that is limited to a few neighbouring member states<sup>1</sup>. We tabled a proposal two months ago, under the TEN-T [Trans-European Transport Network] projects. The system would be limited to vehicles weighing more than 3.5 tonnes.

### You do not seem to be interested in interoperability for light-duty vehicles. Why is that?

Citizens have different transport needs. An interoperable toll system for private cars would make sense at a local level between Germany and the Netherlands, if the German national authorities decided to put

it in place for light-duty vehicles, or between France and Spain for holiday makers. But there are few private cars circulating between Spain and the Netherlands. The mobility of Europeans is determined by the quality of infrastructures, by the absence



Schierhackl: “There is no such thing as endless growth”

of border controls. For an interoperable payment system, there simply is no market.

### In a crisis, do your members still want to invest?

There is no such thing as endless growth. Motorway concessionaires have to be cautious and continue to be very careful with investment and operating costs. The European Electronic Toll Service (EETS) should lead to further standardisation on our market. For the moment, each country has its own national providers, tailor-made to meet local needs. Component manufacturers want to sell their solutions throughout Europe.

### The average length of concession contracts is 30 years. Would it make sense to extend them?

Motorway concessions are not a model in which you make money in the first six months. In Croatia, there is a motorway South of Zagreb, which opened in 2008, and lost part of its traffic in 2009. The quantity of traffic depends on the health of the economy. So we need to focus on a long-term outlook. The benefits are not likely to arrive until the second half of our contracts. Why not extend concessions? The French authorities want to give an extra year to companies that have committed to invest more in protecting the environment. Could that work over 60 years? I doubt it, because of inflation and interests. The 30-year length of contracts is no coincidence: it is the lifespan of the installations we have to finance.

### What do you expect from the EU?

ASECAP members need a transparent basis to work. Let us not go down that road again, the road of replacing the market with directives. The Commission has to limit itself to giving recommendations. Our association revised its mode of governance by naming two vice-presidents and now a “past president” alongside its new President, Frenchman Jean Mesqui, who was elected for two years. We have become a recognised partner of the European Commission. It listens to our opinion.

### At its Dubrovnik congress, ASECAP signed an agreement with its US counterpart, the International Bridge, Tunnel and Turnpike Association (IBTTA). What is the aim of this transatlantic partnership?

Our joint aim is to convince the member states that tolls are the best solution to finance the construction and maintenance of motorways. IBTTA is not only American. It also welcomes European and Asian member states. In China, there is a 95,000-km motorway network, and each day it is extended by 13 kilometres. Our interests lie in the attribution of concessions for construction and extension. Everywhere. ■

(1) Spain, France, Italy, Switzerland, Austria, Germany, Poland and Denmark