

Presidency Summary of the Informal Videoconference of Transport Ministers

Brussels, 29 April 2020

Executive summary

On 18 March 2020 Transport Ministers held the first informal videoconference and agreed to establish national focal points for transport which proved to be useful platform for sharing information on traffic flows on the Green Lanes, for notifying measures adopted in the context of the COVID-19 crisis and for sharing other relevant information.

At a second informal videoconference, held on 29 April 2020, the Transport Ministers supported future work on exit and recovery strategy while reaffirming the importance of a coordinated approach in order to prepare, in a timely and well organized way, proportionate and non-discriminatory exit and recovery measures for the transport sector.

Main messages

Ministers expressed their satisfaction with the measures taken so far, while stressing the need for further work in all transport modes, such as resolving the issues with the crew changes, extension of the validity of licenses, certificates and other documents, harmonisation of the regime of driving derogations in road transport, extended transposition deadline for the Fourth Railway Package, and rules for air traffic control providers.

Minister Butković thanked Commissioner Vălean for the Transport relief package that was published today and he expressed the willingness to work on those proposals together with the European Parliament as expedient as possible.

The overall objective is to restore connectivity whilst at the same time giving full attention to public health, health of transport workers, protection of passengers and minimisation of the risk of infections at transport hubs and in all modes of transport. This will require a combination of testing, protective material and social distancing.

With regards to the different modes of transport, Ministers referred to the need for the following actions:

- for aviation, a number of Member States expressed the need to follow an harmonised approach to Air passengers rights at EU level and allow temporarily airlines to issue vouchers instead of immediately reimbursing cancelled tickets, possibly ensuring a mechanism of guarantee in case of insolvency, and to even apply a similar instrument to all types of transport; some Member States opposed changes to the current rules so as not to frustrate the legitimate expectations of passengers. There was also a call to help critical infrastructure such as Air Navigation Service Providers (ANSP) to continue providing services by offering loans and the necessary flexibility for the Reference Period 3 process in order to allow them to maintain the stability of the system and to recover their costs for 2020/2021 at fair levels. In addition, there was a mention of the need to, despite the COVID-19 crisis, review current legislations such as the ETS legislation for CORSIA implementation from 2021 and the Single European Sky.

- for road transport the Green Lanes, referred to in Commission Communication on the Implementation of the Green Lanes of 23 March, are key in preserving the flow in the supply chain and they need to be secured and maintained especially when the volumes of goods, passengers and private transport start to grow again; a number of MSs called for the reassessing the impending and current legislation in road transport in light of the long-term effects of the COVID-19 crisis; others pointed out that the measures deviating from current rules should be limited in time and proportionate.
- for rail transport the need to strengthen the role of freight transport corridors, which proved their importance during the COVID-19 crisis, was highlighted, as well as the need to invest in railway projects in the recovery period, which is in line with the goals of the Green Deal,
- for shipping ministers put special emphasis on resolving the issue of organizing crew changes and safe work conditions; in particular the Presidency heard concerns expressed with regards to Member States keeping their ports open for crew change and the necessity for the crew to be regarded as essential workers in the context of the Guidelines on the Green Lanes and Guidelines on Seafarers in all the Member States.

Across the different transport modes, Ministers also expressed the need for legal clarity on the possible continued use of expired certificates and licenses and to ensure an optimal coordination of driving bans and other transport restrictions. In this regard, Ministers welcomed the latest legislative proposals adopted by the Commission and called for their swift adoption.

Ministers and the Commissioner Vălean acknowledged that the future discussions on the Multiannual Financial Framework and the Recovery Fund should fully reflect the needs of the EU transport sector especially in terms of liquidity and investments needed for the recovery of all the different stakeholders in the sector. Those financial discussions should reflect the fundamental role of the transport sector in fostering the recovery and growth of the EU economy as a whole. Further, the Ministers stressed the importance of temporary state aid and financial recovery measures to help mitigate the immediate negative effects of the crisis. It will be important to find solutions for the financial obligations of the businesses and transport operators in the short and medium term. It was stressed that in all the efforts aimed at recovery of transport sector, we should have environment and digitalisation in mind, while maintaining a level playing field and offering necessary flexibility.

Ministers stressed the importance of the measures in the context of an exit strategy for transport to be proportionate and based on risk assessment that will allow for harmonisation of different approaches and coordination between the Member States. Ministers underlined the necessary coordination at EU level and with our international partners. The Ministers called on the Commission to present such sector-specific Guidelines for gradual easing and phasing-out of confinement measures as soon as possible. In that regards, they stressed the need for those guidelines to aim at harmonisation of rules and procedures with regards to sanitary measures for different transport modes as the lack of common approach could jeopardise the reestablishment of the connectivity.

It will take some time, but Ministers were convinced the EU will manage and come out even stronger from this crisis.