

Solidarity is the basis of our recovery plan!

By

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When COVID-19 first hit Europe, the European Union, national governments, and citizens tried to get a grasp of and deal with this emergency. Few expected the emergency to reach such magnitude rendering it impossible to plan our course of action with certainty. Fast forward one month, and as this new reality starts to set in; we need to start planning our recovery. A recovery that must be planned with solidarity as a basis. If we don't, the EU will lose its last chance to show citizens the added value of the European project.

Transport workers are essential to keep supply chains going

The COVID-19 emergency has shown Europe the importance of the workers that are often forgotten. Together with health care staff, retail workers, cleaners, there are the transport and logistics workers who keep our supply chains going. And these millions of workers, who ensure that supermarkets are well stocked, that hospitals have medicine and supplies, and that citizens receive goods delivered straight to their door, expect to be treated fairly.

Europe must bring prosperity to workers

This crisis might be the EU's last chance to show its worth. Why? Because up until now, transport workers have experienced mostly the negative aspects of the European internal market. Letterbox companies, precarious contracts, deteriorating working conditions and salaries – this has been their reality for years. Consumers have benefitted while their workers were suffering. COVID-19 has exacerbated these dubious practices and has added its problems to the already vulnerable position of workers: health risks, uncertainty about job retention as well as the confusion of thousands of posted or highly mobile transport workers who do not know if they are entitled to social security and if applicable, from which country it's coming from.

Fair transport for Europe

We should use this moment in time as an opportunity to rethink the future of the transport industry by building a fairer one. How?

First of all, if we support transport companies that have difficulties dealing with this crisis - and we should- it must be conditional on the support those employers provide workers. We cannot allow a perverse situation where taxpayers' money is used to increase companies' value, but not to save employment. Any financial help that does not take into account this social dimension will further contribute to the increasing feeling that this is the Europe of banks and shareholders, not the Europe of citizens. In other countries across the world, for example, the US, such measures have already been put forward – the EU should not lag behind. Measures must include: prohibition of lay-offs due to the COVID-19 crisis, prolongation of temporary agency work contracts until the end of the crisis, and should include the coverage of zero-hour workers by all job retention schemes ensuring a decent level of living throughout this crisis. At the same time, a ban on pay-out of dividends to shareholders and a

ban on stock buybacks by companies should be put in place for companies benefitting from this support.

We leave no one behind!

The EU should also respond positively to the calls for strong measures based on solidarity, such as coronabonds : it would be a big mistake to let millions of Europeans down. Let s not just look at what it would cost the EU to go for it, but rather what it would cost not to do it! If the EU wants to have its economy that works for people , one of the Commission s current priorities, it has to be a champion in its response to COVID-19. We would like to join the policymakers from many political families, economists, academics and institutions who all agree that this is the only measure that will allow us to recover from this crisis in a sustainable manner.

The present emergency should not be an excuse to block legislation that is aimed at improving transport workers' life: for example, the Mobility Package. This hard-reached compromise will allow thousands of lorry drivers to see their families more often and will help restrain the unfair competition that causes social dumping.

« Social » and « sustainable » go hand in hand

We also need better regulations in other transport sectors. Dubious business models and precarious contracts aimed at circumventing labour law need to be deterred. Fair pricing should be endorsed throughout the transport and supply chain – the current situation has exposed the detrimental effect of liberalisation and cost-cutting in the sector on its stability. Therefore, fair pricing, which ensures the industry s social, economic and environmental sustainability should be the basis of the Smart and sustainable mobility strategy which the European Commission is planning to launch soon. And what is the EU risking if it does not meet these expectations for workers-oriented recovery? We saw that the financial crisis of 2008 and the austerity measures that followed brought the rise of inequalities, and consequently, the advancement of right-wing populism. We are already witnessing attempts, by governments in Europe, to use these times of crisis to put democracy on hold. We can still reverse this trend, but we need to act fast, and with a plan. Because we still need the EU – the EU based on solidarity and respect for its citizens, and for the transport workers that, even in times of crisis, keep Europe moving.

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