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Open letter to EU Transport Ministers

Given the upcoming transport policies and discussions revolving around the recovery of the transport industry, the ETF would like to address to you an open letter underlining the shortcomings of current and past policies. COVID-19 has exposed unsustainable practices, and it is now time to shape a fair future transport policy.

The European Commission's decision to frame the future transport policy under the European Green Deal clearly indicates that environmental protection and the fight against climate change will be the priorities addressed through the new policy proposals.

We, at the ETF, a 5-million- transport worker-strong organisation, firmly believe that it is high time to act. There is no choice here. And, we are fully aware that the future of our jobs depends on how quickly and effectively we stop climate change.

So far, Transport policies have not succeeded in achieving sustainability. One of the reasons for this is that they have deregulated instead of regulating. They have pushed down the price of transport instead of internalisation of external costs. They have pushed in the direction of a race to the bottom where extreme low-cost models, both in freight and passenger transport, have spread thanks to dubious business models and social dumping.

The mantra based on liberalisation and more competition has brought nothing but unsustainability.

The slogan we hear neverendingly is 'Future of transport is green!'. Dare we say: 'Future of transport is fair!'

Fair to the workers that move people and goods, fair to the environment, fair to the citizens that deserve fair mobility and fair to those companies that play according to the rules. Future policies that only look at the environmental side of transport without tackling the social and economic dimension will fail because they need to start by tackling the root of the problem.

In 2018 the ETF launched the Fair Transport campaign to give visibility to our claims for a fairer transport sector for the men and women who work in it. During a year, our affiliates took action in their countries and at the workplace, and many coordinated transnational



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actions were carried out. The campaign culminated with several thousands of transport workers marching through the streets of Brussels to claim fair transport.

Unfortunately, not much has changed since then. Today, we are facing a full-blown pandemic, and COVID-19 has laid bare the cracks in the foundation of transport, and our transport workers have had enough!

For decades, companies and policy-makers alike have repeated that transport work has no added value. And yet, suddenly transport workers are referred to as key workers and are being applauded and called heroes. Despite this, many of them were fired by companies that have taken advantage of the crisis to lower working conditions. They were denied access to toilets while their working time has been extended. They were denied access to social security because of their precarious contracts. They were not given the right information and were often not provided with the personal protective equipment to work safely.

While moving goods and passengers in cities, across countries and all around Europe, transport workers have paid the price for an internal market that was built without protection for the weakest.

Instead of making transport more attractive for workers by improving working conditions, companies and policy-makers have been continuously looking for more opportunities to exploit the weakest. Transport workers have been denigrated by employers, by customers and by politicians.

All transport sectors suffer from social dumping practices, and working conditions in transport have been steadily worsening over the last decade. Transport policies have pushed for growing liberalisation and have incentivised competition, pushing for a race to the bottom to the detriment of workers. The situation has been exacerbated by the development of an internal market built without a robust social dimension, allowing for the propagation of dubious business models based on social shopping within the EU.

Fighting social dumping in transport is one of the pillars within our overarching strategy to shape a fair future for the sector. Making sure that the implementation of technological developments is done in a way that put workers at the centre is another. Transport work has constantly been evolving over the last decades, and workers have learned new skills to adjust to the changing nature of their work. For the ETF, it is vital that, from a very early stage, workers and their unions are involved in the introduction of new technologies. If this mostly falls within the remit of social partners at company, national and European level, the role of EU and national law-makers is crucial in setting the right legal settings and political climate. Policies on infrastructure financing, state aid, subsidies and taxation are some of the areas through which it is possible to address the issue of a fair transition in a context of technological development.



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The exit from the pandemic coincides with the phase of designing a new transport policy. It is now the time for open discussions and for listening to those who make Europe move. We are receiving worrying signals from the Commission on trade unions' inclusions in meaningful talks. We are also witnessing a disturbing 'business as usual' attitude from high-level EU officials, following the same past logics.

We cannot stay silent; we will make our voices heard.

Transport workers do not want to be called heroes. They do their jobs with professionalism. But they want a different transport sector, and they are ready to fight for it.

We, as the voice of 5 million workers in all transport modes, make a plea for a transparent and open process to shape the future transport policy. We must be included!

At the last video conference of EU Transport Ministers, crucial issues for the future of the sector were discussed, and we would like to point out our view on these issues as well as on the priorities to be tackled through the recovery plan. In the annex, you may find our sector-specific comments and input on investments and recovery funds.

One of the flaws of the EU crisis management so far has been the lack of willingness from several EU Member States to coordinate on measures to be taken in transport. We believe this has caused negative repercussions on transport workers' working conditions and safety, and we urge you to pursue a different approach in the future.

Kind regards,



Frank Moreels
ETF President



Livia Spera
ETF General Secretary



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ANNEX: ETF Comments on Presidency Summary of the 3rd videoconference for Transport Ministers

Investments and recovery funds

In your summary, you mention that investments in environmentally friendly transport modes are crucial. While this is of course needed, these investments must include social conditionality.

When recovery funds are used to refinance the operators and companies of the transport industry, then this must be conditional on the support these employers provide workers. Companies and operators must comply with a list of conditions. Any financial recovery aid to individual operators will depend on the latter proving a clean compliance record in terms of social and commercial rules. Among those:

- Compliance with health and safety requirements, not just for passengers, but also for transport workers;
- Adherence to sustainable business models, and consequently legal labour practices, proving that they do not dabble in shady employment schemes. For example, all letter box companies must be excluded from any investment and recovery scheme as they are destroying both environmental and social sustainability.
- Enforcement of the applicable collective bargaining agreements. This crisis must not be used as an excuse to scrap pay levels, rights and benefits achieved as a result of decades of negotiation and social dialogue.

In passenger transport there is an urgent need for strategies to regain the trust of passengers. Funds must be mobilised in order to adapt the configuration of vehicles, aircraft, stations and airports to the new norms imposed by the pandemic.

For the bus and coach sector, investments towards protective equipment and adequate accommodations for long-haul journeys are needed. Indeed, bus and coach drivers spending nights abroad will need to benefit from hotel accommodation that comply with post-pandemic health and safety norms. Moreover, operators will need to keep their fleets at the level of vehicle standards required by municipalities (Euro-5 and Euro-6 vehicle standards) otherwise they will no longer be able to access cities; investments will be needed to ensure this.

In freight transport, investments must be allotted to protective equipment and sanitary facilities in parking areas so that they comply with the new norms imposed by the pandemic. These investments must be accompanied by protective equipment for enforcers in the context of roadside checks.

Furthermore, for services of public interest (i.e. school buses, lines that are key to regional mobility and connectivity), there must be financial aid to help them meet the losses generated by the new social distancing rules where the rules impact the vehicle occupancy rates.



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Railways

Transport ministers agreed on the importance of further developing rail freight corridors and on the need to boost international rail passenger transport. We fully agree with this view and emphasise that plans to increase passenger transport by rail must include a plan for railway workers.

Transport ministers discussed the further development of rail freight corridors, and we would like to underline that solely focusing on competition and cost efficiency would only contribute to further proliferation of social dumping practices in the sector as well as more flexibility in the application of social standards.

Railway workers must be at the heart of any new policy for boosting passenger transport by rail, and this must be negotiated, at all levels, with the unions.

An inclusive railway policy must include regional networks and commuters' lines, and not only focus on high-speed/long-distance lines.

Maritime

We welcome the attention that was given by Transport Ministers to the problems of crew changes and repatriation and expect urgent action to follow these discussions. We call - yet again - upon Member States to find immediate solutions to enable crew changes in European ports through visa facilitation. More details on how this can be done are available [here](#).

According to the summary of the meeting, Transport Ministers referred to the need for *“continued greening, further digitalisation and automation of the sector.”* While, as said above, we are ready to negotiate the introduction of technological development in the sector, we would invite Member States to take a cautious approach to digitalisation and automation, considering the potential effects on safety, security, privacy, labour and the environment. These technological developments will bring about profound changes in the nature of work and the demand for skills. The Member States and the Commission must deal with these structural changes through a Just Transition, preparing the future, investigating the repercussion in terms of jobs and consequent losses in income tax and address the skills gap, involving workers' representatives and their trade unions.

On the “vision for the future” of waterborne transport, we want to reiterate that the COVID-19 crisis has revealed that seafarers, crew members and port workers are essential ‘front line’ workers. New business models along supply chains with sustainability at their heart are vital for quality of life around the globe to improve. The crisis has highlighted that waterborne transport workers require special attention and has highlighted the complexity of a global industry with unfettered mobility of labour and capital, in particular the well-known proliferation of flags of convenience which have not adequately assumed jurisdiction over the social matters concerning their ships. The crisis can be a “game-changer” to the extent that it allows us to act on these revelations and stop unscrupulous companies and ship owners, as well as inept



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flag States, from continuing to engage in unfair competition. We now have the opportunity to safeguard a level playing field and implement the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals aimed at ending poverty and achieving social and environmental progress. Any “vision for the future” of waterborne transport shall implement the European Pillar of Social Rights, and put fair working conditions and fair competition at its core.

Aviation

We welcome the Ministers’ commitment to a „fair social transition“ in ATM and call upon the governments to enforce social conditionality for any state aid, as said above. Only conditionality can ensure that the industry emerges strong and is part of a socially sustainable future.

The call from several Member States for a review of EU rules on Ownership and Control is mentioned in the summary. We believe it is of utmost importance not to allow any relaxation of Ownership and Control rules, as the crisis has shown that aviation is a strategic sector (ensuring transportation of medical supplies, facilitation of repatriation flights). Thus the 50% plus one rule on EU ownership should be maintained.



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