



Ursula von der Leyen
President of the European Commission
European Commission
Rue de la Loi / Wetstraat 200
1049 Brussels

Brussels, 20 September 2022

Dear President von der Leyen

Opening the EU labour market for third-country nationals as proposed in the 14 September “State of the European Union” speech

On behalf of the European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF), a pan-European trade union federation representing over 200 unions and 5 million workers, I am writing to you to remark that it is with great concern that we took note of your recent “State of the European Union” speech of Wednesday 14 September 2022. Your points regarding transport work, and work generally, were of particular interest, and it is on these that we develop upon specifically in the text below.

Since the onset of COVID-19 crisis, the effects of a shortage of transport workers have become visible to all segments of society. While it may be understood that the intensive pressures within transport that are causing operational crises began due to the onset of COVID-19, we would like to remind you that these crises are the consequence of decades of deliberate policy and political choices focused solely on competition and liberalisation which have undermined labour terms and conditions throughout transport – these crises began in maritime transport, worked through road and urban public transport and have finally reached aviation.

We are shocked that the solution proposed in your State of the European Union speech does not propose to deal with the fundamental cause of the issue – substandard working terms and conditions. Instead, you propose to open the exploitative European transport labour market to third country nationals. A lack of a basic floor in working terms and





conditions remain, and will remain, the cause of any labour shortage within transport. The aim must be to develop legislation and policies that engage with and fix substandard working conditions, rather than creating a system that perpetuates exploitation and promotes the exploitation of third-country nationals.

Therefore, a thorough assessment of legislation and policy surrounding competition and liberalisation in transport is necessary in order to discern and determine where changes should be made. Collective bargaining remains, and will always remain, one of the most effective ways to improve labour terms and conditions. It is incredibly contradictory for the European Commission to promote collective bargaining through tools - such as the Minimum Wage Directive, and the European Pillar of Social Rights – on the one hand, while also allowing the exploitation of workers on the other.

The liberalised European market has allowed an employment system to develop within transport that is akin to modern slavery – particularly for third-country nationals. The issue at hand is a lack of decent work, and the trans- and international nature of transport demands a trans- and international response. Jobs are not desirable as a direct consequence of liberalisation and competition policies enacted at the transnational scale. It is, for that reason, that we call on you to supplement your speech with concrete and targeted responses regarding the lack of decent work in transport.

We await your response.

Sincerely,

Livia Spera
General Secretary

