

Interview with the ETF President, Frank Moreels



1. If you had to pick up three priorities to address the current problem in transport work, what would these be?

“We need to put people at the centre of transport – workers and users/customers. We must re-shuffle transport so that its goals and priorities reflect these people. We need a pact, a political plan with clear objectives that puts people first - putting people first is a political choice, not a utopian ideal. If we have political willingness, it can be reached, and this is what ETF and all our unions are doing daily: working to put people, and transport workers, at the centre of transport and transport policy.

There is an inspection and enforcement problem in transport. The Mobility Package was the outcome of many discussions between trade unions and the European Parliament and Commission, and we came to a good result that would tackle social dumping and exploitation in transport. It was a good result, but the question is – what is enforced? Is legislation backed by inspections and enforcement? Legislation at the national level against social dumping and exploitation existed already before the Mobility Package, but there were also issues with sufficient inspections, and now we have the same problem. For example, in Belgium the 2nd largest transport company was caught by inspection services and police organising social dumping and even human trafficking. This began a whole discussion of whether there was to be an investigation and legal proceedings, but the only consequence was a €200,000 fine and a suspended sentence for the CEO. This is only one example of the lack of inspection and enforcement for social legislation. This opens it up for people to question the efficacy of legislation such as the Mobility Package.

The 2nd priority is to do something about precarity of jobs and illegal subcontracting. I agree with the commissioner in that regard, labour shortages exist because the jobs are unstable or badly paid. There are lots of issues in the eCommerce and logistics sector – precariousness and low-quality jobs are a big issue.

A 3rd priority is minimum wage. There was a big discussion in the European Union around minimum wage. We don't want that all workers throughout Europe are paid the same, we

need decent wages everywhere and we can achieve this through good CBAs. Is it too much to ask that all have a minimum wage to ensure them a decent living? And is it too much to ask that this should definitely apply to third-country nationals to ensure that there is no exploitation? This would create quality and attractive employment for all, and help lessen labour shortages in transport.

Some of the other panellists today advocate for further liberalisation, but they must understand that it's not normal to discover nearly 200 road freight drivers in Denmark in a camp living in unacceptable circumstances, as our unions did. This motivates us as unions to lobby for regulation and legislation that protects these people. We saw in maritime that P&O fired 800 workers through a video message and replaced them instantly with cheap labour – this is not only unacceptable, but not a viable method to organise transport.

We don't need to create regulation only for more bureaucracy, we must create efficient regulations to control and combat exploitation in transport. If we can clean up transport through regulation, we will answer the problem of labour shortages. Young people don't want to work in transport, because they understand that the conditions are bad. We must create quality transport to motivate young people to work in this sector. We must realise that there is a real problem in transport and that labour shortages will exist for a long time unless we adapt.

Moreover, labour should be organised in a way to make it accessible for all to do that job. It is not normal that baggage handlers suffer broken knees, shoulders, and backs at 45. We must reorganise work to make it more ergonomic. We must regulate to ensure the health and safety of workers. Baggage handlers lift more than 5 tonnes per day, and there are many other examples from different transport sectors - so we must reorganise this so that all workers, no matter men, or women, can work easily and safely, and then there will be more women in transport.”

- 2. Do you think that the EU has given up on employment in sectors such as shipping and long-distance truck driving? If not, how could we reverse the current situation, and how could we put an end to social dumping practices in transport?**

*“We, the ETF and its unions, are not giving up on this and we won't. But **the priority is clear: we decent working conditions and a standard for all workers, especially third-country nationals.** Why can't seafarers in European waters have the right to European salaries? Many European countries and the EU have given up on maritime employment and yet they haven't learned from past mistakes. We have been asking for a European maritime space for years now, where seafarers enjoy European conditions. We have continued along the same way with road and then urban public transport and now airports. This trend is becoming more and more visible and it is the duty of policy-makers to put an end to it. It is*



highly hypocritical to complain about flights being cancelled or delayed due to lack of staff while eyes are closed to bad working conditions.

*Policy decisions have created these situations. Aviation has been pushed to the extreme when it comes to liberalisation – extremely cheap, extreme competition, and working conditions and pay pushed all the way down. This created the chaos that we experienced last summer. There’s no magic wand to fix these problems, we need a profound review of the policies and a rethink of the sector overall. This is the only way to heal the illness in aviation. The same mistake should not be made in other sectors. The European Commission is currently revising the Train Drivers’ Directive. **ETF is highly concerned by several of the proposals the Commission makes, as they would seriously endanger the safety on railway workers and passengers and the viability of the sector as a whole.** They propose to lower the language requirement for drivers, which can lead, in the worst-case scenario, to serious emergency risks. European policy makers must listen to the expert advice of train drivers, they have the knowledge and expertise in making the job safe and attractive.”*

3. Modal shift has been a priority for EU and national transport policies for decades already. Why do you think this objective has not been reached and what should be done differently?

*“I believe there have been several issues, among them **underinvestment and privatisation, are the cause of the failure of modal shift.**”*

***We must make public transport more attractive than the car.** Public transport must be organised in a way to make it more attractive, that’s how simple it is. To make it more attractive, public transport must have more frequent journeys, at earlier and later times. This needs greater public investment but also a sector that is attractive for workers to work at these earlier and later times.*

*Road transport is very cheap and, while road freight is incentivised to shift to rail, **the price of road transport is kept artificially low** through rules not being enforced and unscrupulous companies undermining social benefits and working conditions to save money. The same is true for aviation.*

*There are high ambitions for the railway sector to play a key part in more sustainable transport systems, but **for rail to be able to live up to these expectations, the sector needs investments, not only in infrastructure and rolling stock, but especially also to attract and retain enough workers.**”*

4. We have seen many experiments in Spain and Germany offering low-fares for citizens, to encourage greater public ridership. This is linked to transport poverty, but trade unions have some doubts about the implementation of these plans. Could you please elaborate on this?

“Public transport is a public good and cannot be a profit-making activity. Public transport played a key role in guaranteeing mobility to essential workers and to allow low-income people access to jobs and services. The energy crisis brings another urgency to good public transport.

***But there is no public transport without workers,** and still public transport fails to attract enough workforce. The shortage of staff is becoming critical and this undermines any attempt at shifting ridership to public transport.*

*So, **in our view low and free fare should be regarded as a means of redistribution of wealth and applied in a targeted manner.** This approach ensures fare revenue and a certain balance. Low or free fares must also be planned and agreed upon in consultation with the social partners, and public transport must be compensated by other revenue sources to allow investment in infrastructure, fleet improvement, etc. Low and free fares must be accompanied by measures that ensure adequate levels of pay and working conditions and must be a part of long-term national strategies.”*

5. Were there any agreements among the panellists here today?

*“It is true that **we agreed to disagree on a lot of topics here today, but there have been many issues that we have found agreement.** Safe parking areas for drivers, this is something that we found agreement on. We need safe parking areas with decent facilities, where good food is available and accessible, and we should develop our agreements on this.*

*We disagreed on many topics, such as the investment in rail. While many rail services in Europe are state-owned, these states have disinvested in rail. We still have concrete examples of the outcomes of the privatisation of rail. So, **the dichotomy** told by some panellists today is false, it **is not between state-owned and private rail, but between invested and non-invested rail services and other public transport.***

*The commissioner and I agreed on the fact that **we need well-paid and well-protected workers in transport in order to make transport a sustainable and attractive sector for workers.** We have also agreed on the modal shift, we need to solve the problem of social dumping in freight transport, otherwise the modal shift and intermodality won't be*



successful, because it will still be too cheap to transport freight by road. So, we have agreed to clean up the trucking industry, and we have agreed that there is a lot of work to do on this. “