



To Mr. Tzitzikostas

Brussels, 20 September 2024

Dear Mr. Tzitzikostas,

On behalf of the European Transport Workers' Federation, the trade union organisation representing 5 million workers in land, sea, and air across our continent, I would like to offer our congratulations on your nomination as Commissioner-designate for Sustainable Transport and Tourism.

As I am sure you know, transport is a vital sector for Europe. It directly provides millions of jobs and supports our economies. It encourages balanced economic growth by providing economic actors with effective means of reaching suppliers and customers. Similarly, the transport sector allows Europeans to access education, work, culture, and leisure, as well as promoting social and territorial cohesion across our Union. Transport also represents a key aspect of the just ecological transition.

However, **transport workers in Europe have increasingly faced issues of poor and deteriorating working conditions, low pay, and long hours.** Decades of underinvestment, liberalisation and fragmentation have undermined the attractiveness of the sector, with severe labour shortages emerging in recent years. Shortages of good jobs are an undeniable problem in almost every aspect of transport and EU policymakers have a key role to play in addressing this issue.

Whereas your predecessor was primarily tasked by President Von Der Leyen to green the transport sector, your mission letter is almost entirely focussed on boosting the competitiveness of the sector. Now as in 2019 **the wellbeing of transport workers, their families, and communities seems not to be the priority for the European Commission.** Coupled with the lack of a Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs, the low priority given to employment questions as part of the formation of the current Commission is extremely worrying for workers across Europe.

**The transport workers who keep Europe moving, who were universally recognised as key essential workers during the Pandemic, face another 5 years of working conditions, wages, and investments continuing to deteriorate.**

In her letter to you, President Von Der Leyen grouped together working conditions, transport poverty, and passenger rights under the term of “the social dimension of mobility.” While the fight against transport poverty and the promotion of passenger rights are important, **the lack of good transport jobs represents a fundamental threat to the long-term sustainability of the sector.** Poor working conditions and low wages have drastically reduced the attractiveness of transport jobs, leading to the crippling labour shortages we see across our continent.

Transport workers need urgent EU **action to end the abusive employment of aircrew, notably through wet leasing in aviation by revising Regulation 1008/2008, to strengthen enforcement of the Mobility Package through a stronger ELA and a dedicated EU Road Transport Agency, and end abusive subcontracting across supply chains,** just to name a few. One of the sectors most affected by shortages is ground handling. Here, we are strongly in favour of a new ground handling

directive that would enforce mandatory transfer of staff with guaranteed working conditions in case of a change of provider, respect and enforcement of collective agreements at airports, as well as improved safety and service quality.

Transport professions are set apart from work in other sectors in many ways. This means that labour legislation and enforcement methods need to be tailored to the specificities of this highly-mobile workforce. **We need specific rules to protect transport workers' rights and enforcement capacities that are able to efficiently ensure compliance with these rules in a cross-border context.** This is especially the case with regards to posting workers and the coordination of social security systems. A lack of enforcement of existing regulations represents an indirect subsidy to unscrupulous employers and a distortion in the Single Market – the Commission must therefore step in when Member States are unable or unwilling to enforce the social acquis.

It goes without saying that **without transport workers there is no transport.** The successful achievement of the other goals President Von Der Leyen has set therefore depend on resolving this question.

Furthermore, while the focus on competitiveness is logical for those transport sectors exposed to unbalanced third-country competition, notably long-distance aviation, deep sea shipping and transshipment ports, there is little sense in applying the term to intra-European transport. Moreover, competitiveness must not be reached through a race to the bottom, but rather the opposite, through investments in high-quality jobs, skills and infrastructure.

**Mobility within our Union is a fundamental right and vital socio-economic glue holding our society and economy together.** Its value as a strategic infrastructure was recognised by President Von Der Leyen when she tasked you with reinforcing transport security and military mobility. However, this goal stands in total contrast with the Commission's continued insistence on the dogma of marketisation and liberalisation, which has brought fragmentation, inefficiencies, and worsening working conditions across the sector. For this reason, **we call on you to order a full evaluation of the effects of the Four Railway Packages on the state of the EU rail sector in both passenger and freight.**

We emphasise public transport for a reason – **it remains the most sustainable, economically efficient, and socially just form of mobility.** President Von Der Leyen's emphasis on high-speed railways and Trans-European Transport corridors covers only a part of the sector. Often forgotten, urban and intra-regional mobility represents the vast majority of trips and is key to move people from private to collective transport. Since 1995, Europe has built 9,000 km of high-speed rail lines, while at the same time losing over 13,000 km of regional railways. Urban public transport operators are facing a shortage of over 100,000 workers, and investment in shared mobility has plummeted. **We need leadership and policy coherence from the European Commission to promote high-quality, well-funded public transport solutions. Achieving the objectives of the Green Deal and promoting efficient public transport are incompatible with austerity policies.**

Regarding specific sectors, we are pleased that you have been tasked with developing an EU Port Strategy. **This must take account of the working conditions of dockers and other port workers, ensuring that port jobs remain attractive for young workers entering the labour market.** We have also demanded that there is **proper monitoring and mitigation of the negative effects on**

**employment of the ETS in shipping**, a concern shared with other organisations in the sector. The current system allows for carbon leakage and displacement of traffic to neighbouring non-EU ports.

**In Air Traffic Management, we must highlight that the current crisis is due to a lack of trained staff, and not “inefficiencies”**, as written by President Von Der Leyen. Nevertheless, the ETF and its affiliated unions representing ATM staff are ready to engage in comprehensive dialogue with the Commission and Member States on the subject.

We hope that you agree with us **that transport must be included in the new Clean Industrial Deal and Competitiveness Fund**, given its strategic value to our economy and importance for decarbonisation. Europe is facing a shortfall in transport investment of hundreds of billions of Euros. Similarly, state aid and competition rules must be adapted to allow transport firms to adapt to the changing economic environment globally. **A new industrial policy for transport must combine investments in infrastructures with the support to companies employing workers domiciled in the EU to compete globally. Obviously, such support must be conditional to the creation of good jobs and the respect of labour rights.**

Without decisive action during this Commission’s mandate to support the transport sector and the workers that keep Europe on the move, the EU faces a very real danger to its mobility, social cohesion, economic development, and green ambitions. It is therefore my sincere hope that the ETF will be able to cooperate with you in addressing these crises.

Sincerely,



Livia Spera,  
General Secretary, European Transport Workers’ Federation