

Ministers of Transport of the Member States of the European Union

Ms Adina Vălean,
Member of the European Commission
Commissioner for Transport

By email only

Date: Berlin,
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Dear colleagues,
Dear Commissioner,

Thank you very much for your valuable contributions to the discussions taking place in the framework of the Informal Video Conference of the EU Ministers of Transport on 8 December 2020. The ambitious agenda and the vivid discussions have once again confirmed that our political exchange of views is just as important in times of crises and pandemic as it is in normal times.

The topics discussed at the video conference reflected the German Council Presidency's priorities in the field of transport, ranging from overcoming the COVID-19 pandemic to advocating climate change mitigation and future-proof mobility. Besides the resilience of the transport system to crises and the maintenance of freight traffic flows, we have deliberately also chosen to focus our joint discussions on the issues of the future – sustainability, innovation and digital transformation. Today, more than ever, making the European economy fit for the future in global competition and ensuring the well-being of our citizens depends on us taking the right decisions for a more innovative, sustainable and crisis-proof transport system.

The revision of the Eurovignette Directive represents an important contribution to creating such a more innovative and more sustainable transport system. Against this backdrop, I am pleased that a clear majority supported the compromise proposed by the Presidency in the policy debate on 8 December 2020. The negotiating mandate that has since been granted in the Committee of Permanent Representatives paves the way for the trilogues with the European Parliament and the European Commission. The aim is to strengthen the user pays principle and to better take account of environmental and climate aspects, without limiting the necessary national scope for action. In this way, we can lay the groundwork for a more climate-friendly road transport while, at the same time, provide important incentives for innovations in vehicles. I would like to wish the incoming Portuguese Council Presidency already now every success in the upcoming trilogues and assure it of my support.

A further priority of the video conference was the policy debate on the Single European Sky (SES), which resulted in general support for the objectives of the revision of the existing legal framework. The aviation sector was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic like no other transport sector. The reform of the SES must therefore introduce greater flexibility into the system so that we can respond adequately to traffic flow variations in the future. Moreover, the potentials of the digital transformation are to be exploited to a greater extent and stronger incentives for environmental and climate protection are to be provided. At the same time, it became clear, however, that there was still a need for examination regarding some aspects of

the European Commission's proposals for amendment. I trust in the Portuguese Presidency to advance the solutions that are required for a Council agreement in the light of our discussions in the next few months.

Other important reports that were noted by the Ministers of Transport during the video conference were:

- New Mobility Approach – Information by the Presidency;
- Current proposals on rail transport – Information by the Presidency;
- Investment in the extension of the European rail network – Information by the Luxembourg delegation;
- Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on air passenger rights – Information by the Presidency;
- Crew changes in maritime transport – Information by the European Commission;
- Social aspects in air transport – Information by the Austrian delegation;
- High-Level Dialogue on Automated and Connected Driving – Information by the Finnish Delegation;
- Joint declaration by the Visegrád group on the forthcoming TEN-T revision – Information by the Polish delegation;
- Passenger Locator Form – Information by the European Commission;
- Work programme of the incoming Presidency – Information by the Portuguese delegation.

Dear Colleagues, dear Commissioner, with a view to the German EU Council Presidency that is now coming to an end, I would like to express my sincere thanks for your support, for the large turnout at the virtual events of the Presidency on all modes of transport and for your important contributions.

Together, we have succeeded in advancing crucial dossiers and initiating future debates, despite the difficult circumstances resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Here, in addition to the issues above, I would like to mention, for example, the adoption of Council Conclusions on compliance with the necessary hygiene and infection control measures to ensure cross-border collective passenger transport in July 2020 as well as of Council Conclusions on benchmarks for a pandemic and crisis contingency plan for the European freight transport sector in October 2020. We have clearly demonstrated that the European Ministers of Transport are able to act and together can lay the foundations for a more coordinated approach also in the complicated circumstances of the crisis.

Moreover, by presenting the New Mobility Approach, I was especially keen to provide an impetus for the discussion on a modern, climate-friendly and future-proof transport policy in Europe. These discussions have shown that we are in agreement on the objective of a modern and future-proof transport policy for Europe. However, it has also become clear that we have sometimes different views on how to get there. In particular with regard to the European Commission's strategy for sustainable and intelligent mobility, which has been presented in the meantime, and the individual proposals for action, we must continue to discuss the issues of the New Mobility Approach. I am confident that, in a constructive exchange, we will find good joint solutions to the many challenging issues regarding transport policy.

Rail transport, a focus of the German EU Council Presidency, plays a crucial role on the road to decarbonization and a sustainable modernisation of transport. We would like to continue our efforts to strengthen rail transport in the forthcoming European Year of Rail 2021, in particular with the further implementation of the TEE 2.0. I am therefore very pleased that the Portuguese EU Council Presidency has announced that rail transport will also be a priority of its Presidency.

I look forward to continuing to work with you and hope that the situation during the Portuguese Presidency will again permit a direct exchange with you at a Council of the Ministers of Transport in Brussels or Luxembourg.

I wish you a blessed Christmas, all the best and especially good health for the New Year.

Yours sincerely,

(sgd) Andreas Scheuer