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Dear Minister,

Happy New Year, I wish you good health and success in 2021!

As recently as December, in our videoconference chaired by Minister Scheuer, we affirmed support for stronger coordination and a uniform approach for emergency measures, and contingency plans at European level. But I am writing to you now to stress that recent developments show the fragility of the supply chains yet again, and once again COVID requires our full attention.

While precautionary measures are necessary to protect the health of citizens, they need to be proportionate and avoid the disruption of logistics and essential transport. The disruptions in March 2020 following the uncontrolled closing of internal borders triggered the Green Lanes concept¹, which has since been reconfirmed and made multimodal². We all remember that situation that resulted in empty shelves, panic reactions, desperate consumers and businesses. We also need to recall that it was the capacity of our overall transport and logistics system, particularly with the Green Lanes concept at its heart, that played a crucial part of overcoming this “panic buying” episode, as we were able to reassure consumers that goods would continue to flow.

However without frictionless movement of goods, the functioning of the internal market and uninterrupted supply chains, including of essential goods like food, medicines and vaccines, is threatened. Restrictions placed on transport services have an important knock-on effect on production, consumption, other service sectors as well as further damaging consequences for employment. The appearance of new virus mutations today is testing the concept again! And my very firm view is that we should resist taking restrictive measures. Indeed, the measures taken before Christmas to test drivers en masse given the spread of the UK variant provide hitherto unavailable evidence³. The relatively low positivity rate (0.3%) resulting from the systematic testing of truck drivers before crossing the Channel⁴ demonstrates that freight transport staff are a

¹ Communication from the Commission on the implementation of the Green Lanes under the Guidelines for border management measures to protect health and ensure the availability of goods and essential service, C/2020/1897
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020XC0324%2801%29&qid=1610121711004>

² Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council upgrading the transport Green Lanes to keep the economy going during the COVID-19 pandemic resurgence, COM/2020/685
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0685&qid=1610121711004>

³ Recommendation 2020/2243 adopted on 22 December 2020 aimed amongst others to facilitate the movement of goods between EU Member States and the United Kingdom.
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32020H2243&qid=1609884468489>

⁴ Out of the 33,783 tests carried out between 22-31 December, 102 cases were positive.

fairly safe group because they do not tend to mix with the local citizens as they transit a country, road haulage companies and drivers generally obey the applicable health rules. Moreover, the exceptional temporary measures such as derogations and exemptions all help keep these essential workers away from potential sources of the virus.

Today, the vast majority of Member States are continuing to respect the Green Lanes, and are excluding freight and transport workers from new requirements. However, others are now introducing requirements for testing, quarantines or other restrictions and not only for transport workers that have been passing through the United Kingdom. This creates a burden for the sector, and puts the Green Lanes principles at risk (as such tests tend to be carried out or controlled at borders). In addition, because these new measures are taken unilaterally, without coordination, they confront the freight industry with an ever-changing patchwork of rules with the risk that transport workers face being subject to different testing regimes while travelling through Europe, paying penalties and ultimately quarantine measures if the patchwork of rules are not followed. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to keep Green Lanes operational at all times.

The Commission continues monitoring the waiting times at the border crossing points and – in the spirit of the successful Green Lanes initiative – stands ready to coordinate whenever traffic issues related to COVID-19 arise. In this monitoring exercise the recently relaunched Galileo Green Lanes mobile application and the national transport contact points network will play a key role. Member States authorities and transport operators are encouraged to use the mobile app in order that traffic and border crossing time can be better predicted and actions planned in advance.

Freight transport and indeed industry as a whole needs reassurance that – while taking all necessary safeguarding measures to protect health – essential services are guaranteed. Member States should always recognise transport workers as essential personnel and exempt them from the obligation to undergo testing and quarantine measures. We need to keep Green Lanes operational at all times, and this is even more important now, when new checks at borders for travellers are in place and essential goods such as vaccines need to be distributed quickly around Europe.

Today we have adopted in College a new communication on “A united front to beat COVID-19”, in which we set out our views on speeding up vaccination, dealing with variants of the virus and ramping up testing. The communication clearly reiterates the system of Green Lanes to keep transport moving, to ensure the free movement of goods, thus avoiding supply chain disruptions.

I trust you will continue to support this important policy.

Yours faithfully,



Adina VĂLEAN