

Abolishing tests and any forms of registration for professional drivers necessary for preserving supply chains in the EU Single Market

European Union's Single Market is under the heaviest pressure ever, and with the COVID-19 pandemic continuing in series of waves, we are running the risk of repeating mistakes of the spring 2020 when disproportionate unilateral restrictions within the EU brought more damage to the society than gains in controlling the virus.

Few days ago Germany added new countries to their high-risk Covid-19 list. It means that as of 14.02.2021 every truck driver entering Germany not only from the UK, Ireland or Portugal but also from the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Tirol (Austria) needs to present a Covid-19 test. Immediately, that caused huge delays at German borders with Czech Republic and Austria. To be tested, thousands of truck drivers need wait many hours in long queues outside, in a freezing cold and snow. In some cases they need to pay for tests (about 50 € each). The main TEN-T corridor from Northern Italy to Southern Germany has successfully been closed, since Austria decided to organize tests yet before its border with Italy, on Italian side. In order to enter Germany, drivers are obliged to show the test result no later than 48 hours prior to border crossing. That means that drivers regularly crossing those borders need to run the same tests every few days. As a result, truck drivers in the EU have become the most frequently Covid-19 tested profession all over the globe, despite the fact that positive tests results ratio among truck drivers is only about 0,2%!

Last year, just before Christmas, France closed its borders with the UK demanding Covid-19 tests from truck drivers. More than 20 000 drivers were held hostage in Dover area for many days during Christmas time due to that incomprehensible decision. All together, we should do everything we can to avoid repeating that sad scenario.

In addition, many Member States demand from truck drivers several forms of registration every time they cross its borders: different forms to enter the country, different forms to drive during curfew, different forms when coming from different countries. These rules change very often and it is almost impossible to keep up with them. Especially, when they are available in national language only. It is an unnecessary red tape for the hauliers struggling with many other problems at the same time.

Therefore, we call to abolish requirements for mandatory testing every professional driver without exceptions and various forms of registration for professional transport drivers across the entire EU, in order to preserve supply chains in our Single Market and to keep undisrupted transport of goods.

Implementing such solution would be in line with the European Commission's Communication on the Green Lanes from 28th of October 2020, which stipulates that freight vehicles should not

face more than 15 minutes total delay in crossing internal borders of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) network irrespective of the goods they carry and set out accompanying provisions for transport workers. The situation described above clearly shows the infringement of this rule.

Furthermore, in accordance with point 19(b) of Council Recommendation (EU) 2020/1475 of 13th of October 2020, transport personnel should be designated and accepted as essential workers and service providers by all Member States authorities and should not be required to undergo quarantine while exercising their essential functions.

Moreover, according to the Commission's Proposal from 25th of January 2021 for a Council Recommendation amending Council Recommendation (EU) 2020/1475, *“by way of derogation, transport workers and transport service providers pursuant to point 19(b) should in principle not be required to undergo a test for COVID-19 infection in line with points 17(b) and 17a. Where a Member State requires transport workers and transport service providers to undergo a test for COVID-19 infection, rapid antigen tests should be used, and this should not lead to transport disruptions. Should transport or supply chain disruptions occur, Member States should lift or repeal any such systematic testing requirements immediately in order to preserve the functioning of the “Green Lanes”. Transport workers and transport service providers should not be required to undergo quarantine in line with points 17(a) and 17a while exercising this essential function.”*.

Therefore, we appeal to the Commission, the Council, the European Parliament and to all Member States to undertake all necessary steps to bring this provision into life as soon as possible. We cannot allow the COVID-19 pandemic to dismantle our strongly integrated value chains and Single Market, which was built with so much effort and struggle by at least one generation of committed Europeans – not only politicians but also our brave and strong enterprises. Similarly, we must not turn a blind eye on significant problems faced by transport companies and professional drivers at the borders in such difficult times.

This is why we hope that the EU institutions and Member States will find enough wisdom and courage to do what is necessary to abolish tests and any forms of registration for professional drivers. Europe needs it now!