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## **Time for real Europeans to stand up!**

Pandemics do not stop at country borders; this is a clear lesson the COVID-19 crisis is teaching us.

This is a global crisis which merits a global response, and most certainly a European political answerer. As trade unionists, it comes naturally to us to say that there is only one answer possible: solidarity! We are learning that the market will not solve it all, and that solidarity among citizens, institutions or countries is the most powerful tool we have to survive.

Together with the workers, we represent, we, the European Transport Workers' Federation, are aware of the strategic importance of the transport sector, even more so during these hard times.

This crisis is bringing us closer to the unimaginable. Hospitals, pharmacies and supermarkets risk running out of essential supplies. Empty shelves, lack of medicines and safety materials are a common fear. If transport came to a complete halt, this crisis would deteriorate. It would be a disaster.

Another lesson we should learn from this crisis is about the real value of transport workers.

Together with workers in health care, retail and food production, transport workers are helping us survive this crisis. This is their role and their duty: no one is applauding them and they do not see themselves as heroes, but they are proud of the work they do.

This is a wake-up call! When this crisis is over: employers, institutions and citizens cannot go back to 'business-as-usual'! The transport workers driving a cab, a bus, a truck or a train, piloting a plane or managing air traffic, ensuring safety on your flight or train journey, unloading ships or planes, manning a ship or a barge, delivering goods directly to your place, deserve respect and fair working conditions!

Today, there is no respect! This crisis is making the cracks in the foundation of the transport sector in Europe even more visible. And workers are paying the price!

Just like anyone else, transport workers are scared of getting sick! And they often do not receive any protective equipment or information from their employers on how to protect themselves while at work.



**President** Frank Moreels

**Vice Presidents** Alexander Kirchner  
Ekaterina Yordanova

**Acting General Secretary** Livia Spera



Some of them don't even have a choice between working and staying at home, as they are not entitled to social safety nets. If we look at all those employed by platforms and letterbox companies, or those on bogus self-employment: It's social dumping at its best, in all transport modes!

Truck drivers blocked at closed borders, at terminals as Calais, or in parking areas as Goordijk, in the port of Antwerp, are packed together in situations where it is impossible to follow health regulations. They are often even denied the right to go to the toilet! We have all seen the notices put up by shameless companies forbidding drivers to use their facilities.

Third-country citizens working in transport companies in the EU, who were already suffering appalling working conditions in normal times are now left to fend for themselves on roads and parking areas. We see workers travelling back home in small vans, despite all the social distancing rules.

It is clear that the various forms of social dumping applied to transport are not only a social problem, but can also exacerbate the sanitary emergency.

Dubious business models are killing people today in Europe!

But (transport) workers expect more, and they will remember this when they cast their vote! They expect Europe to be a "solidarity zone" where it is not only citizens helping each other - and honestly, we are happy to witness this massive flow of solidarity happening all over Europe. Transport workers, those who, by moving passengers and freight, make Europe a reality, expect to see members states organising the idea of European alliance for solidarity.

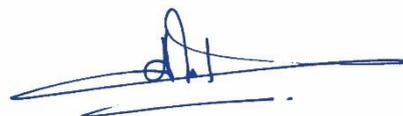
What are we seeing instead? The attempts, in several EU countries, to take advantage of the crisis to put forward authoritarian measures or to suspend social and labour rights. National, or even regional self-interest being used by populist parties as a weapon to get a few more votes in the next elections. The austerity lions roaring again against concrete EU measures that would help some of our countries fight off this health emergency with dignity.

This crisis will certainly mark the beginning of a new era for the EU. A brighter future based on solidarity or further disintegration.

Transport workers of Europe are not asking for *less Europe* but *another kind of Europe*. A European space where social rights and labour protection are as high on the agenda as free movement of goods and people.



Livia Spera – General Secretary of ETF



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