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Transport

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Introductory Speech Violeta Bulc

Chairman, Honorable Members of the TRAN committee,

It is a great privilege to speak to you today. Today's dynamic society has more and more demands for connectivity, mobility and global awareness.

That makes transport an essential backbone to our economy and to our lives.

Transport drives growth and creates jobs.

While preparing for this hearing today, I could not help noticing that transport is somehow taken for granted. I would dare to say - **underestimated** - in Europe today.

It tends to be seen as a problem, rather than a solution and as a creator for growth.

I will do my best to change that kind of attitude, by working with you, the European Parliament, **to give transport the importance that it deserves.**

You are already aware of this importance, I know, since you voted to triple the infrastructure funding for transport for the current budget period. I am fully aware of the obligations that such a commitment puts in front of us. And I hope you will recognize me as a passionate advocate of this vital sector.

To start with, transport needs to be **friendly to the environment**, it needs to be **competitive** and it also needs to be **inclusive** - because let's not forget that transport is ultimately about people, the travelling public, workers: you and me.

Then, as President-elect Juncker has made clear, the work of his new European Commission will evolve around the need to **create jobs, growth and maintain social fairness**.

We need to keep these elements in mind at all times and integrate them into every aspect of transport policy. Everything we do has to create value – economic, social and environmental.

My previous work has provided me with extensive experience and a sense of un-doubtful **importance of networks**. When developing strategies with clients and municipalities, for example, logistics were always essential. Smooth supply chains embedded in a wider, efficient networks: **these are the key to our modern life**.

However, as anyone involved – as I have been myself – with innovation will know, it works best when there is **high-quality and functioning infrastructure** to support it. In the case of transport, its infrastructure should be properly integrated and made technically compatible regardless of the mode of transport that people use: road, rail, air and water. There is a lot of reason for innovative business modelling, as well.

I will continue to support optimal connectivity across Europe, in an integrated conceptual system. This is why it is so crucial to turn the Trans-European Transport Network into a reality, to complete it by building the missing links and removing the bottlenecks.

I promise that we will advance on this.

I also promise that, if appointed, I will lead the way to find the best solutions for an integrated and prosperous modern European transport.

From my own professional background as an engineer and entrepreneur, I see that **we can do more for transport to benefit from new technologies** – ICT in particular – while respecting Europe's traditionally high social and environmental standards. If used properly, ICT can be an excellent instrument leading to sustainable success. Let me just mention few of the projects: E-call, River information system, ERTMS (European Railways transport management system), to name only a few.

Transport networks are, and will remain, a key element of Europe's single market: the heart of the supply chain, providing free flows of goods and people.

Their smooth high-quality interconnections, modern and functioning infrastructure, are vital to growth.

They are part of the solution to Europe's economic recovery.

Should I be approved by the Parliament as European Commissioner, I would use my experience, determination and commitment to make sure that transport brings jobs and growth and contributes to the EU green agenda.

Let me turn now to the principles that will underpin my priorities for the next five years.

I will start by returning to **the importance of co-modality and interoperability**, because I would hope you agree that **the future of transport is to be connected – on every level**.

To achieve this, we will need to look at ways to promote **multi-modal journey planners, integrated ticketing services**, tracking of goods, real carbon measurements.

Data availability and protection, and their acceptance, also need to be tackled.

We will need what I would call a **‘technology push’**, funded by **public and private investment**, involving as many parts of the transport sector as possible.

If confirmed, I will push all types of organisations to innovate in transport: **cities, large companies, SMEs, new start-ups, public transport providers, and Member States**.

Cities and urban areas are a good innovation test bed. Take my own city, Ljubljana – which now has 5 hybrid buses and 20 buses running on methane, thanks to the EU's CIVITAS project. The city authorities are now planning cleaner, safer and more reliable public transport services.

The **Smart Cities** initiative, in particular, has a great role to play in this regard. Its momentum has to be kept up to make the most out of all the opportunities of transport, energy and ICT sectors to **improve Europe's urban environment**.

But I would also like to emphasise that Smart Cities are not about technology as such, but about social innovation. Therefore, the close cooperation of many stakeholders will be needed in order to understand and prioritise and set the right direction.

For the future, Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) will play a major role: they have great potential in terms of safety, with smart vehicles and infrastructure.

They also have significant environmental advantages since, by helping to avoid unnecessary journeys and empty vehicles, they can raise transport's energy efficiency by keeping emissions to a minimum.

And as President-elect Juncker has said, if Europe is to have affordable energy available in the years to come, it is important that we strengthen the share of renewables and alternative fuels in our energy usage.

Transport has an important role to play in that ambition since Europe is still hugely over-dependent on oil as a power source.

We also cannot forget that transport has its part to play in making sure that the EU meets its wider commitments to cut greenhouse gas emissions.

Alternative fuels are now firmly at the heart of EU transport policy. The challenge now is to get things up and running on the ground. That means making sure enough appropriate infrastructure gets built so that we create the conditions for these fuels to power transport into the future.

But let us not forget the important role that technology is also going to play in this subject.

Honourable Members,

One thing we have learned from the past is that failing to invest in transport infrastructure is a mistake that has long-term consequences.

We cannot assume that transport services will always be there for us, or be safe, if we don't maintain them.

In the EU, these public investments have been falling since the late 1970s.

Maintenance budgets and infrastructure quality across the EU have diminished.

I will develop policies to promote integration across different transport sectors based on the principle of general infrastructure costs being funded by those who use them.

This will generate revenue and help to “green” the transport system.

Without investment, we risk losing our global competitive edge. By using innovative financing instruments to target investments in key infrastructure, we can help to create jobs and boost growth and competitiveness, at a time when Europe needs them the most.

The **€300 billion investment plan proposed by President-elect Juncker** will address this financing need, create immediate jobs and set the conditions for the respectful environment.

Of course, we should make the best use of instruments already available within the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), as well as find ways to complement national and regional funding from the European Structural and Investment Funds.

Honourable Members,

If I had to sum up my future agenda to you in one word, it would be: **people**.

We need to be aware of social issues and transport’s impact on the labour force, workplace, workers’ health and safety, and their life-work balance.

For those working in the transport sector, social conditions need to be fair.

The transport sector is, on the whole, an ageing one. Particularly in land transport. In addition, there are relatively **low numbers of female workers**. Clearly we want to avoid future critical skill shortages, despite high unemployment in the rest of the EU economy.

So it is important to make transport an attractive profession, especially for younger people. I will study what kind of Europe-wide action could be taken to improve training, career prospects and to ensure quality jobs in transport.

We also need fairness to guarantee equal conditions. I am also strongly opposed to social dumping. The fairness of social conditions, as well as of the internal market, is essential.

Lastly, I would like to say a few words on the **single market**. It is a founding principle. It is what the European Union is all about.

This is Europe's greatest achievement for business. It is the engine to drive growth and jobs to help and stimulate the gradual economic recovery.

But it is equally vital to remove the remaining technical and administrative barriers to make sure that transport services can really operate across the whole EU without national boundaries.

This is why I intend to work actively with you and with the Council to achieve the rapid adoption of the Single European Sky and 4th railway packages.

Chairman, Honourable Members,

You may see in me an open-minded commissioner-to-be who is devoted to solving problems in a collaborative and innovative way, with you together, who knows that all that we do, we do it for us, the people and to improve our lives.

I can only hope that this resonates with you, as well.

Thank you for your attention, and I am now ready to answer your questions.