

COVID-19: Council agrees its positions on transport relief measures

The EU is working on a set of urgent measures to **help companies and authorities in the aviation, rail, road and shipping sectors to weather the impact of the coronavirus crisis**. Today, member states' ambassadors approved a mandate for the presidency to negotiate with the European Parliament four legislative proposals designed to provide flexibility, ease the administrative burden and reduce financial costs for transport businesses.

The transport sector is one of the hardest hit by this crisis, and any measures to bring relief are a priority for the Croatian presidency. The Council worked intensively, and has been able to finalise its position on all these proposals within ten days. We will now work with the European Parliament to reach a rapid conclusion of the measures, so as to provide legal certainty for both operators and administrations.

Oleg Butković, Croatian Minister for the Sea, Transport and Infrastructure, President of the Council

The proposal on **aviation** amends **air carrier licencing** rules in case of financial problems caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to avoid unnecessary administrative burdens. It also introduces a derogation to the procedures used by member states to impose **traffic rights restrictions** to deal with emergencies resulting from unforeseeable and unavoidable circumstances. The derogation will clarify that a member state may temporarily keep a justified and proportionate emergency measure in place for a period longer than 14 days, but the measure may only remain in force for as long as there are public health risks clearly linked to the coronavirus pandemic. The Commission may suspend this action at the request of any member state involved or on its own initiative. In addition, new temporary rules on **ground-handling services** will help airports to continue operating in the event of a ground-handling company going bankrupt, by introducing a direct procedure for the selection of service providers. They will also help airports avoid complex tenders by allowing for the extension of contracts.

The proposal to extend the transposition deadline for the rail safety and interoperability directives of the **fourth railway package** will give the rail sector and the authorities the flexibility to better face the current circumstances caused by the coronavirus outbreak. Under the Council mandate, the transposition deadline has been extended to 31 December 2020.

Amending the **port services** regulation will help ship operators by relaxing the existing rule that requires member states to ensure that a port infrastructure charge is levied. The amendment will give ports the possibility to waive, suspend, reduce or defer these charges for port users.

The Council mandate stipulates that this temporary legislation should be in force until 31 October 2020, which is slightly shorter than what the Commission proposed.

The proposal allowing the extension of the **validity of certain certificates and licences** will support those transport operators, individuals and national administrations that, owing to the coronavirus restrictions, are having difficulties fulfilling certain administrative formalities before the expiry of the relevant deadlines. This is the case for instance for driving licences, roadworthiness tests for motor vehicles and boat-masters' certificates. Certain periodic checks in road, rail, inland navigation and shipping will also be postponed temporarily, as these activities may not be feasible in the current exceptional circumstances. The Council text includes some changes to the Commission proposal to allow the differences between member states as regards the spread of the pandemic to be taken into account.

Both the Council and the European Parliament will need to agree on the final texts of these proposals.