

Statement to Parliament: EU Transport Council 29 and 30 October 2018

I attended the informal meeting of members of the Transport and Environment Councils in Graz, Austria on 29 and 30 October.

The programme for the Informal meetings included separate sessions for Transport and Environment Ministers and a joint session for both Ministers entitled 'Starting a new era: clean, safe and affordable mobility for Europe'.

On 29 October, Transport Ministers were invited to discuss the Commission's proposal on 'Discontinuing seasonal changes of time (summer time)'. My Noble Friend, The Rt Hon Lord Henley, (Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy) represented the UK at this session and explained that the UK government does not support the proposed directive. He also noted the Commission had fallen short on the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality as has been highlighted by the decision of the House of Lords to issue a reasoned opinion. (The House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee has subsequently recommended that the House of Commons also issue a reasoned opinion on this matter.)

There was broad consensus in Council that the timetable proposed by the Commission was too short and thus there was widespread support for the Presidency's intention to provide for an extension. A small minority of Member States were notably critical of the proposal while the majority welcomed the initiative, albeit noting its deficiencies. Several Member States advocated the need to coordinate across borders in order to know the final time zone arrangements before taking the decision to abolish daylight saving.

Environment Ministers were then invited to discuss 'The Future of European Environmental Policy'. The Secretary of State for the Environment was represented by officials from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Ministers broadly agreed on the need for an eighth Environment Action Programme (EAP) with a consensus that it should take full account of climate change given the Report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) on Global Warming of 1.5 Celsius published last month.

At the joint session for Transport and Environment Ministers on 30 October, interventions were wide-ranging with common themes being the need to move towards zero emissions vehicles and enabling people to choose sustainable ways to travel. These themes were reflected in the Presidency's 'Graz Declaration' published after the meeting. For the UK, I stressed the importance of ambition to accelerate the development and introduction of zero emission vehicles, recalling that the Prime Minister had hosted the world's first zero emission vehicle summit in Birmingham recently.

The subject for the afternoon session was road safety. Transport Ministers

shared experiences with progress to date in reducing casualties and their perception of the challenges in making more progress. In my intervention I noted that human error was a factor in over 85% of road accidents, and that connected and automated vehicles offered opportunities to make our roads safer.

In the margins I met with a number of EU Transport Ministers to discuss current EU transport business and how relationships will evolve as the UK leaves the EU.