

3rd IRU/EU Road Transport Conference



“ The Road Transport Market Competitiveness & Partnership. Transforming Challenges into Effective Solutions for Growth ”

16 September 2013
Vilnius, Lithuania



Opening Session

Janusz Laczny, President, International Road Transport Union (IRU)

Prime Minister, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for the International Road Transport Union and for me as IRU President, to open this the 3rd IRU-EU Road Transport Conference, organised once again in partnership with the European Commission and the acting Presidency of the Council of the European Union namely the Lithuanian Government, which also provided us the wonderful opportunity to have this event in the beautiful city of Vilnius.

I sincerely thank the Government of Lithuania, and in particular The Prime Minister, Algirdas Butkevičius, and his team for their invaluable support in co-organising this Conference. As a former Minister of Transport, I am sure the Prime Minister knows better than most the importance of establishing effective cooperation to achieve results.

Can I also thank sincerely the Vice President of the European Commission responsible for Transport, Mr Siim Kallas and his team, for once again working closely with the IRU to establish this conference? I trust the conference today will lead to equally successful results as with the previous conference and please permit me to remind you what we achieved last time.

The 2nd IRU EU conference led to the establishment of the Smart Move High Level Group and the recent finalisation of recommendations on how to double, by 2025, the use of collective passenger transport by an increased use of bus, coach and taxi. On top of this we established concrete joint goals to, in partnership, make road transport even more safe and sustainable, which for instance led to the proposed revision of the weights and dimensions regulation. Allow me to urge the European Commission, the Lithuanian EU Presidency and all the Member State representatives present here today to fully support the implementation of the policy recommendations and participate actively in the monitoring work of the Smart Move Citizens Mobility Forum.

I am particularly pleased with the reinforced public-private partnership between the road transport industry, represented by the IRU, and the European Union, Member States and the EU institutions. This partnership is especially important now that the EU is striving for a more efficient and sustainable transport sector, while at the same time finally having understood

and recognised the vital role that road transport plays in international trade, mobility, tourism, development and economic growth.

In order to stimulate growth and improve efficiency, remain competitive and reduce public debt, EU Member States and many of their neighbouring countries will have to continue to do much more with much less. Old answers and solutions will not address new questions and challenges. National governments, the EU and the EU transport sector as a whole needs to become smarter in the policies they pursue and operational measures they implement, and more flexible in their response to changing behaviours and markets.

Relying on outdated methods and inefficient market-distorting policies, such as a return to a modal shift policy for freight supported by a heavy provision of state aid, or imposing fiscal penalties against one transport mode over another, are simply not sustainable and will not lead to the establishment of the efficient and sustainable transport system you Vice President Kallas advocate, and indeed that we all want to see emerge in the future.

We must have the foresight to invest, especially in SMEs which count for more than 85% of jobs in the private transport sector. We must have the confidence to consult and rapidly make clear decisions, without being derailed by what appears to me like a de-facto veto that the rail industry believes it should have over any road transport policy or proposal. We must have the strength to undertake concerted actions and build new relationships and have the confidence to take risks to overcome barriers and achieve immediate results – as private road transport companies do every day. This will enable us all to become more efficient, more competitive, more sustainable and more responsive to the needs of the European economy, companies and citizens without risking that the efficiencies of one transport mode would be penalised because of the failings of another mode.

With attention focused on how to maximise and sustain economic recovery and, at the same time, ensure an even more efficient and more environmentally sustainable road transport sector, it is clear that we cannot ignore the need to effectively promote and further facilitate trade, mobility and tourism – both within the EU and with its neighbours - and so road transport which underpins economic growth and development.

Indeed, to succeed in a globalised world, everyone will be forced and should be allowed to provide and deliver the best services and the best products under the best conditions. This applies as much to the services provided by Nation States as it does to private commercial organisations, particularly those services that support international trade and development such as customs arrangements and the Treaties and Conventions that underpin them.

Unilateral decisions by countries to change their compliance with international agreements, such as the United Nations TIR Convention, will curtail international trade and economic development. Furthermore, increasing restrictions and costs for road transport operators will reduce competitiveness and reduce the economic viability of many small and medium sized transport enterprises. Permit me to say, at this time, that it is essential that signatories to the UN TIR Convention comply with their international obligations and continue to provide the stability and certainty that the international road transport sector and our economies' need.

We cannot however simply stand still. New trade and mobility facilitation agreements are necessary if barriers to international trade and travel are to be removed. I therefore urge those countries represented here to embrace and fully support the United Nations OMNIBUS proposal and the geographical expansion of the INTERBUS agreement concerning international coach services. These are vital if you share my desire to see an expansion of this most green form of collective passenger transport.

Similarly EU Member States could do more to remove administrative burdens, restrictions to competition and liberate the road transport industry from the dead hand of over regulation or de-facto veto rights from the railways that stifle creativity and entrepreneurial initiative, without which sustained economic recovery would be a dream rather than the necessary economic reality.

Prime Minister, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Transforming challenges into effective solutions for growth through competitiveness and partnerships is today's topic. Our panellists who will follow will be discussing solutions to make road transport operations more efficient within the EU and externally – or in other words, how best to ensure that we obtain better rather than necessarily more road transport. Allow me at this point to highlight some possibilities for doing just that.

By working together, it is our common duty to ensure that the road transport sector is allowed to become even more efficient and sustainable, for instance through smart innovations to increase the weight and dimensions, including the aerodynamics of vehicle combinations to allow, as is the case for all other modes, an increase in loading capacity, productivity and safety.

We should, by working in co-operation, take immediate steps to establish a new public private high level group dealing with operational and working conditions within road transport, with the goal to even further optimise sustainability and efficiency of road transport and thus support road transport's role in facilitating trade, mobility and tourism within and between the EU and its neighbours.

Prime Minister, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, only by developing partnerships, by working together with clear objectives to meet our shared challenges, can we hope to achieve our common aims to the benefit of all of us.

I look forward to hearing today's contributions and hope to discover new ways for us to cooperate and drive forward the change that is needed.

Thank you for your attention.