

Ursula von der Leyen
President
EU Commission
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B-1049 Brussels
BELGIUM



By email

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Geneva, 20 January 2021

CALL TO PREVENT THE COLLAPSE OF SUPPLY CHAINS DUE TO NEW COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS

Dear President von der Leyen,

Faced with new COVID-19 strains, EU Member States are contemplating new or tighter restrictions on goods transport, including closing or controlling intra-EU borders and restricting truck drivers. This will damage vital supply chains for millions of EU citizens and businesses.

As in the first wave of the pandemic, and despite the experiences learned from that time, the risk to supply chains is severely underestimated in the current political discourse.

IRU is calling for immediate European Commission action to prevent barriers to the free movement of goods, in particular COVID-test requirements for professional truck drivers, in order to maintain supply chains.

Testing will cause major disruption

EU Member States are increasingly requiring all citizens, including professional goods transport drivers, to present negative COVID-19 tests, often PCR tests, to enter their territory if they come from specific high-risk regions.

The consequences of this type of restriction became clear with the French decision last month that drivers entering France from the UK must have a negative COVID-19 test. The enormous queues and humanitarian crisis around Dover just before Christmas demonstrated the scale of disruption resulting from one “simple” requirement for a “quick” COVID-19 antigen test.

Professional international drivers do not have easy access to testing due to the nature of their job and a huge, costly and time-consuming UK government operation was needed to get the border functioning again.

In Dover however, only 0.3% of the tens of thousands of drivers caught up in the crisis tested positive for COVID-19, showing the very limited impact of such measures to combat the virus.

This should not be a surprise: truck drivers mainly work alone. Isolated in their cabin, they are not exposed to the virus. Moreover they comply with strict measures against possible COVID-19 infection put in place by their employers and their customers, including no physical contact at pick-up and delivery locations. Letting drivers do their job and continue their journey across a border is the safest solution on a human and economic level.

What would happen if the Dover crisis was repeated at multiple borders across the European continent?

This prospect is even more alarming than Dover, because countries where hauliers pick up goods, or the countries they transit through, have no interest to deploy massive and expensive resources in organising any kind of testing for drivers, in particular diverting scarce PCR testing resources from their own national health system.

Truck drivers would consequently be stuck at the envisaged new intra-Schengen borders, with long queues building quickly. Transport operators would soon stop sending drivers to these areas and pan-EU supply chains, including for essentials such as food and medicine, would grind to a halt.

The key to creating or solving the issue: Germany

Our most immediate concern is Germany. In a worst-case scenario, with new virus strains spreading across the continent and based on already enacted legal framework, Germany is likely to block entry to all people on its territory unless they have a negative PCR test, including professional truck drivers. This will cause huge blockages in North-South and East-West EU freight corridors, with devastating consequences on EU supply chains.

As an example, the Brenner corridor between Austria and Germany, which is just one of several crossing points between the two countries, has a similar freight traffic volume to the Dover region in the UK. Approximately 7,000 trucks use this corridor every day (2.4 million annually). To imagine the amplitude of the Germany/Austria case if compared to Dover, this would be 4 times bigger because Brenner corridor accounts for less than 25% of the 32,000 trucks moving between Austria and Germany every day (11.5 million annually).

In this scenario, a transit country like Austria is unlikely to want massive truck queues with humanitarian issues on its territory, and will replicate the German measures at all of its external borders.

Hence, the German decision in this scenario will cause a domino effect with dramatic and rapid consequences on EU-wide supply chains. Austria has already closed some of its border crossings with the Czech Republic and reintroduced random border checks: a frightening precursor of what could happen.

In comparison to the Dover blockage in the UK, where transport decreased by 40% percent even after testing and traffic flow resumed, blockages across the centre of Europe would have devastating consequences on the availability of products, in particular fresh food and medicine, across the single market.

EU Member States should not break their commitments

In a [joint statement of the European Council](#) on 26 March 2020, EU Member States unanimously committed to ensure smooth border management for people and goods and preserve the functioning of the single market, based on the Commission's guidance on implementing Green Lanes. This guidance includes the principle of no testing of goods transport drivers.

EU Member States renewed their commitment to implement Green Lanes on 28 October 2020, in the "[Policy considerations for a pandemic and other major crisis contingency plan for the European freight transport sector](#)".

Several EU Member States however are now on the verge of breaking their commitments by blocking access to professional goods transport drivers without a COVID-19 test.

This will severely damage supply chains, the single market, and the lives of millions of EU citizens – at a huge cost, and without any material benefit to controlling the virus.

We appreciate the European Commission's work in the COVID-19 matter, including the release of the Communication "A united front to beat COVID-19" on 19 January which specially recalls the importance of the "Green Lanes" system. However, this will not be enough to prevent the foreseeable economic crisis caused by unthoughtful restrictions.

We ask for your personal strong support to ensure EU Member States respect the Green Lanes principles agreed in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and exempt goods transport drivers from mandatory COVID-19 testing.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'U. de Pretto', followed by a period.

Umberto de Pretto
Secretary General