

## **Speech**

**Of the Minister of Transport of the Czech Republic, Petr Bendl,  
Concerning the Agenda of the Czech Presidency (Transport Issues)**

at the

**Meeting of the European Parliament Committee on Transport and Tourism**

**10 February 2009**

Mr. Chairman, Members of Parliament, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured and pleased to be with you today to present the Czech Presidency's priorities in the field of transport. I was appointed as the Czech Minister of Transport in January this year. Transport has always been an important subject in my country and in fact the Czech Republic was the meeting point of several important trading routes for centuries. After the fall of the Iron Curtain and our membership of the EU we regained our national traffic heritage. My former post was the Governor of the Central Bohemia Region, which is one of the top ten most congested regions in Europe. Due to this historical handicap we have only been able to build a modern transport infrastructure in recent years. Nevertheless, we have some achievements in the Czech Republic in the transport field the world's first electric tram ran here and the daily rate of passengers in the Prague public transport system is twice the number of citizens. Also as far as tourism is concerned we have one of densest network of hiking trails in the world.

With your help, I would like to contribute to common goals in the field of transport throughout our EU Presidency. We are very well aware of your tight schedule before the end of this legislature and we will try to achieve maximum progress in as many transport issues as possible before the June European Parliamentary elections.

Together with France and Sweden, the Czech Republic has set out priorities for an eighteen-month agenda. In the field of transport, these three presidencies have agreed to focus on three cross-sectional goals: the sustainability and competitiveness of transport, the safety of individual modes of transport, and the development of intelligent transport systems. We think that transport policy should contribute to the fight against climate change and to environmental protection, while

reflecting the competitiveness of transport. The European Union is also concerned with transport safety, and we will strive to achieve major progress in that regard. Finally, a great challenge is the use of new technologies, which should be used for environmental purposes as well as for competitiveness, safety, and performance. New technologies can also contribute to more efficient logistical solutions in the transport system.

As for **road transport**, there are two main tasks before us. The first is to bring to an end the decision-making process concerning the road package, and the other is to continue the discussions about an amendment to the Eurovignette Directive. As concerns the road package, we hope that all of the parties involved will show a certain measure of flexibility, in order to reach a quick agreement on these proposals, which are of a great importance for the European transport industry. We are striving here to improve the conditions for business and to reduce administrative burdens, both for road transport operators as well as for authorities. They should also serve to limit disruptions to competition and ensure that road transport operators better adhere to regulations in the social sphere and to road traffic safety rules.

As I am aware, the positions of the Council and the European Parliament do not differ to a large extent. Naturally, the political issue concerning the opening up of the market needs to be resolved, and I would like to ask you for searching an optimal solution respecting differences in economic sphere of carrier companies in different EU countries. I think that for the adoption of the road package is necessary to make a sensitive compromise. In order to accelerate the progress of the negotiations, informal contact has already been initiated with two rapporteurs, Silvia-Adriana Ticaou and Mathieu Grosch.

The next important issue of the Czech Presidency is the change of working time of persons performing mobile road transport activities. The road transport sector over the last years had changed. Barriers to entry into this market are low, leading to enlargement of the gray zone between employed and self-employed drivers. As a result, we submitted an amendment to the Commission Directive 2002/15, which is to prevent the phenomenon of "false" self-employed drivers, and more effectively promote the entrepreneurial spirit of self-employed drivers. The Council started work on this legislation for our presidency, and I sincerely hope that we can move forward in this issue so that we can achieve maximum progress in this area.

Now, allow me to say a few words on the Eurovignette. This is a complex issue. On the one

hand there is an interest to implement the rule “polluter pays” into the road transport and on the other hand there is the technical feasibility of that system. The new proposal of the Commission, focused on the internalisation of external costs, brings a new dimension into the issue of subjecting roads to payments. It must be clarified as to what means will allow us to achieve the best results, in terms of the environment. We all certainly welcome the main idea of a fee system that could encourage road transport operators to use more ecological vehicles, opt for less over-burdened routes, and use infrastructure more efficiently. On the other hand, commercial transport is not the sole actor responsible for air pollution and traffic overburden.

We understand this principle as the correct perspective, but we believe that it is necessary to realistically evaluate the possible impacts. For example, an increase in freight prices, without effectively reducing pollution and congestion can happen. I am, therefore, fully aware of the complexity of this issue and we will work hard to achieve a balanced consensus.

**In railway transport**, the Czech Presidency will start an examination of the Commission’s proposal for the Regulation Concerning the European Rail Network for Competitive Freight, which supports the development of a specialised European freight network that will enable rail to offer a better quality of service, in terms of the duration, reliability, and performance of operations. We all know that the political goal of transferring freight from road to rail is complicated by the fact that the railway sector has suffered due to several structural disadvantages. We must ensure that a developed railway infrastructure has to be open to the competition of the different freight transport operators.

We appreciate that the Commission has presented this proposal, which is, however, not simple, because a suitable approach will need to be found, such as one that would bring us closer to the idea of creating specialised freight corridors.

My next point concerns one of the main cross-sectional concepts of the three Presidencies: the development of intelligent transport systems. It relates to the recently adopted Commission Communication on the Action Plan for the Implementation and Use of Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) in Road Transport and the related directive. To a large degree, ITS can contribute to a more ecological, safer, and more efficient transport system. In the last fifteen years, vehicle manufacturers and their suppliers, with the support of the European Commission, have developed a number of new technical innovations. Technical development has far exceeded our imagination.

However for the potential of the ITS to be fully developed, the public sector needs to implement measures that will speed up the penetration of relatively advanced intelligent transport applications and services in the European market. These measures should help ensure that the introduction of those systems in Europe will no longer be carried out in a limited and un-harmonised manner, but will be carried out at the Europe-wide level. The Action Plan is a part of the “Greening of Transport” initiative and strives to accelerate the implementation of those systems into road transport, and to link them to other modes of transport. That is why we are planning to devote a substantial amount of time and attention to this major initiative during our Presidency.

The Czech Presidency believes that one of the main tasks of the European Union is the ability to appropriately respond to the needs and worries of our citizens. I am pleased that two proposals have been drafted concern these needs and fears. A common set of principles is now required, applicable to all modes of transport so as to define passenger rights in all areas of transport.

In recent years, we have enacted legislation concerning passenger rights in the air and railway sectors. With respect to the third package, focused on maritime safety, we have recently reached an agreement with the Parliament concerning a proposal for a regulation on the liability of carriers to passengers travelling by sea and inland waterways, in the event of accidents. The first of those two proposals concerns the rights of passengers in bus and coach transport. The proposal focuses on three main areas of importance: passengers with reduced mobility and orientation; the liability of a bus transport operator, in the event of the death or injury of passengers and loss or damage to baggage; and compensation in the event of the cancellation or delay of the service.

The other proposal concerns the rights of passengers travelling by sea and on inland waterways. In principle, the proposal contains provisions for people with reduced mobility; the obligations of carriers in the event of service cancellation or delay; the obligation to inform passengers about their rights when travelling by sea and on inland waterways; and the processing of complaints. The Czech Presidency hopes that in these cases, too, it will manage to achieve substantial progress over the next six months.

By mentioning proposals concerning passenger rights in maritime transport, I have de facto moved to informing you about the Czech priorities concerning **maritime transport**. As we are a

land-locked country, our technical expertise in this area is less developed. We are therefore very grateful for the Presidency succeeding us – the Swedish – with which we cooperate closely, and which has kindly offered its full support.

In addition in this area the Commission adopted a Communication on the strategic objectives and recommendations for the EU maritime transport policy by 2018. This statement of the Commission presents the main strategic objectives of the maritime transport sector by 2018 and identifies key areas for EU action in the broader context of EU transport policy and the EU integrated maritime policy.

The Commission presented a Communication on the European maritime space without barriers, which corresponds to the principal Czech presidency theme „ Europe without barriers“. The Czech Presidency intends to adopt Council conclusions on both these strategic documents.

Another priority of the Presidency is **aviation**. As you certainly know, at the beginning of July last year, the Commission presented a package of various proposals dealing with changes in existing legislation relating to the Single European Sky. The aim is to better achieve what was sought when the first package on the Single European Sky was adopted in 2004, in other words:

- To set up a new, modernised system of air traffic management, thereby improving flight efficiency in the EU and improving the environmental impact of the aviation industry;
- To implement the SESAR programme (research into air traffic management in the Single European Sky project) which should provide the future technology required for the modernisation of air traffic management;

We all know how important these proposals are which focus on the issue of the burdens on infrastructure capacity. As soon as this legislative package takes effect, we will be able to prevent the fragmentation in air traffic management that does not allow for the optimum use of the capacity available, and which poses a unnecessary financial burden on aviation. That will, at the same time, contribute to improvements in safety and to a reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in this industry. The Czech Presidency intends to continue the work of the French Presidency, which allowed us to arrive at general agreements as to the technical aspects of the revision to the Single European Sky regulation, and to adopt a partial general approach to the amendment of the EASA regulation at the last meeting of the Council, comprised of the ministers of transport, telecommunication, and the

energy sector. In cooperation with the Parliament, we would like to try to achieve an agreement in the first reading with respect to both proposals. We have already started discussions with the rapporteur Marian-Jean Marinescu and have agreed that this would be the only way to conclude this important issue before the European Parliamentary elections. We would also like to reach an agreement on the Air Traffic Management Plan at the March meeting of the Council for Transport, Telecommunication, and the Energy Sector.

We are also concerned with **horizontal issues**. Recently, the Commission presented a proposed amendment to the 2006 regulation setting out the second “Marco Polo Programme”, for providing Community financial assistance, aimed at improving the environmental impact of the freight carriage system. This programme is a tool for reducing the overburden of road transport and is a part of the EU’s coherent strategy in the sphere of transport policy. We fully share the Commission and the Parliament’s opinion that, in terms of the transition to another mode of transport and restricting traffic, the second Marco Polo Programme does not fully meet the goals set out in that regulation. Simply put: we have a financing programme amounting to roughly 450 million euros, but only 73% of the budget available has been used. Hence, we welcome the Commission’s proposal to change the original programme, such as to increase its efficiency and stimulate applications for financing, by increasing the participation of small companies, especially companies providing inland water transport. We consider those goals to be fundamental and intend to devote significant amounts of time to them during the Czech Presidency. In order to speed up the negotiation procedure the informal contacts with the Rapporteur Ulrich Stockmann have already been established.

Before I conclude, allow me to say a few words about the future planning of projects concerning the Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-T). In the light of the world economic crisis, the importance of investments in infrastructure keeps growing, and not only because of the improvement and modernisation of transport networks, but also in order to stimulate employment and economic growth. A large group of EU Member States have set up such investment programmes at the national level. At the EU level, we should support high-quality transport projects that have a positive effect on employment and economic growth and also linking rapidly developing regions such as the Baltic and Adriatic regions for example.

In the European Economic Recovery Plan presented by in December 2008, the Commission gave notice of the launch of a call for proposals for projects concerning trans-European transport, amounting to 500 million euros.

The Commission has now adopted the Green Paper on the Future of the TEN-T, which points out the future challenges of its politics for Trans-European Transport Networks. During the Czech Presidency we will give both initiatives priority attention in the Council, in order to achieve effects that will stimulate our economies as rapidly as possible. Therefore we would like to initiate the adoption of Council conclusions with respect to the Green Paper on the Future of TEN-T during our Presidency.

I would like to thank you for your attention. The Czech Presidency is aware that we will not have all of the six months of our Presidency to complete all of the topics discussed in the shared decision-making process, with the present membership of the European Parliament. That means that the Council and the Parliament must set priorities among the legislative proposals they have before them, and decide which of them should be concluded before the present Parliament's mandate runs out. That also means that we must join all our energies together and work as efficiently as possible. Let me assure you, that we will do our best to quickly find viable solutions.

Now I am at your disposal and will try to answer any questions that you may have. In any event, I hope that we will have further opportunities during the Czech Presidency to continue in this discussion on transport.

Thank you for your attention.