

[Formal greeting]

Today, I would like to discuss the pandemic from the viewpoint of a tiny landlocked country located at the very heart of Europe.

The difference between Luxembourg and larger nations is that in our small country, the “international” dimension is part and parcel of our daily lives. Borders have long not been considered barriers, yet less than a year ago, they shut again. It meant isolating our country from others, just like in the past: two of our three neighbouring countries closed their borders.

Many cross-border workers had to take long detours every morning to go to work and every evening to return home.

It is important to note that in Luxembourg, cross-border workers are not considered foreigners. They are full members of our society, on par with our residents. As a result, all our government’s initiatives are available to our cross-border workers, including the free distribution of masks and testing.

Early on, Luxembourg decided not to close its borders, preferring to implement measures such as lockdown. Moreover, there is no proof that open borders would have caused the virus to spread any faster.

The closure of the borders around our country severely hit Luxembourg. It was impacting the smooth operation of our society and causing supply problems because the country depends on the international exchange of goods and services.

From the outset, the Luxembourgish government recognised the crucial nature of hurdle-free, open borders for road freight transport. We defined it as a priority even before the European Commission issued its recommendation on “green lanes”.

Luxembourg being so small, it is obvious that practically all our transportation is international. So it is crucial that all road hauliers be continually updated on the restrictions in place in the various countries.

However, especially in the beginning of the crisis, obtaining such information was not always easy. Countries did not cooperate with each other and national measures were constantly changing. To add to the chaos, in some larger countries, the restrictions implemented differed from town to town.

When we speak of freight, we must not only think of the goods that are transported from one location to another... We must also think of the drivers.

In Luxembourg, from the early days of lockdown in the spring, we ensured that petrol stations on the main road arteries stayed open, including their shops and sanitary conveniences. Unfortunately, not all countries did the same.

Drivers' lives were also made difficult by waivers concerning driving and rest times. These differed from country to country and as a result, it was easier for them to stick to the normal rules.

More specifically, on a UN level, Luxembourg was also very vocal. Our ministry's expert on the transportation of hazardous goods was a driving force in the drafting of multilateral ADR, RID and ADN agreements.

Despite the fact that the public at large is little aware of such accords, they have always played an essential role in the management of this crisis. Without them, we would have hit numerous problems in the transport of necessary equipment such as hydro-alcoholic gel for disinfection.

The CTI and its working groups play an important role in the coordination of national efforts to ensure the smooth operation of supply chains and flow of goods, not only during the pandemic but also beyond.

I urge all partners to strive for fruitful cooperation both on a European and on global level, making good use of the United Nations' platform. By pooling our efforts, we will stand a better chance of overcoming this pandemic.

Thank you for your attention.