



Karmenu VELLA
Member of the European Commission

Rue de la Loi, 200
B-1049 Brussels
Tel. +32 2 295 57 25
karmenu.vella@ec.europa.eu

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Dr Bernhard Ensink, Mr Ádám Bodor
European Cyclists Federation
Rue Franklin 28
1000 Brussels
BELGIUM

Dear Dr Ensink, dear Mr Bodor,

Thank you for your interest in air quality and the letter you sent on 26 January, to which I would like to respond also on behalf of Commissioner Crețu and Commissioner Bulc.

The Commission takes air quality very seriously. The communication with Member States you refer to in your letter is part of a large set of actions we have been taking to act on this problem, with the seriousness it demands.

While the Ambient Air Quality Directive 2008/50/EC requires Member States to respect limit values on air pollution, it is left to the Member States to choose how they will achieve this. The Commission cannot decide the specific measures to be taken by national authorities, such as on investments in particular modes of transport.

This does not stop the EU from acting. A shift towards cycling, walking and other modes of sustainable mobility is strongly encouraged through relevant EU initiatives, as outlined, for instance, in the Commission's Communication "Together towards competitive and resource-efficient urban mobility" [COM(2013)913]. Moreover, a new stream of activities will soon start as a Commission response to the blueprint for the EU cycling strategy prepared by the stakeholders, with the ECF in the lead. As 2018 is the Year of Multimodality, this presents us with a great opportunity to give more visibility to the important topic of cycling in the EU, particularly to its very useful role in urban areas where it contributes, inter alia, to improving air quality.

Relevant actions are receiving considerable support in the framework of EU regional policy. For example, in the 2014-2020 period, around EUR 12 billion have been programmed in EU co-financing from the European Structural and Investment Funds for investments in clean urban transport infrastructure and promotion. Another EUR 1.6 billion are specifically foreseen for co-financing the development of cycle tracks and footpaths. Finally, the 2nd call of the Urban Innovative Actions, an EU initiative funded by the European Regional Development Fund, was dedicated also to urban mobility. Five urban authorities were selected to test innovative solutions across the EU.

A successful shift towards more sustainable modes of mobility needs decisive and coordinated action also in the Member States and, in particular by the relevant regional and local actors.

This thinking also guides further implementation support by the European Commission. For example, the Environmental Implementation Review is a two-yearly cycle of analysis, dialogue and collaboration, with publication of country reports and discussions between the European Commission, EU Member States and stakeholders. Specific support on air quality also includes bilateral structured Clean Air Country Dialogues to help foster the collaborative approach required to deliver actions for enhancing air quality and reducing air pollution in the future.

Another concrete example is the Urban Agenda for the EU that was adopted in 2016, under the Dutch Presidency, and in which the Member States committed to work in a close multi-level governance and partnership approach with the European institutions, with towns and cities, and with other relevant stakeholders in addressing urban issues.

The Urban Agenda includes twelve thematic partnerships. Among them are one on air quality and one on urban mobility. Both partnerships have been working on action plans and their implementation, and they are coordinating their actions. The action plan of the Partnership on Urban Mobility will aim to provide a framework for taking action to foster cycling and other sustainable mobility modes, at EU level but also in the Member States, including at local and regional levels.

The European Cycling Federation is a valued member of this partnership, and we would invite you to use this opportunity to present your findings and recommendations to the Member States and the partnership's other members and stakeholders for discussion.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Karmenu Vella', written in a cursive style.

Karmenu Vella

cc.: Commissioner Crețu and Commissioner Bulc