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COMMISSION DECISION

of 29.4.2020

authorising Hungary to grant exceptions from the application of Articles 6, 7 and 8 of Regulation (EC) No 561/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the harmonisation of certain social legislation relating to road transport

(The only authentic text is Hungarian)

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THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,

Having regard to Regulation (EC) No 561/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 March 2006 on the harmonisation of certain social legislation relating to road transport and amending Council Regulations (EEC) No 3821/85 and (EC) No 2135/98 and repealing Council Regulation (EEC) No 3820/85¹, and in particular Article 14(1) thereof,

Whereas:

- (1) Article 14(2) of Regulation (EC) No 561/2006 allows Member States in urgent cases to grant a temporary exception from the application of Articles 6 to 9 of that Regulation for a period not exceeding 30 days, which must be notified immediately to the Commission.
- (2) The COVID-19 outbreak in Europe has led to major disruptions to the transport and supply chains in Member States and third-countries, in particular due to the introduction of controls at internal borders, which have led to significant waiting times for drivers when crossing borders. Important parts of the economy have also slowed down or shut down, leading to disruption in the supply chains, while other sectors are under increased pressure and are facing a significant increase in demand of some products.
- (3) In its Guidelines for border management measures to protect health and ensure the availability of goods and essential services² adopted on 16 March 2020, the Commission stressed the principle that all Union internal borders should stay open to freight and that the supply chains for essential products should be guaranteed.
- (4) On 20 March 2020, Hungary notified the Commission of the temporary exception to Article 6(1), (2) and (3), Article 7, and Article 8(2) and (6) of Regulation (EC) No 561/2006 granted for the period from 21 March until 19 April 2020, pursuant to Article 14(2) of that Regulation in view of the exceptional circumstances caused by the COVID-19 outbreak. That flexibility for driving time, rest periods and breaks was considered necessary to ensure the national supply of goods in Hungary.

¹ *OJ L 102, 11.4.2006, p. 1.*

² Guidelines for border management measures to protect health and ensure the availability of goods and essential services, C(2020) 1753 final, OJ C 86I, 16.3.2020, p.1. https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20200316_covid-19-guidelines-for-border-management.pdf

- (5) In its Communication on the implementation of the Green Lanes under the Guidelines for border management measures to protect health and ensure the availability of goods and essential services of 23 March 2020³ the Commission recognised that land supply chains and in particular road which accounts for 75% of freight transport had been severely affected by the introduction of entry bans at internal land border and by restrictions on professional drivers accessing certain Member States. This situation created excessive waiting times on some days at certain internal Union borders.
- (6) Even though some improvement in the waiting times at borders could be noted over the intervening weeks, controls are still in place at many internal borders of the Union. Given the unpredictability of waiting times, this factor cannot be anticipated in a precise manner by transport operators and drivers when planning transport operations. Furthermore, some Member States have also introduced the obligation for trucks not established on their territory to leave the country within 24 hours after delivering their cargo. These circumstances were identified by Member States as justification for the granting of additional flexibility for driving time, breaks and rest periods, to allow road transport operators and drivers to adjust to these constraints.
- (7) In addition, some drivers have been infected by the COVID-19 virus, thereby further contributing to the current shortage of drivers in the Union. While some drivers are working in sectors affected by reductions in wider economic activity could be temporarily redeployed into parts of the road transport sector that have come under severe pressure, such measures could only constitute temporary solutions in view of the need to prepare for the re-start of the economic activity which is already underway in some Member States.
- (8) In the European Roadmap towards lifting coronavirus containment measures⁴, transport is identified as one of the sectors essential to facilitate economic activity and which should be prioritised for the re-start of the economic activity. A redeployment of drivers may therefore not be suitable from subsectors where the drivers should be quickly mobilised in case of a re-launching of the economic activity. This further justifies the need for Member States to grant flexibility in driving times, breaks and rest periods to guarantee the continuity of transport operations.
- (9) As set out in its second notification of 3 April 2020, Hungary considers that the exceptional circumstances arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and affecting the road transport sector continue to prevail and it therefore requests, under Article 14(1) of Regulation (EC) No 561/2006, the authorisation to grant exceptions to Article 6(1), (2) and (3), Article 7, and Article 8(2) and (6) of that Regulation. This would justify exceptions applying until 31 May 2020.
- (10) Given the continuous disruptive impact of COVID-19 on European transport and mobility, the Commission accepts that exceptional circumstances continue to prevail in Hungary.
- (11) According to the notification, the exceptions requested would be limited to the transport of goods on the Hungarian territory to ensure the national supply of goods. The Commission indicated in its Guidelines for border management measures to

³ C(2020) 1897 final Communication from the Commission on the implementation of the Green Lanes under the Guidelines for border management measures to protect health and ensure the availability of goods and essential services, *OJ C 96I*, 24.3.2020, p. 1

⁴ Communication - A European roadmap to lifting coronavirus containment measures https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication_-_a_european_roadmap_to_lifting_coronavirus_containment_measures_0.pdf

protect health and ensure the availability of goods and essential services, that Member States should ensure constant provisioning to meet social needs, to avoid panic buying and the risk of dangerous overcrowding of shops, which will require proactive commitment from the entire supply chain.

- (12) Given the wide range of goods to be transported as a matter of urgency, the unpredictability of needs and the complexity of the supply chain where some supply considered as non-essential may actually be needed for the fabrication of essential goods, it was not possible for Hungary to limit the temporary exceptions to a certain types of goods. Hungary thus requests these temporary exceptions to apply to all transport of goods in order to reflect the complexity of the situation on the ground.
- (13) In view of the continuous impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on road transport, some flexibility on the maximum driving time limits was thus considered necessary by Hungary to allow drivers to adapt the organisation of their activities, in particular because of unpredictable waiting times at borders. The increase in the maximum driving time limits should allow drivers to occasionally drive longer hours on some days when they have been impacted by delays during their trip, but always within the limit of maximum 11 hours per day. This should enable them to drive more to complete their transport operations, including for loading or unloading the goods, or to drive back to their Member State of establishment within the prescribed time limit, when they are required to do so.
- (14) Hungary therefore requests the daily driving time limit to be increased to 11 hours. The maximum weekly and fortnightly driving time of respectively 60 and 105 hours should ensure that drivers cannot drive 11 hours every day.
- (15) Hungary considers that the maximum fortnightly driving time limit of 105 hours should ensure that a driver who would drive up to 60 hours in the first week shall be obliged to drive less in the second week - up to 45 hours - thereby avoiding accumulated fatigue.
- (16) Furthermore, Hungary requests that drivers are allowed to take a break of 45 minutes after a maximum driving period of five and half hours. Hungary considers that this will enable drivers to drive one more hour without break when they are close to borders and when it is required by the Member State in question to leave the territory in a very short period of time.
- (17) Some backlogs and delays at the distribution centres and at the ports across Europe were reported by the industry. Those delays might cause the drivers to be subject to very long periods of availability and to exceed their daily spread, thereby breaching the rules regarding daily rests.
- (18) Hungary thus considers that allowing drivers affected by these delays to take reduced daily rest periods is necessary to allow them to cope with these unexpected situations and to allay the risk of being exposed sanctions thereafter.
- (19) According to Hungary, the limits on daily driving time and on the maximum weekly working time should, applied together, contribute to avoid consecutive long daily driving hours. This should allow drivers to have daily rests of 11 hours while leaving them the flexibility to reduce some of those to nine hours when needed.
- (20) Transport activities under severe pressure need to benefit from flexibility in the organisation of driving and rest times to respond to the high demand they are facing. This includes the need for drivers to occasionally work during weekends and in particular on Sundays.

- (21) The current requirements on weekly rest periods do not offer enough flexibility for such a quick adaptation of weekly schedule when needed. The temporary exceptions requested by Hungary aim to remedy to this issue.
- (22) On the one hand, Hungary considers that the possibility to postpone the weekly rest period for one more 24-hour period should allow drivers to work for seven days in a row and be available on Sundays when necessary. The fact that drivers, who are making use of this temporary exception, must still benefit from regular weekly rest periods in any two consecutive weeks should avoid accumulated fatigue. On the other hand, the flexibility to take reduced weekly rest periods will also allow drivers to spend a shorter rest period on the road and benefit from a longer rest at home thanks to the compensation rules.
- (23) Hungary therefore requests that drivers are allowed to take two reduced weekly rests over two consecutive weeks provided that the reduction is compensated by an equivalent period of rest taken *en bloc* before the end of the third week following the week in question. Furthermore, Hungary requests that exceptions to weekly rest periods are not cumulative. Thus, drivers taking two consecutive reduced weekly rests cannot postpone their weekly rests beyond the end of six 24-hour periods, counting from the end of the previous weekly rest period.
- (24) In its notification to the Commission, Hungary has made it clear that working conditions of drivers and road safety must not be compromised. Drivers shall not be expected to drive whilst tired. Employers remain responsible for the health and safety of their employees.
- (25) Drivers should note on the back of their tachograph charts or printouts the reasons of exceeding normally permitted limits by Regulation (EC) No 561/2006.
- (26) Therefore, the exceptions requested do not as such prejudice the objectives of Regulation (EC) No 561/2006.
- (27) The request of Hungary to be authorised to grant exceptions to Article 6(1), (2) and (3), Article 7, and Article 8(2) and (6) of Regulation (EC) No 561/2006 should therefore be approved.

HAS ADOPTED THIS DECISION:

Article 1

1. The exceptions granted under this Article are without prejudice to the provisions on the maximum working time limit set out in Article 4 of Directive 2002/15/EC⁵.
2. Hungary is authorised to grant exception from the application of Articles 6(1), (2) and (3), Article 7, and Article 8(2) and (6) of Regulation (EC) No 561/2006 as follows:
 - (a) increase of the maximum permissible daily driving time from 9 hours to 11 hours;
 - (b) increase of the maximum permissible weekly driving limit up to 60 hours;
 - (c) increase of the maximum fortnightly driving limit up to 105 hours;

⁵ Directive 2002/15/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2002 on the organisation of the working time of persons performing mobile road transport activities (*OJ L 80, 23.3.2002, p. 35*).

- (d) increase of the maximum driving period after which a break of 45 minutes is required up to five and half hours.
- (e) reduction of the minimum permissible daily rest from 11 hours to 9 hours;
- (f) either a reduction of the regular weekly rest from at least 45 hours to at least 24 hours provided that the reduction is compensated by an equivalent period of rest taken *en bloc* before the end of the third week following the week in question; or
- (g) postponement of weekly rest periods so that each such period can be taken up to seven 24-hour period from the end of the previous weekly rest period.

Article 2

This authorisation is valid until 31 May 2020.

Article 3

This Decision is addressed to Hungary.

Done at Brussels, 29.4.2020

For the Commission
Adina-Ioana VĂLEAN
Member of the Commission

