**Matti Maasikas,** *President-in-Office of the Council***.** – Mr President, it is now almost two years since it was revealed in September 2015 that, based on the findings of the United States Environmental Protection Agency, the vehicle manufacturer Volkswagen had used a hidden software to allow diesel engine cars to pass nitrogen oxide, commonly referred to as NOx, emissions tests by the American regulating authorities, while the same car models were proven to emit up to 40 times the legal limit of nitrogen oxides in real world driving.

The shock wave resulting from this large-scale deception is still felt everywhere. At the same time, we seem to discover more and more repercussions. Doubts persist as to the proper testing of car models of other brands as well.

Many actions have been taken at national, but also at Union, level, first of all to investigate the proceedings. In this regard, let me highlight the meticulous and intensive work of the Committee on Emissions Measurements in the Automotive Sector, which finalised its report in March of this year. The report concluded that the responsibilities of the Member States and the Commission as regards the binding emission limits were not respected. It concluded that the fact that there were large discrepancies between NOx emissions in diesel cars measured in the laboratories and on the road had been known to many stakeholders since at least 2005.

But the Dieselgate scandal is just one aspect of a much wider problem. In Europe, we have 400 000 premature deaths due to bad air quality. That is one of the reasons why we need very ambitious laws and the political will to put them into practice.

In this context, regulatory standards are one important element. Decisive action has been taken here, for instance by reaching an agreement between the two co-legislators on the National Emissions Ceiling Directive, which entered into force on 31 December 2016 and must be transposed by 30 June 2018. This Directive sets stricter national limits for the period 2020-2029, and from 2030 onwards, for the emissions of sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, non-methane volatile organic compounds, ammonia and fine particulate matter.

On procedures to test emissions from cars, major steps have been taken by the Commission. Under the provisions that entered into force this month, new car models will have to pass new and more reliable emission tests in real driving conditions before they can be driven on European roads. This test will complement and improve laboratory tests for all emissions, including CO2 and fuel consumption, as well as NOx and other air pollutants. Both tests will be phased in for all new cars between 2018 and 2019.

Furthermore, work on an overhaul of the European vehicle type-approval framework is under way. On the basis of the general approach adopted by the Council on 29 May this year, the Presidency is firmly committed to taking forward negotiations on the proposal on the approval and market surveillance of motor vehicles and their trailers, and we are working constructively with Parliament.

My impression from the first trilogue that took place on 6 September is that both co-legislators are eager to agree in the forthcoming trilogues on a robust legislation that reinforces type-approval procedures, enhances market surveillance and makes the system more transparent. Of similar importance is that the strategies that have been developed to accelerate the effective emission reductions move from the stage of policy incentives to large-scale market activity. This concerns in particular the low emission strategies, including the deployment of alternative fuels infrastructure.

One of the openers will be urban bus fleets, which are mostly diesel-based today and have the power to make a difference on the market. The commitments undertaken by European cities and agglomerations during this summer to progressively convert their bus fleets into alternative fuel fleets are more than impressive, as the launch of the Clean Bus Deployment Initiative by the Commission and the Committee of the Regions on 13 July this year clearly shows.

These initiatives are being strongly supported by the European Union institutions, including the Commission, the European Investment Bank and the Committee of the Regions, and the Presidency welcomes all efforts by public transport companies that will join in these actions.

In terms of policy action, the most important long-term effort rests with the modal shift, converting road transport into train and waterway transport. For instance, it has to be noted that, under the EU funding sources for implementing the strategy for trans-European networks in transport, around 87% of the Connecting Europe Facility co-funding of EUR 21.4 billion for transport has been thus far dedicated to rail and inland waterways projects. However, these efforts require perseverance, as we cannot deny that certain trends work in favour of road transport, for instance, the increase in deliveries directly to the consumers.

More remains to be done. The emissions scandal has shown that we need in particular better car testing and good market surveillance. The Presidency is putting its best efforts forward to achieve progress in these areas. Together with the EU Member States and the EU institutions, we need to decisively pursue EU-wide efforts to foster low emissions mobility.