



To: Mr. Karmenu Vella, Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries European Commission
Cc: Mr. François Wakenhut, Head of Clean Air Unit, DG ENVI
Ms. Violeta Bulc, Commissioner for Mobility and Transport

Brussels, 19 June 2019

Object: Air quality in Madrid: the danger of moving backwards

Dear Commissioner Vella,

Nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) levels in several Spanish agglomerations (including the city of Madrid) have been since 2010 above the limit values set in the Ambient Air Quality Directive 2008/50/EC. The European Commission (EC) opened in 2015 an infringement procedure against Spain (and other Member States) for exceeding such limit values.

In order to tackle air pollution and comply with EU legislation, the Madrid local government planned the establishment of a Low Emission Zone (LEZ) called Madrid Central ('MC') amongst other announced measures.

We are well aware that the Madrid local government announcement to set up this LEZ was among the reasons [considered by the EC](#) when it was decided to exclude Spain from the group of countries that were [finally referred](#) to the European Court of Justice in May 2018 for breaching air quality standards. In your own words, "the EC [...] considered the announced measures, then in the phase of preparation, could adequately address the deficiencies if properly applied in the foreseen timeframe¹."

MC has been running only since November 30, 2018. In these 6 months it has undoubtedly proven effective in reducing air pollution, and it has also made the city centre a more livable place. Although a longer testing period would be needed to draw firm conclusions, the results so far show an important decrease in NO₂ levels. Monthly [reports](#) have been produced showing the data; all data obtained so far consistently show a stark trend of reduced pollution. Particularly, May 2019 shows the lowest NO₂ levels ever since the present Madrid monitoring network was put in place back in 2010. Please note this record applies not only to the monitoring station included inside MC (where a decrease of 40% in the NO₂ levels was observed), but to the average of the whole network, which goes beyond the LEZ. Therefore, beyond lower pollution numbers in the station included in the LEZ, a pollution increase in bordering stations is not observed. On the contrary, reductions across all and every single station have been detected so far.

Local elections took place in Spain recently. Three parties reached an agreement to form a new city government and José Luis Martínez-Almeida was elected as the new mayor. These parties already made worrying announcements² during the election campaign, showing their opposition to MC. The intention to reverse one of Europe's most successful clean air policies was recently confirmed by declarations of the newly elected mayor³. Removing or substantially modifying MC, would hijack the efforts to ensure cleaner air in the city.

¹ [Bruselas descarta llevar a España ante la Justicia de la UE por la calidad del aire](#), EuroEfe Euractiv, 17 May 2018

² [PP y Vox gobernarían tres de los diez municipios más ricos de España](#), El Mundo, 8 June 2019

³ [¿Qué va a pasar ahora con Madrid Central?](#), El Mundo, 27 May 2019

³ Martínez-Almeida already announced after taking over his new role that: "Madrid Central is a failure and we are going to start changing the system establishing a moratorium on fines, beginning on July 1st" This means polluting cars that go through Madrid Central will no longer be fined.

We write this letter to inform you about the latest developments related to the LEZ in Madrid and to share with you our concerns regarding its future. We kindly ask you to closely monitor the actions that will be taken in this regard. As reported earlier, the establishment of MC, and the consequent reduction of NO₂ concentrations, was a reason why the European Commission decided not to refer Spain to the European Court of Justice last year. Therefore, if the LEZ were to be removed, or made less effective, we would like to ask you to reassure us that such a move will immediately put Spain in line for referral to the Court.

We remain at your disposal in case any additional information will be needed.

Yours sincerely,

Francisco Segura
Coordinator
Ecologistas en Acción

Jeremy Wates
Secretary General
European Environmental Bureau

William Todts
Executive Director
Transport & Environment

James Thornton
Chief Executive Officer
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