TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT FOR A WIDER EUROPE

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CONTRIBUTION

“COMMON STATEMENT”

BY

EIA AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS
Common Statement

Transport Infrastructure - Core of the Transport Policy
Basis for Economic Development

Report of the High-level Group under Karel van Miert provides new Impulses.

The transport industry views the insufficient transport infrastructure in EU countries with considerable alarm. Even in the currently depressed economy with declining traffic flows there are perilous bottlenecks. In particular cross-border links - the connecting links of the European integration process – are insufficient. With a pickup in the economy the inadequate transport infrastructure may be one of the main reasons that prevent Europe from achieving in the foreseeable future the goal staked out in Lisbon: to become the world's most powerful economic zone.

We acknowledge that the EU Commission advocated early on, improvement in the transport network. A basic impulse was provided by the Commission President Jacques Delors's White Book "Growth, Competition and Employment" which led to the "Essen strategy." At the European summit in Essen in 1994 prioritised infrastructure projects were decided which, while they did not constitute a coherent design, were after all the first attempt at a responsible policy at the European level. But more than anything else it was the pan-European corridors defined in Helsinki in 1997 which displayed the right conceptual approach. It involves far-reaching cross-border highways, simultaneously including multimodal options.

Eastward expansion of the EU, now immediately impending, makes it necessary to combine together the trans-European networks of the 15 EU countries with the pan-European corridors and to set up a unitary Europe-wide transport network of the 25 EU countries linked up to neighbouring countries. The transport sector has as a whole been looking forward with considerable excitement and hope to the report that the Commission has commissioned under the leadership of the former vice president and commissioner Karel van Miert.

The report now published continues the well-known European minded approach of Karel van Miert which he demonstrated in the late 1970s as transport commissioner by backing up the high-speed design of the European railways. We therefore believe this time as well that positive impulses can emanate from his report. The infrastructure projects selected take account of the fact that as of May 2004 the European Union will have 25 members. It is to be welcomed that the report is
based on the concept of corridors. This is what Europe now
needs. The inclusion of peripheral zones and seagoing
options round out the altogether balanced report. The fact that
the western Balkans and links going beyond the borders of
the 25 EU countries, as contained in the Pan-European
corridors, are missing from the description is something to be
regretted. On the other hand, the design of the Pan-European
corridors has been specifically mentioned as exemplary.
However, the emphasis clearly lies on projects where
implementation should realistically be begun at once. Even if
priority is given to the Trans- and Pan-European Corridors
one should not forget that it is also part of our united Europe
to link the regional networks of the countries for local border
traffic.

Nonetheless, it has to be feared that enthusiasm could be
held back or even completely eliminated by institutional
problems and the counter tendencies they facilitate. On the
one hand, the Commission will see itself prevented by the
subsidiarity principle from taking substantive action to
complete the projects on its own responsibility. On the other
hand, the governmental budgets of all member states are
currently under considerable pressure so that it is precisely
the internationally significant projects that frequently will have
to step back in favour of national interests. The reference to
the principle of subsidiarity will make it easier for governments
evade their European responsibilities.

The European transport industry appeals to parliaments and
governments in the member countries, in view of the Lisbon
goal, to make all efforts to produce and strengthen the
required infrastructure. At the present stage of integration, this
can certainly not be brought about by restricting the principle
of subsidiarity (the idea of the European infrastructure
agency). The only thing remaining is thus binding international
agreements with financial and temporal stipulations on
carrying out the work, as this report also presents them.

The report – respecting the principles of the European Union’s
transport policy as they have been formulated in the
declaration of Götheborg and the White Paper – makes a
couple of useful suggestions which meet up with the
consensus from professionals, as for instance:

- The proposal to provide additional EU funds for TEN in
  the years 2007-2013,
- To raise the EU portion from 10% to at least 20% for
cross-border projects,
- To build up highly developed financial engineering for
  TEN investment opportunities such as guarantee
  mechanisms, risk funds on a mutual basis, PPP, etc
  (perhaps even defiscalisation methods could be
  added),
- To develop common evaluation methods for projects
  and to mark off particularly convincing projects as
  "priority projects" and to promote them.
The limitation to projects of more than €500m appears illuminating especially since in the infrastructure area such a sum is quickly attained. Practical experience, particularly in pan-European corridors, has however shown that another one of the report’s proposals could produce a much stronger effect: Coordination of European projects must improved without additional administrative machinery. And at first a single main axis should be chosen where a concentration of resources could in a short period of time set an "example" for the type of success a coordinated approach can produce in the operational area. In doing so, all options of intermodal cooperation must be considered, particularly with the right border crossings, terminals, etc.

The transport industry as a whole explicitly supports the orientation and urgency of Karel van Miert's report presented by Vice President de Palacio and demands consistency by all of Europe's political decision makers in creating a European transport infrastructure. It considers it an encouraging sign that the Italian government even prior to acceding to the EU presidency cited improvement of the infrastructure as a priority. With an intelligent approach as urged in the report and as can still be defined in detail in further consultations with member states and the transport industry as well, a great step forward towards the common goal can be taken with this amount. The European transport industry declares its willingness to assume a constructive role in this.

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