TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT FOR A WIDER EUROPE

SEMINAR

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SESSION 3 – ROUND TABLE “TOWARDS A NEW POLICY”

CONTRIBUTION

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1- General context:

Before broaching the subject at hand, I should like to thank the General Secretariat of the Conference for inviting Morocco to this round table, which is yet another illustration of the excellent relationship we enjoy with this honourable institution. One of the advantages of such a gathering is that a variety of different speakers address the central theme from their own particular perspectives.

The extension, in recent years, of the geographical scope of the transport policy of Europe and its Member States has been characterised by outreach towards the Mediterranean, with the enactment of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership Agreement. I should like to focus my remarks on two pilot projects (DESTIN and TEN-T) in which Morocco is participating very actively. These projects fit in perfectly with government-launched undertakings in the realm of transport infrastructure development, and they reflect an approach of renewed partnership with Europe.

2- Development of corridors:

1st project: DESTIN PROJECT: Defining and Evaluating a Strategic Transport Infrastructure Network in the Western Mediterranean.

As you know, this project, which just began in September 2003, is part of the INCO-MED programme of the Community Fifth Framework Programme. Its objective is to contribute to research on interoperability between Mediterranean partner countries and between that region and European countries, as well as on methods and criteria for evaluating the development of transport networks in the Mediterranean. These methods and criteria constitute a support system for identifying priorities within the context of the extension of the Trans-European transport network (TEN-T).

The reference network proposed in connection with this project, and the network maps for 2010 and 2020 in particular, call for eventual completion of a number of projects that Morocco has already completed or is completing at this time. For example, the Moroccan Government has decided to speed up the pace of the highway construction programme from 45 km per year over the past ten years to 100 km annually beginning this year, which would meet the goal of completing all of the highway projects under the DESTIN Project before 2010 (Annex 3).

2nd project: MEDA TEN-T PROJECT (MEDITERRANEAN AND TRANS-EUROPEAN NETWORKS FOR TRANSPORT)

This project is a measure to accompany the MEDA programme being carried out by the European Commission with input from a consortium of experts from Mediterranean countries in which Morocco is represented by Société Nationale des Études du Détroit (SNED).

Its objective is to improve links between the TEN-T and the networks of Mediterranean partners, and to enhance the financing instruments made available to them, in particular under the MEDA Programme and interregional co-operation programmes involving Mediterranean partners.
The work of the 1st project conference, held in Brussels in July 2003, led to the selection, based on proposals by members of the expert consortium, of “demonstration” corridors for stocktaking and benchmarking the performances of Euro-Mediterranean infrastructure networks. There are 21 such corridors, 11 of which serving the central Maghreb countries (Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia) and five serving Morocco itself.

In respect of the North-South corridor, it is noteworthy that the completion in 2007 of the new Tangiers Mediterranean Port will cut the distance and crossing time between Gibraltar and the new port of Tangiers to only 16 km and 20 minutes aboard a ferry. The new port, entailing a substantial investment of MAD 11 billion, or €1 billion, will constitute a genuine hub for international maritime trade (Annex 1).

With regard to the East-West corridor, I should like to stress that the Moroccan railway network serves the Kingdom’s large cities and main ports. It is linked to the Algerian and Tunisian networks, which have similar technical characteristics, so traffic can flow smoothly. Work to double the track is continuing between the capital, Rabat, and Fez, in central Morocco. New strategic connections are also planned, involving railway lines linking the new Tangiers Mediterranean Port and the port of Nador with the national network (Annex 2).

As for roads, the Mediterranean bypass linking Tangiers to Oujda in the north-east is under construction, and beginning this year the pace of road building was increased from 1 000 to 1 500 km per year.

The 2nd project conference, held in Athens on 30 and 31 October 2003, explored the choice of corridors to be studied and selected study teams and managers for each corridor.

Of the 21 demonstration corridors, two were to be overseen by SNED, which since 1981 has been in charge of feasibility studies for the Strait of Gibraltar fixed link project. These two corridors are:

1- Paris, Bordeaux, Madrid, Tangiers, Rabat;
2- Tangiers, Rabat, Nouakchott, Dakar.

This Euro-Mediterranean dimension advocated by the Moroccan Government should be taken into account in the prioritisation of new corridor projects and/or extension of the TEN-T.

3- Government transport policy:

Morocco’s efforts are perfectly consistent with the three key objectives of the new European area, which are to “encourage integration”, “improve trade” and “foster development”.

In Morocco, the departments of infrastructure and transport are now part of a single ministry that encompasses all transport-related aspects (infrastructure and operations) as well as all modes of transport (land, sea and air).
In parallel with the Government’s efforts in the realm of infrastructure, and to meet the transport sector’s needs for competitiveness, the privatisation process begun several years ago is culminating with the entry into force at the beginning of this year of a law liberalising the road freight sector and the introduction into the approval process of bills to convert railway, road transport and port operating authorities from public industrial/commercial establishments into private corporations.

4- Development financing:

In the most recent meetings of the EU-Morocco Association Committee, the two parties agreed to establish special groups of experts to explore certain key aspects of the association agreement more deeply. It was also agreed to step up co-operation on multilateral issues and issues related to European integration.

Accordingly, it was decided to restructure how work was carried out by setting up sub-committees, drawing heavily on the existing model for the Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs). These sub-committees, whose work got under way in June 2003 with the first meeting of the Sub-committee on Transport, Environment and Energy, are currently exploring the outlook for Moroccan-EU relations from the standpoint of “advanced status” and the “Wider Europe/New Neighbourhood Policy”.

I should like in particular to seize the opportunity afforded by the presence of representatives from the World Bank and the European Investment Bank to say just a few words about European development assistance flows.

European enlargement could result in a relative eviction of southern Mediterranean countries; apart from the problem of Community budget financing as from 2006, the assistance granted to the CEECs is out of all proportion to that destined for Europe’s Mediterranean partner countries. The European Union’s net financial commitments to the CEECs amount to a combined total of €45 billion between 2000 and 2006, whereas MEDA II financial co-operation totals only €5.35 billion for all Mediterranean non-member countries over the same period, for annual assistance flows of approximately €890 million.

Accordingly, continued quantitative and qualitative improvement of Community support to countries heavily committed to reform and openness, such as Morocco, is vital. European assistance should also be geared towards economic transition and a strengthening of social equilibria.

Thank you.
ANNEX 1
THE NEW TANGIERS MEDITERRANEAN PORT
ANNEX 2
NEW DEVELOPMENT COMPLEX AT NADOR