MINISTERIAL ROUND TABLE ON TRANSPORT

ECMT AND SOUTH EAST EUROPE

Intervention by
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ECMT AND SOUTH EAST EUROPE

Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dealing with South East Europe, ECMT has taken two recent initiatives:

• one at the regional level, and
• the other one at the pan-European level.

Concerning the regional level, ECMT was responsible for the supervision of the TIRS Study which constituted a first step in the process of the selection of transport infrastructure investments in the Balkans. This Study was followed by the REBIS Study and the CARDS programme in order to identify a priority transport network and priority projects in the region, and to prepare projects for funding from International Financing Institutions.

At the ECMT Ministerial session in Bucharest in May 2002, the results of the TIR Study were presented to the Council of Ministers. These results were accompanied by a list of political messages (document [CEMT/CM(2002)20]), of which I would like to remind you, in view of the fact that these recommendations remain valid. These recommendations concern:

• Infrastructure projects;
• Railways;
• Roads;
• Inland waterways and ports;
• Documentation, statistics, information;
• Institutional issues.

They are important guidelines for Ministerial decisions on transport infrastructure.

At the Pan-European level, the idea of corridors originated at the ECMT Ministerial session in Noordwijk in 1993 and this concept was developed subsequently during the Pan-European Conferences in Crete and Helsinki. More recently at the ECMT Ministerial session in Ljubljana, following a Seminar jointly organized by the ECMT, the European Commission, the UNECE and the EIB, a Declaration was adopted by ECMT Ministers defining a strategy for transport infrastructure development in a wider Europe. By adopting this Declaration, which was accompanied by a policy note, Ministers agreed on a strategy to revise the Pan-European transport corridors and identify priority projects for non EU-Member countries. This Declaration suggests that the European Commission take a lead in the process in which all the concerned parties, including the relevant countries and the ECMT, should be involved.
Following the Declaration, at a Seminar organized on 8 June in Santiago de Compostela, it was decided to establish a high level Group to identify and develop priority connections between major Trans-European axes and the different neighbouring regions of the Union.

ECMT welcomes this initiative which is a clear follow-up to the Ljubljana Declaration but wishes to express certain concerns:

- It is absolutely necessary to adopt a transparent process in this field. Planning infrastructure is a difficult subject at both national and international levels. The methods used up to now are far from perfect with a risk that planning at the international level has all the weaknesses of the national level as well as some additional ones. The existing legal frameworks, financial leverage possibilities and implementation, all seriously limit the possibility of carrying out supranational planning. Therefore, in order to make progress a process of consultation and discussion on the approach is needed where the experience, contacts and professional skills of all parties can only be constructive. As indicated by Ministers in Ljubljana, ECMT experience would obviously help the high level Group.

- The process needs to be carefully prepared, as indicated in the Declaration adopted by Ministers. There should initially be a period for carrying out the much needed economic and review analyses. As indicated, major axes must be defined on the basis of real needs. The definition of corridors must not be the outcome of purely political choices but instead should have an economic rationale and reflect demand, i.e. the needs of the users. This is why the implementation of the strategy should start by:
  - Launching a consultation on existing corridors in order to make an accurate assessment of their relevance;
  - Analysing traffic forecasts, economic data, the conditions of interoperability, organisational and legal aspects;
  - Analysing how corridors can draw lessons from existing structures like Trans-European Networks, UNECE Networks, Euro-Asia corridors, PETRAS;
  - Determining efficient management and monitoring methods for the corridors;
  - Evaluating the resources that could be available at the national and international levels.

It is only on the basis of the information collected through such an approach that the work of the high level Group could start to revise existing Pan-European transport corridors and identify priority projects.

In conclusion, I would just like to stress another point which was mentioned by the ECMT Secretary General in Ljubljana during bilateral meetings with many of you. There are many initiatives concerning transport in the South East European region and it seems to us necessary to ensure coordination of all initiatives underway and monitor progress on implementation of the many plans in the region. This is why Jack Short has proposed the creation of a South East European Task Force under ECMT auspices. We hope this idea is acceptable to you as suggested by the numerous positive reactions already received, and that you will help us to create such a Task Force. We are looking forward to concrete initiatives from your side and to making a continued positive contribution to improving the transport system and policies in this vital region.