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Motorways of the sea

Context ministerial conference on the motorways of the sea

Ljubliana, 24 January 2006
Mister Chairman,
Honorable Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank all of you for accepting the invitation from the Slovenian Ministry of Transport and the European Commission to come together for this conference on motorways of the sea. I would like to thank, in particular, the Honorable Minister Janez Bozic for his hospitality.

Your presence here today is an important display of support for this ambitious and innovative European project. Indeed, it is with great pleasure that I note your clear interest in motorways of the sea.

My message to you today is to underline the ambition of the Commission, in the maritime and ports sector, to develop the motorways of the sea, thereby providing attractive alternatives to the road sector.

As you know, in April 2004, motorways of the sea were included in the guidelines for the Trans-European Transport Network.

Motorways of the sea will complement short sea shipping services. The objective is to contribute towards transporting more goods by sea, and less by road. Clearly, this will not only have economic benefits but also enable Europe to meet its commitments under the Kyoto agreement. The integrated network of shipping services will be incorporated into logistical chains for the transport of freight from door-to-door. Regular, frequent and high-quality transport services will be available. These services will lead to reductions in the share of heavy goods vehicle traffic on major European motorways. This will, in particular, be the case for freight movements that currently cross the Alps and the Pyrenees. Mountain regions need the motorways of the sea.

I. Some words on the context and the challenges which we are facing:

The Lisbon strategy for growth and employment is dependent on viable transport links. Transport is one element of the cost of production. Efficient transport means lead to lower costs and increase the competitiveness of our industries. The relentless increase in the transport of goods by road has a direct effect on our environment, infrastructure and economy. Several major motorways in Europe are at saturation point. Today, road transport still remains attractive due to its speed, flexibility and price. But as a result of the adoption of the “Eurovignette” directive the price of road transport will soon more accurately reflect the real costs of this mode of transport.

A doubling of the amount of goods transported by road is forecast in the 10 new Member States by 2020: enlargement leads to increases in the use of road transport infrastructure.

In an ideal world, Europe will invest 600 billion euros to complete the Trans-European Transport Network. Investments in new infrastructure are expensive, take time to complete and are not always immediately welcomed by the general public. Without losing sight of our long-term objectives, we have to recognize our responsibilities from today on to find solutions which make it possible to safeguard our quality of life and stimulate economic activity everywhere in Europe.

If we don’t have all the resources we need to complete the task, then we must do our best with what we do have.
A practical and inexpensive solution is to promote logistical services using intermodal transport. Already today there are many examples of high-volume car manufacturers using integrated transport solutions. These manufacturers integrate several modes of transport into the production process – an example of the benefits of using “rolling stocks”!

II. The Motorways of the sea

Short Sea Shipping is, in this context, a major asset for Europe. For example, Airbus uses maritime transport services in its supply chain. Clearly, maritime transport services need to be integrated with other modes of transport for there to be door-to-door services. Such integrated transport services fitting into logistical chains are competitive with “all-road” services, in terms of frequency, price and reliability.

It is in this context that the European Commission proposed, in its White Paper on Transport Policy, the implementation of motorways of the sea: short sea shipping services fully integrated into the European transport network, offering high frequency and high quality transport links to unblock motorways on the major road corridors and to support economic and social cohesion in Europe.

The concentration of the flow of goods is an essential condition for the success of these motorways of the sea. Only such concentration can guarantee that are intermodal services are both profitable and frequent. Of crucial importance for this concentration of freight is the choice of the transport corridors and of the ports. The “motorways of the sea” initiative does not only challenge the transport sector, it also challenges political determination.

The choice of a port or of a region of ports to become a "motorway of the sea, port" will have significant economic repercussions for the region concerned: the development of the landside logistical areas, the increased use of regional transport companies, the development of employment and improved quality of the employees' life in a sector that is facing difficulties today.

For the general public, this reduction of congestion will mean fewer delays on the roads and less pollution. It must not be forgotten that maritime transport is much more energy efficient than other means of transport, and that its impact in terms of atmospheric emissions is significantly less by tonne/kilometre travelled. The energy consumption of roll-on/roll-off ships and their resulting emissions are much lower than the dozens of heavy goods vehicles they carry. Almost two years after the decision to give financial support to the motorways of the sea within the framework of the Trans-European Transport Networks, the moment has come to show the political will and imagination for their implementation. Convincing and visible results are needed quickly.

Where are we with the motorways of the sea?

The first contributions from the European budget are ready. As you know, the Commission has worked to implement this concept since 2005 within the framework of the TEN-T. For the years 2005 and 2006, this mainly involves the financing of feasibility studies within rather modest budgets. Studies are launched as a preliminary to the completion of plans for each one of the four corridors where there will be motorways of the sea.

As regards financing for the period 2007-2013, the European Council reached an agreement recently that should enable the motorways of the sea to benefit from Community financing through both the TEN-T and the Marco Polo II programmes.
We must also recognise the opportunities offered by the motorways of the sea to improve economic links with our neighbouring countries, as the high-level Working Party on the extension of the TEN network concluded.

I appeal to you as members of your respective governments. In the decision of the European Council on the financial perspectives, the funding for transport policy will be limited. Each one of us in our respective positions will have to plead the merits of financing TEN-T and Marco Polo projects. Each one of us must demonstrate that these projects will not only have a positive effect on growth and employment, but that they stand ready to be launched.

Using our political determination to meet our objectives, we must increase the share devoted to the maritime sector in the TEN-T programme, which currently accounts for only a few percentage points of the amounts given in subsidies granted notably to the rail sector. This means that Member States will need to enter into close cooperation in three areas:

1. A dialogue with all the actors concerned for the implementation of the motorways of the sea and for the selection of carriers and ports for these motorways of the sea;

2. The search for means that are both public and private for the financing of the motorways of the sea, namely: port infrastructure, river and motorway rail connections, and the new services and vessels;

3. The technical analyses necessary for the adoption of the projects on motorways of the sea and finalisation of the master plans for each corridor

It is also imperative to ensure the marketing and promotion of the motorways of the sea to transport users, and to logistic companies. The mode of maritime transport is still too often seen as not very reliable, or even dangerous. We must modify this false and out-of-date image. Indeed, for the success of the motorways of the sea, it is necessary to have non-congested ports with good infrastructure, offering quality services with good intermodal connections to the inland transport network.

It is just as important to convince the shipping lines that it is profitable to provide regular and frequent services. Member States have therefore to finance better the network of short sea shipping and intermodality promotion centres. This network does an excellent work but without the level of public support necessary.

We have to show the example! The Commission is convinced of the great potential the motorways of the sea have. If we start, the market will do the rest. I am sure of it!

We will also help by reflecting on how we can better promote the development of intelligent logistics and transport through GALILEO.

To help to convince users and providers of transport services, I wish the notion “motorway of the sea” to be associated with a quality label which will have to satisfy a number of criteria: speed, regularity, safety, and quality of service. But above this, it is necessary to involve all the stakeholders without whom the motorways of the sea will not be realised. Whether they are the local authorities, the port authorities, shipping lines or other providers of transport service, they all need the reassurance that we are putting in place a system for the long-term. Indeed, our intention for this conference was to assemble all the stakeholders here today, to share best practices and get a better idea of where the benchmark lies.
Allow me to finish, Mister Chairman, Honorable Ministers, and ladies and gentlemen, by welcoming your input. I believe that this initiative needs a strong political signal at the level of the Member States. In addition, I propose regular meetings on the motorways of the sea, to stimulate their entry into operation. I am delighted by the increase in cooperation between certain Member States within the framework of the preparation of the motorways of the sea. I am delighted by the Franco-Spanish initiative to sign a declaration of intent concerning the introduction of a service on the “Atlantic” motorway of the sea in 2007. I am also delighted by the agreement signed in the spring of 2005 between Greece, Italy and Cyprus, subsequently extended to Malta and in Slovenia, with a view to developing motorways of the sea in the Eastern Mediterranean.

I wish you informative and constructive discussions today and a major success for the motorways of the sea. Thank you for your attention.

I would also like to particularly thank the Prime minister for having honored us with his presence and for the interest that you have shown in this conference and the motorways of the sea. Thank you very much.