

SPEECH by Mr Edgar Thielmann

Workshop " Waterways of tomorrow"

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The Commission's White Paper on Transport of 2001 outlines clearly the issues at stake and the decisions that need to be taken to assure the future of sustainable transport in the enlarged European Union. One of the major suggestions was the need to shift transport from road to more environmentally friendly modes as rail, shipping and inland navigation.

On 1 October 2003 the Commission adopted a proposal for the amendment of Decision 1692/96/EC on Community guidelines for the development of the TEN-T network. The proposal contains mainly a list of 29 priority projects of European interest plus some suggestions to improve the procedures for the implementation of the projects and to increase the necessary financing

This proposal follows an earlier proposal of 2001 which was adopted with amendments by the European Parliament in first reading but not adopted by the Council, and the recommendations of the report of a High Level Group chaired by ex-Commissioner Mr Karel Van Miert which was presented on 30 June 2003 to the Vice-President of the Commission, Mrs de Palacio

A fully integrated transport network is a prerequisite for a real freedom of movement of goods and people. A modern, interconnected and interoperable network allows, through a better use of transport, to enhance trade and the competitiveness of the European economy as a whole. Without implementing the necessary infrastructure and an appropriate regulatory framework for an efficient network management, the concepts of the internal market and the territorial cohesion of the Union will remain unfinished.

The past decade saw not only a worrying increase in traffic congestion in urban areas, but also a new phenomenon of congestion on the major arteries of the trans-European network, increasing the number of bottlenecks. Missing links in the infrastructure, and a lack of interoperability within specific transport modes and for intermodal transport systems, are all reasons aggravating this congestion of the network. Please note that according to some estimations, the external costs of congestion due to road traffic alone represent approx 0,5% of the GDP of the EU.

This assessment becomes even more alarming when one realises that transport demand will continue to increase strongly in the future. Economic growth and the ensuing increase in household incomes have been the main drivers underlying this continuous increase. More recently, globalisation of the world economy and greater reliance on just-in-time production processes, the completion of the single market and its enlargement towards the East have been contributing to increasing trade and traffic growth.

Inland navigation

It is estimated that if no measures are taken between now and 2010, heavy lorry traffic alone in the Union of 15 could increase by 50% compared to 1998. In the new Member States, road transport increased by 20% between 1990 and 1998. Overall, growth in freight transport demand still exceeds the growth in GDR. And road's share in the enlarged Union is anticipated at about 85% by 2020. The scope for freeing up capacity by extending the road network is limited. If the problems of congestion and pollution are to be tackled, demand must be shifted towards modes with underused potential and environmentally friendly: rail, sea shipping and inland navigation.

The European Union has for some time recognised the great potential that Europe's inland waterway network has for freight and passenger transport. Europe has over 30.000 kilometres of canals and rivers that link together hundreds of key towns and areas of industrial concentration. The position of inland ports at the heart of Europe's trading routes, means they are perfectly placed to offer intermodal connections to road, rail and sea lines.

Inland waterway transport is considered rather cheap and efficient, reliable, safe and environmental friendly particularly compared with road transport.

Freight transport by inland waterways presently accounts for 7% only of total inland transport, but there is still a massive capacity that is not being used.

The EU aims :

- To improve integration of inland waterways into the European transport system
- To create favourable conditions for the further development of the sector
- To encourage business to use the mode.

TEN-T proposal

So in the recent proposal for the amendment of the TEN_T guidelines an important inland navigation project was included, namely the complete axis Rhine/Meuse - Main - Danube where some infrastructure projects are needed in almost all the countries concerned.

The main sections identified where works are necessary to improve navigability are:

- Rhine - Meuse with the lock of Lanay Vilshofen - Straubing
- Vienna – Bratislava
- Palkovicovo - Mohacs (in Hungary)
- Bottlenecks In Romania and Bulgaria

The various sections are planned to be implemented from 2011 to 2019.

Another important project which was examined by the Van Miert Group was the Seine - Scheldt river link. This link will connect the Parisian region and the Seine basin with the entire Benelux inland waterway network. It can become a vital transport route in a highly-developed economic and industrial region, connecting in particular the ports of Le Havre, Rouen, Dunkirk, Antwerp and Rotterdam. This project is considered of great importance for sustainable development of transport and modal equilibrium in an area where road and rail infrastructures are close to saturation.

This project was not included in the list of priority projects of European interest by the V. Miert Group and the European Commission only because there was not on 1/10/2003 a firm commitment of the governments of the countries concerned to start works before 2010.

Only on 13/10/2003 the transport ministers of the three countries concerned, France, Belgium and the Netherlands indicated their firm commitment to start on time for this project. This project is now discussed in the Council and the European Parliament in view of including it in the final list of priority projects.

Apart from the list of projects, the Commission proposal contains a set of measures necessary for the development particularly of alternative modes of transport. So in order to help inland waterways' users, a pilot project called "River information System is currently developed in order to provide' boats with:

- Fairway information (geographical, hydrological, administrative information regarding the waterway);
- Flash traffic information (affecting immediate -navigation decisions in the actual traffic situation and geographical surroundings);
- Planning traffic information (voyage planning, lock and bridge planning port and terminal planning);
- Cargo and fleet, management, tracking and tracing; Information on calamity abatement;
- Information on possible interfaces with other transport modes.

This project aims at minimising voyage incidents, injuries and fatalities in inland navigation and at preventing environmental hazards as well as polluting spills.

Up to now, Member States are implementing the system on a voluntary basis on the basis of commonly agreed standards and protocols. To ensure interoperability on Community inland waterways, the Commission will propose a framework directive in the very near future. It is

indeed in the Community interest that Member States implement in a harmonised way on the trans-European inland waterway network, in priority on the Rhine - Danube axis.

Maritime transport

In an effort to develop flexible and efficient modes of transport alternative to road, thorough consideration should be given to the possibilities' to combine maritime transport and inland navigation.

Short Sea Shipping was in fact the only mode of transport in the 1990's that was able to keep pace with the fast growth of road transport.

The Commission is undertaking specific efforts to help to overcome problems related to shipping mostly of administrative nature, logistics, access to ports, etc.

Furthermore it prepared a new category of priority project called "Motorways of the Sea" La its proposal of 1110/2003 it has built up on the recommendations of the Van Miert group and proposed 4 areas for the concept:

- Motorway of the Baltic Sea (linking the States of the Baltic Sea to those of Central and Western Europe);
- a Motorway of the Sea of Western Europe (leading from the Iberian Peninsula via the Atlantic Are, to the North Sea and to the Irish Sea);
- a Motorway of the Sea of south-east Europe (connecting the Adriatic Sea to the Ionian Sea and Eastern Mediterranean to include Cyprus);
- a Motorway of the Sea of south-west Europe (Western Mediterranean), connecting Spain, France, Italy including Malta, and linking the Motorway of the Sea of south-east Europe (including towards the Black Sea).

A crucial factor for development of shipping and of the "Motorways of the Sea" is the selection and the proper functioning of ports, as well as their hinterland connections.

Should the ports be selected with good connections to the inland navigation network, then freight could be transported in the hinterland of Europe, without using road or rail.

Financing

It is clear that the completion of the 29 priority projects needs heavy funding from community, national and private sources. The cost of the 29 projects is estimated at 220 bn € and the cost for the implementation of the whole TEN_T -network at 600 on E. European countries are spending less than 1% of GDP for transport infrastructure nowadays. For the enlarged Union the total amount devoted to transport infrastructure according to the financial perspectives for the period 2000 - 2006 is. almost 24 m € out of which 4,4 for the TEN-T.

Some preliminary simulations by the Commission based on the characteristics of the individual projects indicate that the users and the private sector in general could contribute up to 40 bn C. This means that the rest, almost 180 on € has to be financed by national and community budgets. This gives a very clear idea of the scale of the resources needed, which is especially true for the cross-border regions.

Discussions are underway in the Commission to establish a proposal for the new financial perspectives after 2006. Anyhow, the figures or finance highlight the need to be very selective in our decisions and concentrate on a few new projects.

It has to be stressed that investment projects in the transport sector have a life span of many decades and will benefit future generations. They boost the growth potential in the long term dynamise the internal market and contribute to sustainable development in Europe. Their implementation requires multi-annual firm commitments from the countries concerned.

Environment

Transport development is closely linked to environmental considerations. The requirement for sustainable development has to be taken into account. Long term consequences for the climate, the water pollution, the land use, have to be examined in order to find the ecologically most beneficial solution from environmental point of view.

The Commission has carried out an Extended Impact Assessment for the amendment of the TEN-T Guidelines on 1 October 2003 including the evaluation of environmental economic and

social impacts by taking interrelations of projects, corridors and modes into consideration as well as traffic and economy forecast for alternatives.

As already mentioned, the efforts to shift from road to alternatives are due amongst other things, to the need to reduce the important CO₂ Pollution created by road transport. Rail and waterborne transport are considered as more environmentally friendly.

The Commission is giving priority to sustainable development also in the transport policy.

In the new context of sustainable development, the Gothenburg European Council of June 2001 asked that, in future, stress should be laid on the development of rail, maritime and river transport. The Commission's White Paper on transport policy for 2010 also placed the re-balancing between different modes of transport at the heart of a sustainable development strategy.

With the list of the priority projects the Commission submitted a concept striving for a better change of transport modes. Most of the priority projects are railway projects and the concept to develop motorways of the sea is highlighted, in order to promote intermodal transport.

Giving priority to modal shift, environmental impact particularly caused by uncontrolled increasing road traffic could be avoided and minimized.

For the development and the financing of any transport Infrastructure project in the EU it is absolutely necessary that the requirements of environmental legislation at the Union level or at national level are fully respected.

The present concept of priority projects was developed on the basis of relatively broad corridors, in order to leave a margin for the Member States to solve legal, technical and environmental conflicts in the phase of planning.

The Member States have to determine examine and to evaluate the environmental impact of their planning, considering particularly; protection goods like human being, of animals and plants, soil, water, air, climate, landscape, cultural and other special goods following the Directives in this field of the European Union.

At the level of plans and programmes, the Member States have to implement the Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment by July 2004. Art.6 of the Habitats Directive requires Member States also to assess plans (and projects) in relation to their impact on Natura 2000 sites.

Within the next years the Member States will transform the Water-framework Directive. A well balanced water management, weighing up economic, social and environmental interests could have a favourable effect for the development of inland waterways and consequently for the Trans-European transport network.

Conclusion

The Commission has made recently a very concrete proposal by identifying priority projects for the TEN-T network, by suggesting solutions for their financing and for facilitating their implementation by removing obstacles which have been experienced so far.

Particular attention is paid to inland navigation and to maritime transport. The Commission is looking forward to developing these modes of transport, so as to provide a safe, reliable, efficient and environmentally Friendly alternative to road transport.

Further progress in the modernisation of the transeuropean transport network is needed for a variety of reasons. The Commission hopes the European Parliament and the Council will be able to decide very quickly on the proposals made by the Commission on 1110/2003.