Improving the connection and accessibility of the transport infrastructure in central and eastern Europe

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The European Parliament adopted by 532 votes to 142, with 16 abstentions, a resolution on improving the connection and accessibility of the transport infrastructure in Central and Eastern Europe.

The resolution stressed the need to **enhance the connectivity and accessibility of the infrastructure for transport to, from and within the central and eastern parts of the EU**, taking into account the needs of the economy and the principles of sustainable development.

Transversal aspects: Members considered that the use of **EU funding must reflect the real investment needs for completing the TEN-T core network by 2030 in the region**. Moreover, the EU should not only create new infrastructure but also **invest in the modernisation** and completion of existing transport infrastructures.

The implementation of the core network should also **stimulate the development of the comprehensive network**, in particular for connections that have cross-border relevance.

Parliament recalled the Commission of its obligation under the 2011 White Paper on transport until 2020, to shift 30 % of road transport over 300 km to rail or waterborne transport by 2030, and more than 50 % by 2050, thereby significantly reducing traffic in Central and Eastern Europe.

The resolution also stressed the need to:

- coordinate project planning by and among Member States, taking into account as far as possible national master transport plans and coordination with candidate countries, while conducting realistic assessments of transport needs, in line with the EU White Paper on transport and including cost-benefit analysis and stakeholder consultation;
- improve **coordination among European and national authorities**, especially with regard to the realisation of the core part of the TEN-T network while taking account of the specific challenges in the Member States;
- make **better use of existing policies and instruments for regional cooperation**, such as European Territorial Cooperation (ETC), Interreg and especially European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs), to enhance cross-border transport between regions and remove bottlenecks;
- develop **transport hubs** to be a key element for interlinking long-distance, regional and urban transport, thus promoting efficiency, intermodality and regional business development;
- ensure **synergies and mutual complementarity of funding** under the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI), the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance and instruments of the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) when implementing transport infrastructure projects in the central and eastern EU;
- use the means of the **European Fund for Strategic Investments** (EFSI) in a timely manner to advance commercially viable market-based projects;
- use the ESI Funds to **increase the administrative capacity** of the intermediate bodies and beneficiaries;

- pay attentions to east-**west and north-south transport corridors** within the European TEN-T network;
- ensure the integration of the **Western Balkans accession countries** into the TEN-T network and the cooperation on transport links with Ukraine, Moldova and other neighbouring countries.

Member States are encouraged to make use of **public-private partnerships** where appropriate, which can be an advantageous way of investing in infrastructure, in particular as regards the implementation of complex infrastructure projects requiring extensive expenditure.

Moreover, cooperation under the **macro-regional strategies** of the EU, using innovative governance mechanism, could help to tackle transport policy issues which cannot be solved by Member States individually.

Road transport: the Commission and the Member States are asked to address the urgent need to enhance the road infrastructure network along the eastern border of the EU, starting in Estonia, passing through Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria and ending in Greece.

Such efforts should build on the long-standing planning done already under the **Via Carpatia** project which should be incorporated into the TEN-T core network in order to ensure **appropriate EU funding**. Members considered that the possibility of opening the Rhine-Danube corridor to the north of the EU through the Via Carpatia should be exploited and that Via Carpatia should receive a **proper budget allocation**.

Rail transport: Parliament stressed the priority of constructing, modernising and maintaining railway lines for the coherent, sustainable growth of rail transport and cohesion in the central and eastern parts of the EU.

It reiterated its support for the deployment of the European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS) on all TEN-T core network corridors.

Member States are called upon to adopt clear, long-term rail transport development strategies and to remove barriers to rail projects implemented using EU funding.

Members underlined the common benefits of the Rail Baltica link as one of the priority projects in the North Sea-Baltic Corridor and its significant strategic importance for all the Member States involved, as well as for the whole region from Finland (with the possible 'Bothnian extension'), through Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and on to Germany, the Netherlands and southern Europe.

Inland waterways: Parliament highlighted the importance of inland waterway transport as a cost-effective and sustainable means for multimodal transport and for logistics across the EU.

Members underscored the **role of the Danube River as the key transport waterway** in the Danube macro-region. They invited the riparian states to ensure the continuous navigability of the Danube, while taking the environmental aspects into account.

Maritime ports and airports: Parliament underlined the potential for further developing attractive shipping to ports in the Baltic, Black, and Adriatic Seas in the context of the 'Motorways of the Sea' concept. It pointed out that sustainable port development in the Baltic, Adriatic and Black Seas must not be impeded by other undersea infrastructure.

Northern Adriatic ports must strengthen their cooperation through regional coordination for the common promotion of traffic flows for maritime trade in the North Adriatic and to fully integrate the Italian ports with those of Slovenia (Koper) and Croatia (Rijeka). The Commission is called upon to include the port of

Rijeka in the Baltic-Adriatic corridor in order to enable the full transport connection of northern Adriatic sea ports towards Central Europe and the Baltic Sea.

The Commission should examine air connectivity in and between Member States and to establish measures to improve air transport services in terms of quality of services for consumers.

Members noted the enormous potential that small and medium-sized airports have in terms of transport accessibility in Central and Eastern Europe and stressed the contribution regional airports make to increasing the attractiveness of their regions.

Lastly, Members recognised the diverse roles of **regional and local airports** as well as the contribution regional airports make to increase the attractiveness of their regions. For any new facilities, traffic demand and potential must be duly assessed and use of EU funds strictly limited to economically viable and sustainable projects.