Intermodality and intermodal freight transport, services and sustainability

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The Committee supports the integrated approach to developing intermodal transport in the EU. The way in which this is described in the communication shows insight into a complex issue and points the way for concrete action. The ESC also draws the Commission's attention to a number of points that it feels are important, namely: - Since the technical, economic and, above all, political obstacles to the market-oriented operation of the railways in particular are hardly mentioned, the ESC feels that one of the most serious, if not the most serious stumbling blocks to the development of intermodality is missing from the communication. - In view of the developments in road transport, one should focus on improving technology and finding solutions to present obstacles in rail, inland waterway and coastal transport, so they can maintain their advantage in the fields of energy consumption, emissions and noise prevention. - The Commission's communication does not elaborate on the idea of using "intermodality" as a quality indicator of the efficiency of the total transport system, or give it any concrete foundation. It is also unclear what the consequences of intermodality will be for jobs and society as a whole. - The development of Trans-European Networks of motorways and "Freeways" for rail traffic will directly have a big impact on the use of road, rail and water-borne transport and may greatly influence the development of "intermodality". - The development of "intermodality" often calls for huge investments, especially in equipment, terminals and information systems. Government support for new services is only possible to a limited extent, while subsidies for operating losses, for example, are quite impossible, even in the initial phase. As many parties in intermodal transport can only invest very limited sums, this is a considerable barrier. Finally, the Committee thinks that red tape should be kept to a minimum when implementing the Commission's action programme and further developing intermodality. Moreover, the Commission should consult closely with all those involved, both market operators and social partners.