

Conclusions of the Ministerial conference at Bled on 29 August 2012 and Final Conclusions of the SEETAC project

The Final Conference of the SEETAC project took place while the revision of the TEN-T guidelines and the establishment of a new financing mechanism (CEF) are under discussion in the European Parliament and the Council.

In this context, the SEETAC partners:

General Considerations

- **Advocate** the need to reconsider the SEE as a key element of the EU transport system, acting as a bridge between Europe, Black Sea, Turkey and further to Middle and Far East. All Western Balkan countries are either candidates or potential candidates for EU membership. To reach this goal, they have to fulfill all the criteria and conditions required for membership. Regional cooperation is one of the preconditions for their successful integration into the European Union and is therefore also an essential component of the Stabilization and Association Process (SAP).
- **Stress** the importance of overcoming the vicious cycle of austerity, lack of infrastructure investment and low demand for transport services, by the adoption of concrete measures, better regional coordination, and accurate selection of priority projects.
- **Encourage** the EU institutions to consider the extension of the EU Core Network to the Western Balkan countries in order to fully integrate the SEE region in the EU transport system.
- **Underline** the potential of extension of the CEF application in the SEE region (combined with other sources), not only for EU MS, as well as the Europe 2020 Project Bond Initiative.
- **Highlight** the importance to plan and prioritize cross-border projects in line with EU Core TEN-T Network. Taking into consideration that the SEE countries are located at the cross border of many pan-European axes and that logistics play an increasing role in the development of trade, further action is needed in order to achieve cross border facilitation and elimination of bottlenecks at the borders which constitute the main current key problems. Interventions for the improvement of the administrative procedures at border crossings do not demand a lot in terms of financial resources. On the contrary they could be very efficient and contribute significantly to the reduction of delays and other administrative barriers at border crossings. Last but not least, there is a need of high quality and reliable data for the cross border projects in order to attract financial assistance in the area.
- **Encourage** the necessity to further strengthen the regional coordination vis-à-vis the EC and other IFIs. The planning of new projects and the upgrading of the infrastructure on the EU Corridors still lack of coordination between the various countries. While the SEE region is rather small, infrastructure planning remains focused on national priorities more than on regional scale. In this context, regional coordination should play a major role in transport planning and selection of priority projects.
- **Urge** to consider the possibility to extend the mandate of the Ten-T Coordinators, through a Corridor approach, to the Western Balkans.

- **Highlight** the need to target investments (grants from EU, national funds, IFI loans) on a limited number of high added value, well coordinated priority projects. In this way coherence in the network development of the neighboring regions is insured thus rendering the TEN-T extension as an opening to the rest of the world.
- **Stress** the importance of earmarking adequate resources both at National and European level for selected transport priority projects, thus also contributing to the economic recovery.
- **Point out** the necessity to reinvigorate the situation of the transport infrastructure in SEE, by taking into consideration not only the point of view of the single national project, but giving the priority to those projects which are in line with a Corridor approach, aiming at better integrating the transport system of the SEE with the EU; as well as the importance of coordination between national and EU funds.
- **Stress** the need to take further action in order to achieve cross border facilitation and elimination of bottlenecks at the borders through the improvement of the administrative procedures in order to reduce delays and other administrative barriers at border crossings.
- **Consider** that despite continuous efforts undertaken during the past decades and significant lack of transport infrastructure it is necessary to activate private funding through contemporary investment schemes / mechanisms, as the funds required for the implementation of the transport infrastructure are nowadays much higher than the available EU funds.
- **Underline** the importance that EU should have a strategic role for the enhancement of regional cooperation and the optimum management and utilization of resources, financial instruments and mechanisms. This task should not lead to the creation of new structures throughout Europe, but to better exploitation of existing structures.
- **Urge** the need for cooperation for effectively tackling infrastructure horizontal issues. As EU candidate and potential candidate countries need not only to incorporate the total EU legislative framework (EU acquis) into their national legislation, but also to align their transport safety and environmental operations to current EU standards.

Specific Considerations on the SEETAC project

- **Agree** unanimously that the SEETAC Project delivered successful and important results: it initiated and developed a transport Networking frame, provided a harmonized data collection, and a coherent international traffic forecasting model for the SEE region. These elements enhanced the cooperation of decision makers and decision takers in the field of transport in the region. Moreover, the project enabled the sharing of experiences among countries and gathered experts of the region from various transport related fields. The decision makers in the region should fully exploit SEETAC results.
- **Welcome** the fact that the methodology developed for the SEETAC project indicates possible future scenarios in the transport sector together with environment impacts as well as with “What if..” situations. In particular the project has identified priority projects that can be submitted to the IFIs for financing consideration.

- **Point out** that interaction developed in the SEETAC project among the EU, regional organisations and the national authorities underlined that besides huge infrastructure investments, the development and use of the IT tools, processes and methods might significantly contribute to the future efficient transport system. It is a common wish and will that the recent EU strategies on the transport field would be better implemented compared to all past initiatives and agreements. This will trigger in common understanding that in the future, sustainable and rational use of energy oriented to transport system, would be of common benefit with particular respect to our successors.

- **Highlight** that the outcomes of the SEETAC project are to be considered within the Danube strategy scope. In this context the project promoted the development of co-modal, multimodal–sustainable transport system of the region where the terminals and logistic centers that can enable interconnection of different transport modes, are indicated accordingly.

- **Put** forward the proposal to consider the possibility of setting up the Rail Corridor as per Regulation 913/2010 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 September 2010 concerning the European rail network for competitive freight.

- **Welcome** the approval of the project “*Accessibility improved at border CROSSings for the integration of South East Europe*” (ACROSSEE) under the 4th Call of the South East Europe Programme which aims at improving the accessibility through the cross-border in the SEE region.

- **Stress** the importance to continue the SEETAC project with new project proposal named SEETAC 2, and the need to develop the terms of reference of this new proposal in cooperation with the EU Commission (DG Move).