

Sarajevo, 01.12.10

**INCREASE EFFICIENCY OF TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE  
REDUCING NON-PHYSICAL BARRIERS IN THE AREA OF  
SEETO COUNTRIES**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

This meeting takes place at the moment when the Western Balkans or Eastern Europe as it is now called, is preparing to join the EU. We as the Ministers of Transport meet every year on the framework of SEETO to discuss how to increase the efficiency of transport by improving the infrastructure and the removal of non physical barriers.

This collaboration has given its own results which are proved not only by the increase of the annual level of investment but also by the increase of the level of people's mobility and volume of goods exchange among our countries and with other international destinations. But it is a fact that these indicators at a regional level are lower than those at a pan-European level and one of the reasons is the fact that barriers that are among us are greater than those we have with European countries.

We are talking to make the activity of transporters easier, more comfortable and with no costs. There exists a full understanding with the authorities of Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina to establish bilateral relations in the field of transport in accordance with the European standards and would like that such relationships be established with all the countries of the region and beyond. We hope that the EU initiative to establish a Regional Transport Treaty will help in this regard.

We have identified the need for a road transport agreement between Serbia and Albania. Both countries have been express since time ago their readiness. We do not do it simply for bureaucratic reasons, because we should sit down in a table and sign this agreement in order to facilitate the work of the Albanian transporters that travel to Serbia or the Serbian transporters that come to Albania.

The “non – physical barriers”, are barriers that we have created ourselves or barriers we have inherited which we cannot remove. Therefore since we are moving fast in infrastructure we need to have the same pace in implementing the removal of these non – physical barriers or administrative barriers.

But the level of efficiency of existing infrastructure would be very low if it is not combined with the reduction of so-called “non-physical barriers” because generally freight traffic analysis and forecasts made by different researchers are done on the assumption that traffic will be developed based on increased market demands, without problems of these barriers. An experiment conducted by IRU with a caravan of means from 12 different countries in the region proved that the time lost at border crossings was larger than the time to travel the route.

I am sure that the infrastructure in each of our countries is improved in those three years. I am skeptic on the other side, that we have had the same pace in this other direction, in the direction of the removal of non – physical barriers. Not to mention here a series of taxes and procedures that we have to eliminate with a spirit of understanding. With the emergence of new states since 1991, the number of border crossings in South-East Europe has increased sharply.

The next barrier we have to remove is the Visa regime between our countries.

The countries of the region have liberalized visas with the European Union, whereas we have not liberalized the visas with each other. In order to forerun this Albania has removed the visas with all the countries in the region. This is a political agenda mostly, it does not belong to transport, and we will exercise our influence that this phenomenon be solved because it is abnormal to knock on the doors of Brussels and ask for the liberalization of visas in the *Shengen* area and not liberalizing visas among us.

The next barrier has to do with the legislation. We need to harmonize the legislation procedures with one another. We all are in a process of the European Union, the process of the harmonization of legislation toward the *acquis communautaire*, but can we harmonize with each other in parallel? Can we create a set of procedures, rules that would made a transporter travel with the same commodities in Albania, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo and so on as well?

Unification of rules, documentation and procedures will significantly reduce delays at border crossings. A concrete step would be for example the mutual recognition of driving licenses among the countries of the region similar to the agreement that the Albanian government has signed with the Italian government that is now at the final stage of negotiations with Slovenia, and Croatia. Most of our countries have done so with several countries of EU, whereas we have not done so with one another and it is not a difficult task. We can quite well in a short time reach the mutual recognition of driving licenses, and become part of that free zone. Harmonization of legal framework is a necessity. For this reason, adherence to international conventions and agreements and their adoption into the national legislation is on the agenda of priorities of the Albanian Government. In this context, the Albanian parliament has ratified many community agreements, part of the *acquis communautaire* in the field of road, air, maritime and rail transport under the National Transport Plan. Progress has been made in the process of implementation of digital Tahograph where our country is now part of the European network of monitoring of this system "Tachonet".

The waiting time at border crossing points is another issue. We have the possibility to reduce it. We have a successful experience with Montenegro where we have established a common border crossing point. The time spend there is much shorter because it has one police control, one custom, one stop shop that exercise control in both countries, we have much less costs for the transporter and the administration as well.

We save from the administrative point of view each of the governments of our countries. These are some of the barriers, but I am convinced that they are all surmountable; they are not a question of political will. From all the issues we have had with all the Ministers or with those Minister that for one reason or another are not here today, we have all noticed that there exists a political will to overcome these barriers. I will repeat that it remains to solve only the bureaucratic part of the problem.

We should find a very simple solution, which would be a table like the one we are offered today in Sarajevo. We need to prepare a plan and a time schedule with clear targets toward the removal of the "non physical barriers".

I would like to assure all participants of this meeting that the Albanian Government will provide its contribute without reservation so that the pace of this process be as swift as possible to the benefit of the economic development and prosperity of our countries.

I would like to conclude by thanking once again the organizers of this meeting and for all the efforts done to bring us closer to communicate and solve those problems that we can solve.

**Thank you.**