



**Address to the Steering Committee  
on the development of the South East  
Europe Core Regional Transport  
Network.**

***Speech of Mr Zoltan Kazatsay***

*Deputy Director General*

**Tirana 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2007**

**Good afternoon,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**Dear Colleagues,**

**Introduction**

First of all, I would like to express my pleasure being here with you this afternoon for the 14th meeting of the Steering Committee. I want to congratulate all of you for the efforts made so far in the work done, for achievement of our common goal to develop a well functioning transport network in the region.

The Memorandum of Understanding, signed in June 2004, has in the meantime become a reference for the development of the transport system in the Region. The South East Europe Transport Observatory (SEETO) created to support this initiative has successfully found its role and is now a focal point for regional cooperation.

Today, I would like to concentrate my intervention on the follow-up to the High Level Group on the extension of the major trans-European transport axes to the neighbouring countries and regions and the future implementation of the MoU for the Western Balkan Countries

Most of you were part of the High Level Group chaired by Ms Loyola de Palacio and therefore participated to the drafting of the report *Networks for peace and development* transmitted to Vice-President Barrot in December 2005. We are all sad that Ms de Palacio passed away one year ago and I would like to recall her decisive contribution to our work.

Based on this report and after a stakeholder consultation organised in 2 phases: during the work of the HLG in spring 2005 and on the HLG report in 2006, the Commission presented a Communication on *Extension of the major trans-European transport axes to the neighbouring countries; Guidelines for transport in Europe and neighbouring regions* in January 2007.

In the Communication, the Commission endorsed the High Level Group's recommendations (5 axes, horizontal measures and strong coordination frameworks) and announced the launch of exploratory talks to prepare concrete action.

The talks were launched in Spring 2007 and the first round of discussions is taking place now with all the neighbouring countries and other relevant stakeholders. As we all know, your region is close to the EU and has a European clear perspective. Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia are already candidate countries, whilst

the other are potential candidate for accession. The South East Europe Core Regional Transport Network will be the basis for accession negotiations concerning the future the trans-European network for transport. Tomorrow, an addendum to the MoU will be signed on rail market access and market opening, which brings the sector a step closer to the implementation of Community rail *acquis*. For all these reasons, we consider your Region at a different stage compared to the other neighbouring countries. That is why we propose to use the existing framework of cooperation under the Memorandum of Understanding on the development of the South East Europe Core Regional Transport Network as the appropriate structure to strengthen our cooperation. In spring 2008, the Commission intends to propose a negotiation mandate for a treaty on a Western Balkan Transport Community, which would aim to apply the *acquis communautaire not only* in the rail sector but also to extend the same principles to all transport modes and in particular to roads and inland waterways. In the field of aviation, the European Common Aviation Agreement already agreed, has the same objective. Let me now briefly report on the other axes. For the Northern Axis, the working group on “Transport strategies, infrastructure and public-private partnerships” under the EU-Russia transport dialogue met in Moscow in October. A joint meeting involving also Norway and Belarus will be organised in early 2008. For the Central Axis, the work has concentrated on the conclusion of an enhanced agreement between Ukraine and the EU. The aim of the agreement in the transport sector is to include a strong chapter on transport cooperation aiming at the implementation of the recommendations of the High Level Group and approximation of EU legislation. Today, 3 December 2007, a High Level conference is organised jointly, by the Commission and the Portuguese Presidency of the Council in Lisbon to officially launch the exploratory talks on the Mediterranean axes. For the South East Axis, the branch to the Caucasus region should be covered under the Traceca framework. A

Ministerial meeting will take place next week<sup>1</sup> in Astana to explore ways to strengthen cooperation and make the Traceca framework more effective.

The Commission has already scheduled a series of meetings for spring 2008. A second progress report on the exploratory talks will be tabled by July 2008, including, when relevant, a recommendation to the Council to open negotiations.

Dear Members of the Steering committee,

We strongly welcome the development of the multi-annual plan 2008-2012, which clearly shows to us the huge amount of resources and efforts that are required to be invested in the improvement of the Core Network. These efforts need to be cover operations as well as o infrastructure developments. I understand that SEETO has provided a useful platform for regional cooperation in this respect. The European Commission, in close cooperation with IFIs, will continue its support and commitment towards SEETO. I am looking forward to your continuous regional cooperation. That is the key for future success.

Thank you for your attention.

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<sup>1</sup> 12-13/12