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Reply to the Fourth Report on the activities of the European Conference of Ministers of Transport

Report¹

Committee on Economic Affairs and Development

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A. Draft Resolution

1. The Consultative Assembly has examined with great interest the Fourth Report of the European Conference of Ministers of Transport. It is particularly gratified to see that careful consideration has been given to the comments and suggestions made by the Consultative Assembly in reply to the Third Report of the E. C. M. T. The Assembly has also studied with great interest Reports Nos. VI (Resolution of the Council of Ministers of 23rd-24th October 1957) and VII (Resolution on Prospects for the trend of Transport in the period 1956-1960 and on the influence of that trend on investment).
2. The Assembly is pleased to see that the E. C. M. T. is prepared to establish the closest cooperation with the European Economic Community and would be grateful to have in the next report full details of the arrangements made, particularly as they affect the instituting of a common transport policy and the need to avoid duplication of work and waste of specialists. The Assembly also welcomes the setting up of a joint group with the O. E. E. C. to study appropriate steps in the field of transport in relation to the establishment of a Free Trade Area. Since the question of cooperation between the E. C. M. T., the European Commission of the E. E. C, and the High Authority of the E. C.S.C., will become even more important as and when a Free Trade Area is established, the Assembly draws attention to paragraph 3 of the attached Explanatory Memorandum and would like to hear, in due course, of any particular proposals which the E. C. M. T. makes in this connection.
3. The Assembly welcomes the continued cooperation between the E. C. M. T. and the competent international governmental organisations, as well as the close association of nongovernmental organisations with the work of the Committee of Deputies and its subsidiary bodies. Having regard, however, to one or two of the representations made in the communications of non-governmental organisations to the E. C. M. T., the Assembly hopes that this cooperation will be still further developed so that the widest use is made of the experience of these organisations.
4. The Assembly recalls that in its Reply to the Third Report of the E. C. M. T. it urged the Conference to develop a real transport policy, particularly in regard to investment. It welcomes the facts and figures assembled in the above-mentioned Report No. VII, but again draws the attention of the E. C. M. T. to the fact that, in the long run, such a policy can only be developed on the basis of sound statistics. The Assembly proposes therefore that the E. C. M. T. should make a vigorous effort, together with the Conference of European Statisticians in Geneva and the relevant departments of national civil services, to institute a comparative statistical study for all types of transport in the E C M T countries, and to prepare common rules for collecting and publishing transport statistics.
5. The Assembly wishes to make the following comments on questions affecting particular branches of transport. Railways
6. The Assembly is gratified to learn of the numerous measures taken by member countries to give effect to Resolution No. 10 on the financial situation of the railways, adopted by the E. C. M. T. in May 1957. The Assembly proposes that a special survey of the policies adopted by the Dutch railways be made, as a useful source of suggestions for railway administrations in other member countries.
7. The Assembly welcomes the first report of Eurofima and the fact that sixteen countries have now signed the Convention establishing it. The Assembly strongly urges those Member Governments which have not ratified the Convention to do so at the earliest possible moment in order to enable Eurofima to establish its activities on a permanent basis. It calls upon the members of the delegations to the Consultative Assembly of the countries concerned (Austria, Belgium, France and Italy) to take action in their national parliaments to bring about ratification as soon as possible.
8. The Assembly hopes that the Ministers of Transport of member countries concerned will do their utmost to make Eurofima's work effective, in particular by ensuring that their railway administrations refrain from ordering special types of rolling-stock without prior consultation, in order to enable large-scale standard orders to be placed. These suggestions would apply, in particular, to orders for diesel locomotives. The Assembly would be interested to learn in the next E C M T Report of any special difficulties that arise on this score in the course of the coming year.
9. The Assembly welcomes the recent introduction of the Trans-Europ express trains. It hopes that more trains of this type will be introduced and that particular attention will be paid to the improvement of communications with the cities where European institutions are located. Road Transport

10. The Assembly congratulates the Conference on the considerable increase in the number of " restricted groups ", and especially on the restricted group created between Greece, Turkey and Yugoslavia, having regard to the importance of facilitating communications in Southern Europe. For this reason the Assembly feels also that the system of bilateral coordination of road construction, including development of frontier crossing facilities, should be further extended. Highways connecting France, Switzerland and Austria with Italy include the main traffic arteries between Northern and Southern Europe, and could certainly be further improved. The Assembly would be interested to learn if special provisions are made for joint financing of any scheme set up by a " restricted group ".

11. The Assembly regrets that no significant progress appears to have been made on the problems of weight, dimensions, payload and speed of road vehicles. It seems that decisions are to be postponed until 1960 when the results of the United States road tests are known. The Assembly feels that it should be possible with advantage to carry out similar tests in Europe and would like to hear whether in this way more progress could be made before 1960 or, at least, if valuable supplementary data could not be made available in this way to support those obtained in the United States.

12. The Assembly is grateful for the information given concerning a European Highway Code and is glad to hear that studies concerning regulations on equipment of road vehicles and on further road signs are already under way. The Assembly would ask the Conference to recommend that member countries should make further efforts to obtain still greater unification of rules. Having regard to the enormous growth of road traffic in Western Europe, the Assembly feels that this is a field in which unification is of the greatest possible importance; it accordingly recommends that representatives from all national delegations should follow these matters up in national parliaments and press for positive action.

13. The Assembly fully agrees with the E. C. M. T. that the failure of improvement and equipment of roads to keep up with the increase in traffic is a matter of grave concern. It urges the Conference to do everything possible to increase road investment in member countries and would be glad to learn of any particular problems which the Conference feels that Assembly Representatives could usefully consider, particularly in national parliaments. Inland Waterways

14. The Assembly is pleased to see the progress that is being made in the E. C. M. T.'s work on the coordination of inland waterways' freight rates, and hopes that the Conference will be able in the near future to follow up the work of the E. C. S. C. and reach an agreement on freight rates and transport conditions for goods other than coal and steel on the Rhine.

15. The Assembly hopes that the Governments, and in particular the Netherlands Government, will make another effort to reach a general agreement on the Convention on International Regulations on Waterways to the west of the Rhine. Other Questions

16. The Assembly welcomes the help offered by the E. C. M. T. to the Channel Tunnel Study Group, and would be interested to learn whether the Governments did in fact furnish the information requested, as also to have details of particular matters in which help is subsequently to be given.

17. The Assembly notes that the Tourism Committee of the O. E. E. C. has been invited to bring up specific points towards which cooperation between the two bodies might be directed, and the Assembly looks forward to having' fuller information on developments here.

B. Explanatory Memorandum

1.

1. The Fourth Report on the activities of the European Conference of Ministers of Transport is not only most interesting in itself but should be particularly gratifying to the Consultative Assembly, in view of the careful consideration given there to the comments and suggestions made by the Assembly in Resolution 138, adopted in October last in reply to the Third Report of the E. C. M. T.

2. Although transport may appear to most a technical matter for specialists, that it is a matter of vital concern to everyone is evident from the figures given in the Report. For example, in the ECMT countries for which figures could be obtained, inland transport consumes more than one-tenth of the total energy used, and absorbs about one fifth or one sixth of total investment, while the operation of the various means of transport accounts on an average for 6 %-7 % of the total labour force. Close and continued collaboration between European parliamentarians and the E.C.M.T. is therefore extremely important if the Conference's work is to be made widely known in member countries, and if there is to be a fruitful exchange of views between parliamentary opinion and governmental experts.

3. In paragraph 2 of the draft Resolution, comment is made on relations between the ECMT, the European Economic Community and the O. E. E. C. in connection with the last-named's work on the Free Trade Area. With the institutions of the Common Market in process of being set up, and those of the Free Trade Area a possibility for the near future, it is clear that these must be organised in such a way that there is no duplication of work and no waste of the specialists who are in such short supply. Yet there have been press reports indicating difficulties in ensuring the necessary degree of integration even of such closely connected offices as the Transport Commission of the High Authority of the E. C. S. C., and the corresponding department which will be required in the European Commission of the Common Market¹². It is clear that, if a rational organisation of technical services in a field like this cannot be ensured, the outlook for a sound system of institutions in Europe as a whole is very poor indeed. The time has now come to consider whether the transport clauses in the ECSC Treaty should not be cancelled by common agreement, as soon as the transport department of the European Commission can take over the work done by the Transport Commission of the High Authority.

4. The question of cooperation between the E. C. M. T. and non-governmental organisations in the transport field is stressed in paragraph 3 of the draft Resolution. This is a delicate matter, since it is inevitable that the nongovernmental organisations concerned should support, first and foremost, the interests of the particular sector of transport which they represent, whether it be road, rail or water. Yet when we remember that all forms of transport have a particular interest to support, it is clearly difficult for an organisation which, like the Conference, is responsible for transport development as a whole, not to appear at some time or another, to give too little weight to the representations of an individual branch of transport. Thus an organisation such as the International Union of Inland Waterways may come to feel that the procedure in force for cooperation with the E. C. M. T. " does not promote any continuous work nor the confidence which would be essential for fruitful cooperation". Nevertheless, the Assembly should, in your Rapporteur's opinion, recommend that the very wide experience and expert knowledge of these non-governmental organisations be fully utilised by the Conference, and that they have a full opportunity at all times to present their case on any given topic.

5. In paragraph 4 of the draft Resolution the Assembly calls for a serious effort on the part of the Conference, together with the Conference of European Statisticians in Geneva and the relevant departments of national civil services, to begin building up comprehensive statistics, which are essential if a sound and coherent transport policy is to be developed. It is true, as the Conference's Report states, that " in statistical studies there are considerable difficulties in defining for each country the extent of the transport industry and measuring exactly what it covers ". The Report states also that " owing to differences in the structure of this industry from one country to another, it is impossible to make international comparisons". On the other hand, it is certain that more could be done, and the Assembly should continue to press for further efforts in this direction, though it is grateful meanwhile for the facts and figures given in the Resolution " on Prospects for the trend of transport in the period 1956-1960 and on the influence of that trend on investment ".

2. Le Monde, for example, of 20th February 1958, speaks of " a hard-hitting discussion in progress between the High Authority of the E. C. S. C. and the European Commission of the Common Market on the question of whether a " joint transport service " should be set up or whether, on the other hand, each should possess its own individual service ".

6. On particular branches of transport, the draft Resolution first discusses points concerning railways. The details given in Appendix I to the Report, on measures adopted by member countries to give effect to Resolution No. 10 of the Council of Ministers on the financial situation of the railways, are particularly interesting. It is encouraging to read that in the Netherlands " the railways are considered as an industrial undertaking: they are operated on commercial principles, and their accounts are based on modern ideas of commercial economy". We are also told that " as regards their financial situation, profits in recent years have been sufficient to cover the amount needed to finance the continuous modernisation of equipment in addition to normal depreciation. Thus no special measures are necessary, since the aims mentioned in the Resolution of the Council of Ministers are already attained." Your Rapporteur hopes that his colleagues in the Assembly will forgive him for pointing to this flattering description of the situation of the Dutch railways (in this connection he is aware that population density and competition from road and water transport are also part of the picture). Attention should be drawn to the fact that at least some important railway administrations, the British, Danish and French, are not recorded as having made any communication to the Conference at all on what they have been able to do in connection with Resolution No. 10. A few of the communications made refer to studies in progress on what can best be to give effect to the recommendations of Resolution No. 10. In Austria, for example, a Ministerial Committee has been set up " to make concrete proposals for the normalisation of railway accounts and to relieve the railways of general economic obligations". In Luxembourg the Transport Council of the railways has been asked " to draw up proposals on the measures to be taken, particularly on the normalisation of railway accounts". The Assembly should continue to follow up the work which is in progress on this problem in all member-countries of the Conference.

7. It is pleasing to note that two further Member-States of the E. C. M. T. (Greece and Turkey) have now joined Eurofima, the first report of which is given as Appendix II to the Report of the Conference. Assembly representatives from the Austrian, Belgian, French and Italian delegations could perform a useful service here in pressing in their national parliaments for ratification of the Eurofima International Convention. This is particularly important because the 80 % of the registered capital of the company prescribed in Article 15 of the Convention for its entry into force has not yet been reached. (The Convention is being applied, in fact, only provisionally). With the accession to the Convention of Greece and Turkey most Member States of the Council of Europe have joined Eurofima³.

8. Though this is a most welcome development, Eurofima's work has not yet gathered any real momentum. The first report of the Eurofima company states that " with regard to orders it must be admitted that the grouping of orders for several networks with a single manufacturer, (the only means of achieving mass production and therefore lower prices) was not possible, particularly owing to the level of customs duties, and also to the fact that, for national reasons, administrations which would find it advantageous to import, did not agree to the placing of orders abroad ". (Rapporteur's italics). If this is already the policy in a period of shortage of labour, the consequences could be very serious in times of a high level of unemployment. At a time when the European Economic Community has been set up and a wider Free Trade Area is being negotiated, representatives should do their utmost in national parliaments to ensure that national thinking of this kind is replaced by a more constructive international approach as quickly as possible. Perhaps Assembly members could help the E. C. M. T. in this matter if particular difficulties arising on this score are brought to the Assembly's attention in future reports of the E. C. M. T. A suggestion in this sense is accordingly made in paragraph 8 of the draft Resolution..

9. As regards road transport, the increase in the number of restricted groups is welcomed in paragraph 9 of the draft Resolution, and we must hope that the improvement of Greek and Turkish road communications will be of assistance in developing the economy of these countries. Members of the Assembly will note that a call is made in the same paragraph for the setting up of restricted groups in which Italy takes part, to see whether further improvements can be made in road communications to that country. Attention is drawn in the draft Resolution to the question of financing such schemes, important not only for the countries setting up the " restricted groups " but for European transport as a whole.

10. Paragraph 11 of the draft Resolution deals with the failure to make progress on the problems of weight, dimensions, payload and speed of road vehicles, while paragraph. 12 deals with the work going on to standardise rules of the road and regulations on the equipment of road vehicles. When we read in the Report that, " as far as road transport is concerned, it is expected that the number of vehicles in circulation will increase by at least 50 % by 1960 ", it is clear that this problem is daily becoming more acute, and if we look at the matter from a standpoint in which the general public is more directly interested — the problem of road accidents — the figures indicate how desperately urgent it is to make further progress in this field. 41,000

3. i. e. all except the United Kingdom, Iceland and Ireland (the two last-named countries are not members of E. C. M. T.).

deaths and 1,150,000 cases of injury are reported in the countries of the E.C.M.T. in 1955, and these figures are expected to show an increase of 10 % for the year 1956. Your Rapporteur proposes, in paragraph 11 of the draft Resolution, therefore, that European road tests be carried out on the lines of the United States road tests described in the Report, as a matter of urgency, so that progress can be accelerated in fixing acceptable standards for road vehicles and road structure. And in paragraph 12 representatives from all national parliamentary delegations are urged to press for greater unification of rules of the road.

11. This brings us to the problem dealt with in paragraph 13 of the draft Resolution — road investment and the failure of road improvement and equipment to keep up with the increase in traffic. We have already mentioned the fact that, according to the Report, transport absorbs at present about one-fifth or one-sixth of total investments, and the fact that the number of vehicles in circulation will increase by at least 50 % in the period 1956-1960. Yet we are told in the Conference's Report that " the improvement in equipment of road infrastructure lags considerably behind the increase in traffic... and in order to catch up on these arrears in the period 1956 to 1960, while covering new traffic needs, the level of investment for that period would have to be at least double what it was in 1955 ". The need for appropriate action in member countries on this score is thus evident.

12. Paragraphs 14 and 15 of the draft Resolution refer to Inland Waterways. Although member countries primarily interested in these problems are those of the Six, it is important to make further progress in this matter, since the E. C. M. T. has been asked by the Six to do what it can to bring about an agreement.

13. Two last points remain. In paragraph 16 of the draft Resolution the Assembly welcomes the mention in the Report of the Channel Tunnel project. A meeting was held between members of the Economic Committee's Subcommittee on the Channel Tunnel project with M. Massigli, French Chairman of the Study Group set up on the initiative of the Suez Canal Company. When the results of the studies at present going on are available, this Sub-committee is to take the matter up again. Meanwhile, the Assembly should welcome the cooperation offered by the E. C. M. T. to the Study Group, and it would be interesting to learn in a subsequent report details of what help has been given.

14. Finally, there is the question of tourism. The Report mentions that the Tourism Committee of the O. E. E. C. has been requested to inform the E. C. M. T. of specific points towards which cooperation between the two bodies might be directed. Tourism is a matter of particular concern to the Assembly. As a result of the work of the Council of Europe in this field progress has been made in the simplification of frontier formalities, particularly in the abolition of customs documents for private motor vehicles. This is likely to result in a considerable increase in tourist traffic in the near future, which the various authorities concerned must be ready to meet. The Assembly should, therefore, certainly ask for details of the cooperation that is instituted in this field.