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Reply to the Fifth Annual Report of the European Conference of Ministers of Transports

Report[1]
Committee on Economic Affairs and Development
Rapporteur: Mr Hendrik VOS, Netherlands, Socialist Group

1. 1959 - 11th Session - First part

A. Draft Resolution

1. The Assembly thanks the European Conference of Ministers of Transport for transmitting its Fifth Annual Report and notes with great satisfaction the careful consideration which has been given, as in previous Reports, to the suggestions of the Consultative Assembly on European transport matters. The Assembly would like also to place on record its particular appreciation of the efforts of successive Chairmen of the Conference in attending regularly the Assembly's debates on the Conference's Reports, in discussing more detailed matters with the Assembly's Economic Committee, and, generally, in promoting fruitful co-operation between the two organisations.

2. The Assembly is pleased to note the progress made in developing co-operation between the E. C. M. T. and other international organisations concerned with transport, particularly with a view to co-ordinating work being done in the various bodies and eliminating duplication of effort. It notes with satisfaction the development of functional relations between the Conference and 0. E. E. C, the decision of the member countries of the European Economic Community to set up a " Restricted Group " within the framework of the E. C. M. T., and the liaison established between the Transport Directorate of the European Commission and the Secretariat of the E. C. M. T. With regard to civil aviation, the Assembly hopes that, apart from the collaboration which is being developed with the Air Research Bureau, full relations will be established with the European Civil Aviation Conference, the intergovernmental body in which all questions of civil aviation are dealt with.

3. The Assembly recalls the suggestions it has made in reply to previous Reports regarding the collection of statistics. It urges the Conference to give maximum priority to the solution of this problem and would like to be informed of the results of the examination of ways of improving these statistics mentioned in para. 13 of the Report.

4. In particular, the Assembly draws the attention of the Conference to the need for preparing forecasts of transport development over the next decade, for which reliable statistics are indispensable, though still unobtainable.

5. The Assembly welcomes the Ministers'" intention of giving special attention to problems relating to transport workers and intends through action in national Parliaments to press those Member States which have not yet ratified the European Convention on the Social Security of International Transport Workers to do so.

6. The Assembly is resolved through efforts in national Parliaments to press Member Governments to sign and ratify as quickly as possible the various other conventions and agreements on transport matters concluded under the auspices of the European Conference of Ministers of Transport-—and draws the attention of the Belgian and Austrian Parliaments in particular to the desirability of their ratifying the Eurofima International. Convention.

7. The Assembly welcomes the information in the Report of assistance given by the Conference to the Channel Tunnel Study Group and on co-operation established with the 0. E. E. C. for the study of certain problems of tourism, and looks forward to further information on these two subjects.

8. The Assembly, while regretting that— as stated in para. 24 of the Report—-there has not yet been any real co-ordination in the field of investment in general, notes with satisfaction that the problems of financing investments are to be investigated by the E. C. M. T. The Assembly would be grateful for full information on the results of this investigation.

Railtvays

9. The Assembly is pleased to note the progress made in electrification and dieselis-ation of railways and trusts that the railways will continue to have available the necessary funds to carry on with investment programmes. It draws the attention of the Governments concerned to the fact that there are as yet no electrification projects for the Belgian and German sections of the Cologne-Paris line.

10. The Assembly realises the importance of the Council of Ministers' recommendation that railway accounting should be normalised-though it is aware that the effects of the present recession on railways have made it difficult to eliminate deficits. Nevertheless, the Assembly urges each Member Government of the Conference to examine carefully what it can do to normalise railway accounting and would be grateful for full information on the position of individual countries in the next Annual Report.

11. The Assembly is gratified that the Netherlands Government was able to submit a Note on the position of its own railway administration and would be interested to learn in the next Annual Report what comments individual Member Governments may have on this Note in relation to their own position.

12. The Assembly would like on this occasion to recommend that railways in Europe continue to cease operations wherever these are made uneconomic through insufficient demand and wherever this can be done without harming vital regional interests. Simultaneously, however, railways should make more effort to improve long-distance goods traffic services and services between the principal industrial centres and be given opportunities to take part in road transport as a commercial activity which is a necessary complement to their transport service system.

13. The Assembly suggests that joint studies be undertaken of the different types of combined rail/road goods transport, so that international goods traffic may profit as far as possible from the most efficient standardised methods.

14. The Assembly notes with special interest the report of the Eurofima Company on its second year of activity. The Assembly urges the Conference to find ways and means of ensuring that rolling stock and spare parts acquired by national railway administrations by hire-purchase from Eurofima should be exempt from customs duties; or, alternatively, that at least the rolling stock which is ordered through Eurofima and incorporated in the " Europ " wagon pool should be exempt from duty so long as it remains in the pool.

15. The Assembly resolves, through action in national Parliaments, to urge Member Governments which are members of Eurofima to see what can be done to combine more of their own railways' orders for equipment with those of Eurofima, so that the latter's operations can be increasingly beneficial to European railways as a whole.

Roads

16. The Assembly recalls the suggestions it has made already on the drafting of a European Highway Code. It would be glad to learn whether progress has been made in unifying the rules of the road and draws the particular attention of the Conference to the report of Interpol on road accidents in Europe, in which it is made clear that greater uniformity in road traffic regulations could help to reduce foad accidents.

17. The Assembly notes with satisfaction the progress made by the Conference in setting up Restricted Groups for the development of further international road connections, particularly at Alpine crossings. The Assembly stresses the need, nevertheless, for still greater efforts in this direction. It draws the particular attention of the Austrian, Italian and Yugoslav Governments to work needed on the Eastern side of the Alps.

18. The Assembly further suggests that advantage might be taken of the fact that the development of international motorway networks directly affects the growing number of European tourists to bring the work of the Restricted Groups and the Conference to the attention of the travelling European public by appropriate publicity on newly-opened road connections, where these have been undertaken on the initiative of the Conference. This could be done already where work has started on the very important new route ("the crow's flight route") between Germany and Denmark.

19. The Assembly regrets the fact that no progress has been made on the standardisation of weight, dimension, and payload rules for road vehicles and that, apparently, no attempt has been made to hold valid European road tests to provide supplementary data in addition to those which will become available from tests in the United States in 1960. Through action in national Parliaments the Assembly is determined to do all in its power to encourage Governments to take appropriate action in this field, which is so vital a factor in road traffic safety.

Waterways

20. The Assembly regrets that such slow progress is being made in the deArelopment of waterways for the use of vessels in the 1,350 ton category, and draws attention to the particular importance of ensuring that all principal waterways in Europe can be used by similar vessels of an economic type.

21. The Assembly recommends that the Conference should undertake detailed studies of the economics of waterway transportation in the future. In particular, the Assembly believes that, wherever there is surplus tonnage on inland waterways, efforts should be made to eliminate the surplus, not by withholding new orders for vessels but by scrapping those which are aged or obsolete.

B. Explanatory Memorandum

1.

1. The Annual Report of the European Conference of Ministers of Transport has again been transmitted to the Assembly in sufficient time for it to be included in the Agenda of its spring Session, and Representatives will no doubt appreciate once more the very great interest of this document. Some of the points contained in the draft Resolution which your Rapporteur submits at the head of this paper are self-explanatory, but there is call for comment in a little more detail on other matters. The following paragraphs set out this comment in the order of the points covered in the Resolution.

2. The Assembly is in close contact with a large number of international organisations (2) [2]and has always been preoccupied with the possibilities of overlapping and duplication of effort in their work. A typical example is the way in which the Inland transport Committee of the Economic Commission for Europe seems often to be covering the same ground as the E. C. M. T. The ECE programme for 1959/1960 mentions, for example, the fact that the " Inland Transport Committee has considered the proposal for a highway linking Italy, Greece, Turkey and Yugoslavia and under its auspices consultations are being held "[3]. Is not this a case of duplication of work with the E. C. M. T.'s Restricted Group comprising Greece, Turkey and Yugoslavia?

3. As regards civil aviation, it is important that a difference be made between the Air Research Bureau, (A. R.B.) which represents only the national carriers of 14 European countries, and the European Civil Aviation Conference (E. C. A. C), in which 19 European countries are represented by senior Government officials in the civil aviation field and which covers all aspects of European civil aviation. It is this Organisation, therefore, which should, it seems, be regarded as the appropriate opposite number of E. C. M. T. where questions of civil aviation are concerned.

4. Transport statistics, and particularly road statistics, continue to be neglected by (3 and 4) programme of work of the " Conference of European Statisticians " no transport questions figure at all. Here is certainly a deficiency which the E. C. M. T. should try to make good. No forecasts for future transport development can be made except on the basis of sound statistics, and it is essential that careful studies of transport development over the next decade should be begun now if a real transport policy for the coming years is to be elaborated and decisions on the necessary long-term investments are to be soundly made. It is indeed probable that Governments can only be induced to devote more funds for the development of road infrastructure if forecasts of future road traffic trends are available and based on sound statistics.

5. Several conventions and agreements designed to bring about greater unification (6) in European transport have been drawn up over the last few years. Many of them have not yet been signed and ratified by all countries of the Council of Europe, and a call is therefore made in this paragraph of the draft Resolution for Representatives to press for speedy ratification of conventions already signed by their respective Governments and also to urge accession by their Governments to conventions already in force.

Railways

6. The normalisation of railway accounts is one of the major tasks that must be jointly (9,10 and 11) undertaken by the railways and Finance Ministries. The Note of the Netherlands Government on the situation of the Dutch railways deserves in this connection the closest attention of all member countries, because it proves that it is possible to run a railway system, even in difficult times, without loss. It is, however, necessary that the railways should be well-equipped, that all niain lines should be electrified in order to save time and money, and that subsidiary lines be dieselised.

7. One question that has not been solved satisfactorily so far is the division of work (12 and 13) between rail and road transport, Railways still attempt to serve (at a loss) the less densely populated areas and cover short distances, where the double re-loading involved (road/rail, rail/road) causes costs to be far too high. In such cases, it should be left to lorries and buses to cope with the demand, since they can do this more effectively aiid more flexibly than the railways, which are better adapted to cover long-distance transport needs. If trains are to do this, however, they must be better equipped; collection and delivery of goods before and after transporting by rail with the most modern technical devices, such as containers, should be standard practice over the whole network of member countries of Eurofima. By the same token, fast goods trains connecting principal centres where up-to-date equipment is provided for loading and unloading would make a

2. Throughout the Memorandum, the number in brackets refers to the paragraph of the draft Resolution above.
3. See Doc. E/ECE/346, page 8.

vastly better contribution to the economy than lorry service alone. In this connection, it will be necessary to enable the railway companies to take part in road transport as well, and to combine their rail and road services.

8. It seems that the advantages of the Eurofima system cannot be fully exploited (14 and 15) because customs regulations and narrowly national attitudes in the administrations in home countries mean that all orders for equipment by railway administrations have to be executed in the member country concerned. There is, indeed, already a customs convention on the spare parts used for repairing " Europ " wagons— this convention was concluded under the auspices of the Economic Commission for Europe. The proposal put forward in the present draft Resolution, however, goes further and suggests that it is absolutely necessary that railways which are compelled to renew their rolling stock, should be able to profit, as far as possible, from the reductions in price which large-scale production makes possible. This can only be ensured if customs regulations are modified and permission to place orders abroad is more readily granted.

Road Transport

9. It is known that up to now it is the ECE Inland Transport Committee that has (16) dealt with the question of road traffic conditions and road safety. But it is clear that this Committee has not yet been able to achieve a uniform highway code, covering the whole of Europe. It might, however, be posible to produce such a code to cover at least the member countries of the E. C. M. T. Representatives will be fully aware of the increasing importance of problems of road safety. Everything should bo done to reduce the rising figures of injuries and deaths caused by road accidents. The Report of Interpol on road accidents in Europe makes it clear that drivers' ignorance of road regulations in other countries is thought to be a frequent cause of road accidents involving foreigners, and a special plea is made for greater unification of road traffic regulations.

10. The work done so far by Restricted Groups of the E. C. M. T. to improve road con- (17) nections between neighbouring countries has proved so promising that further groups should certainly be created wherever possible. In particular, it seems desirable to bring about collaboration to develop the " E " trunk and branch roads connecting Austria, Italy and Yugoslavia. At present, the Yugoslav motorway comes to an end at Ljubljana but it is clearly desirable that it should be linked with the Italian network (to Venice) and the Austrian (Salzburg-Vienna).

Inland Waterivays

11. In the Council of Ministers' Resolution No. 1 (Inland Waterways) the E. C. M. T. (20) specified twelve waterways where priority should be given to make them navigable for vessels in the 1,350 ton category. This Resolution was adopted in 1953. Several of the enlargements and alterations involved are now under way, the Juliana Canal, the Ghent-Tonrnai link, the Brussels-Charleroi link, the Meuse, the Moselle-Rhine-Main-Danube link. (It would, incidentally, be of interest in connection with the proposed Rhine-Danube link, to know whether the establishment of this link via the River Neckar would be practicable and profitable). On the French side, however, development work seems only to be covered in the French modernisation and equipment plan, and it may be as much as five years before steps are taken to carry out this work.

12. The Report of the E. C. M. T. mentions (para. 36) that the Rhine ship-owners agreed (21) not to order new vessels as a result of the existing surplus capacity. It may be doubted whether this plan is altogether reasonable, in view of the average age of the ships of the Rhine fleet. In the German fleet, which is the second largest, only 12 % are less than 6 years old, while 35 % are over 50 years old. It is clear that the aged (and mostly uneconomical) vessels should be scrapped so that modern ships of the 1,350 ton category can be taken into service.