Resolution 1186 (1999)[1]

European transport policies (ECMT)

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Assembly has taken note of the 42nd and 43rd annual reports of the European Conference of Ministers of Transport (ECMT) covering 1995 and 1996 respectively and the more recent developments in the transport situation in Europe.

2. The Assembly welcomes the growing membership of the ECMT, now standing at thirty-nine and including Russia which joined in 1997, as well as the increasing number of associate members and observers. It notes with particular interest the joining of numerous countries from south-eastern Europe and central Asia, considering the urgent need to upgrade transport links from the Caspian Sea region – rich in oil, gas and other natural resources – and other parts of Europe. The Assembly believes that the ECMT, in its capacity as the only pan-European transport policy organisation fully specialised in this field, must be given adequate resources to cope with the challenges resulting from the enlargement of its membership and the growing importance of its mission

3. The Assembly fully recognises and encourages the central role of the ECMT as a "political bridge" between those of its member states which do not belong to the European Union and the latter. In view of future European Union enlargement and the introduction of the European Union single currency, it is seen as a measure which is likely to increase trade, and hence transport, significantly. The Assembly calls on the non-European Union countries to do their utmost to accommodate the acquis communautaire of the European Union, and on the European Union to respect the particular circumstances and concerns of non-members, with respect to the environment in particular.

4. The Assembly also welcomes the ECMT's close co-operation with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UN-ECE) on many technical aspects of transport, as it would similar co-operation with the European Civil Aviation Conference as regards the widening interface between ground and air transport.

5. The Assembly notes with regret that, forty years after the entry into force of the Treaty of Rome with its promise of a common transport policy, and a decade after the overcoming of the ideological division of Europe, a common pan-European transport policy is not yet a reality. This notwithstanding, the Assembly commends the ECMT on its efforts to forge such a policy, which the Assembly considers vital to the continent's future prosperity and peace. Such a common approach is all the more urgent since road congestion is reaching intolerable levels, rail transport is in urgent need of modernisation, waterways, short sea shipping and sea lanes continue to be insufficiently used and pressure on the environment shows no sign of abating. In short, inaction is beginning to inhibit further economic development and countries' growing together.

6. The Assembly believes that such a common pan-European transport policy should be inspired by the following principles:

6.1. a common pan-European transport policy must be proactive rather than reactive, strategic rather than tactical, farsighted and geared to future needs and requirements rather than short-term;

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1. Assembly debate on 29 April 1999 (15th Sitting) (see Doc. 8170, report by the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, rapporteur: Mr Bloetzer). Text adopted by the Assembly on 29 April 1999 (15th Sitting).

6.2. every effort must be made to catch up with the insufficient investment in transport infrastructure incurred over the last two decades, in particular with regard to the maintenance of roads, bridges and railways, utilising the most modern technology to this end;

6.3. no part of Europe must be left outside the overall transport approach chosen, in order to permit all countries and regions to contribute to, and benefit from, harmonious overall growth and development. Particular attention has to be given to transport links between the countries of central and eastern Europe, and those from that region to western and south-eastern Europe;

6.4. Europe must build on the transport potential of all available modes of transport in order to achieve a better balance between them, laying particular emphasis on their capacity to link up smoothly with one another. In the present situation, this implies incentives to move goods traffic from road to rail (in particular through combined transport), inland waterways, short distance sea shipping and maritime transport; and a wider choice in the transport of persons, in addition to roads, ranging from collective transport in cities to more high speed trains on medium distances between cities;

6.5. competition should be enhanced within each transport sector as well as between them, building on a number of principles. These include safety, subsidies for modes of transport that are valuable for society as a whole modelled in such a way as to ensure fair competition among them, and consideration of the total costs to society and the environment of different modes of transport, notably road transport. In the case of railways, such an evolution may include increased separation between ownership of infrastructure and its use, deregulation and even, as the case may be, privatisation and bolder co-operation among national authorities to reduce the disadvantage suffered by international rail transport vis-à-vis road transport;

6.6. the interests of people and the environment should take precedence over those of optimal transport efficiency, especially when it comes to safety issues and to the harmful effects of road traffic and infrastructure in sensitive rural and mountain regions, including the Alps, above all on public health. This has become particularly clear after the disastrous fire in the Mont Blanc tunnel in March 1999, which claimed over forty lives. Recognition should be given to the importance of the car for transporting people and improving their quality of life. There must be a fair distribution of costs among all road users proportionate to the environmental and other damage they cause.

7. The Assembly notes with concern the major disruption of transport links in south-eastern Europe caused by the armed conflict in Kosovo and surrounding areas. This includes international traffic on the Danube which has come to a virtual standstill following the bombing of numerous bridges in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and road, rail and air transport through not only that country, but also other countries in south-eastern Europe. It is essential for the long-term development of south-eastern Europe that hostilities be brought to an early end and that the rebuilding of transport links be accompanied by generous international assistance.

8. The Assembly calls on ECMT and Council of Europe member states to contemplate innovative ways of reducing road congestion, such as better adapted working hours and encouraging work from home, using computers.

9. The Assembly welcomes the major liberalisation of international road transport under the ECMT's multilateral quota system, and strongly supports its more recent emphasis on linking this system with a requirement for vehicles which are both safer and more environmentally sound. It calls on ECMT member states to intensify their efforts under this programme. Furthermore, it must be ensured that the newly liberalised cabotage rules for road transport in the European Union give rise to fair competition among all European Union member states.

10. Recalling its Resolution 1147 (1998) on the threat to Europe from economic crime, the Assembly calls on the ECMT, in co-operation with the European Union and the UN-ECE, to step up its efforts to combat the sharp increase in criminal acts affecting international transport, such as fraud in the transit system, the theft of vehicles and goods, and attacks on drivers.

11. The Assembly welcomes the ECMT's work on behalf of vulnerable categories of society, such as children, pedestrians, cyclists, the handicapped and the elderly. Considering the rapid ageing of most European societies, it invites the ECMT to explore the possibility of organising a joint conference with the Council of Europe on European transport policies in an ageing Europe following that held in 1994 on road safety education for young children and teenagers.

12. The Assembly considers that adequate public transport reduces congestion and limits damage to the environment and the architectural heritage. It asks the ECMT to step up its work in this field and to encourage the formulation of a concerted policy involving national governments as well as regional authorities