

World Conference on Transport Research - WCTR 2016 Shanghai. 10-15 July 2016

Analysis of border crossings in South East Europe and measures for their improvement

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Abstract

In South East Europe (SEE) the existence of several non-European Union (EU) member countries and borders procedures burdens the regional and international land transport with times and costs. ACROSSEE (Accessibility Improved at border crossing for the integration of South East Europe) is an EU co-funded project, concluded recently as a follow-up to SEETAC project (South East Europe Transport Axis Cooperation) that highlighted the need to facilitate border crossings and urged for the improvement of Transport in the SEE region, as integral part of the Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-T). This paper presents the analysis and the formulated proposals and measures for the improvement of border crossings, which could have direct positive effects on transport and trade in the region.

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Peer-review under responsibility of WORLD CONFERENCE ON TRANSPORT RESEARCH SOCIETY.

Keywords: Transport Modes – General; ACROSSEE Project; Border Crossings; Trade and Transport; South East Europe

1. Introduction

The EU has been created as an economic union between few countries and evolved to a political one that today counts 28 member countries, 6 candidate countries and 2 potential candidate countries. Especially until the

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enlargements of 2004 and 2007 the EU presented high territorial discontinuity; many member countries are at a great distance from the core of EU, with Greece being the most illustrative example that had no land borders with other EU member states until 2007, when Bulgaria and Romania joined the EU. Specifically in the SEE region, during and after the war in former Yugoslavia, international land transport has been suffering from border crossing obstacles due to the establishment of new countries, the creation of new international borders and posts and the complicated procedures applied there.

Still, despite the stabilization process and the clear orientation of the Western Balkan countries to Euro-Atlantic institutions, and despite any progress made in terms of cooperation for transport and trade facilitation, there are substantial problems and therefore margin for improvement in order to achieve reduction of times and costs for international goods and passengers transport. The on-going, since the last 15 years, reconstruction and upgrade of major national transport infrastructures in SEE countries through EU and International Financial Institutions' funds to meet the TEN-T standards has led to a partial diversion of traffic flows to the traditional routes of the region, but yet borders remain the main obstacle for international trade and transport flows.

In this aspect, in the framework of the South East Europe EU Transnational Cooperation Programme, ACROSSEE project aimed to the enhancement of cooperation for transport development and facilitation of movement of passengers and goods, the assessment of the existing and future bottlenecks, the analysis of border crossings and the definition of short-term improvements to boost international transport in the region. Extensive surveys have been performed at several Road and Rail Border Crossing Points (**BCPs**) sited along main international transport corridors and routes in Greece, Bulgaria, Albania, Romania, Hungary, Serbia, Slovenia and Croatia that participated in the project. The surveys included questionnaire-based surveys of BCPs authorities and truck drivers, traffic counts, in situ observations of the procedures and the respective waiting and procedural times, etc. Besides, the policies in force and the practices applied in the framework of national strategies for Integrated Border Management have been evaluated, in order to propose measures for the facilitation of international transport in the region in the short- and mid-term, upon the accession of all countries of the region to the EU, which is yet not fixed when it will be accomplished. The proposed policies and measures are evaluated regarding their effectiveness, using a transport model established in the framework of the project that simulated various scenarios concerning different types of interventions and evolutions affecting the transport system in the region.

2. Framework of ACROSSEE project

Transport Policy at EU level is responsibility of the Directorate General Mobility and Transport (**DG MOVE**) of the European Commission (**EC**). At Pan-European level (including non-EU countries of the European continent) a strategy has been developed in cooperation of the EU, the European Conference of Ministers of Transport (**ECMT**, nowadays **ITF**), and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (**UNECE**) and major international stakeholders. This strategy was formalized with the Declarations of three Pan-European Transport Conferences in Prague (1991), Crete (1994) and Helsinki (1997). In the meantime, in 1996 the TEN-T were defined for the EU countries. For the TEN-T extension to the Central and Eastern and South-Eastern European countries of the future enlargement (in SEE Slovenia, Hungary) a planning exercise (TINA) was elaborated in 1999, on the basis of ten Pan-European Corridors (**PECs**) and four sea Areas (PETRAS) that had been defined at the Crete and Helsinki Pan-European Transport Conferences.

In SEE – where only Italy, Austria and Greece were EU members at that time – the multimodal PECs running the region were five, plus the Danube River Inland Waterway (IWW). Similar to TINA, planning exercises were elaborated afterwards for the SEE region that concluded with the definition of the SEE Core Transport Network (now called SEE Comprehensive Network) in 2004, which would eventually become part of the TEN-T upon accession of the concerned countries into the EU. The SEE Comprehensive Network is included in the new TEN-T Regulation (2013), which indicates the priority routes and important interconnecting points with neighboring countries/ regions. The new TEN-T is dual-layer, with the “Core” (priority for Europe) and the “Comprehensive” (supplementary to the Core) networks. The map of priority Networks in SEE is illustrated in **Figure 1**.

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