

TRANSPORT POLICY IN THE EUROPEAN UNION¹

FROM AN EASTERN PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Although the intention of developing a common transport policy was mooted in the early stages of the European Communities, it took the form in practice of regulation of isolated transport activities, with the aim in every case of removing advantages inadmissible in competition-policy terms. Only in the 1980s were the sights raised from such institutional matters to that of developing corridors between regions on a continental scale. This period brought the Union's first White Paper on transport, under the motto "a single network for the single market", aimed principally at removing regulatory, institutional and physical barriers to links between member-states. The next White Paper, appearing in 2001, displayed a strong change of outlook with enhanced attention to environmental constraints. The main demand was for curbs on traffic volume, including a decrease in the proportion of road transport. The 2006 revision of the 2001 White Paper marked a significant departure from the progressive change of outlook that had been initiated, leading to a serious degree of backtracking and reformulation of aims.

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INTRODUCTION

The half-century of history of the European Communities has coincided with a new level of globalization of world economic processes (in trade, finance, competition policy etc.) It has also brought recognition of the environmental constraints and a process of confronting these in a global way. The first presents a challenge to the EU as a requirement for strengthening global economic competitiveness, while the second as a demand for a response to the constraints of sustainability.

Both challenges present demands for an EU-wide transport system, but each makes different requirements. Most of the history of EU transport policy was dominated by competition-policy factors. Not until the turn of the millennium did horizontal aspects (social, environmental, regional catch-up) appear strongly in transport-system ideas. Nor can the basic principles of the latter be said to have affected network-building efforts concerned with expansion and closer ties between neighbours. Indeed the recent re-examination of EU transport policy seems aimed at reversing technical interventions relating to environmental requirements and restoring the dominance of economic globalization based on deregulation and liberalization..

FROM EARLY IDEAS TO A COMMON TRANSPORT POLICY

The need for a common European transport policy was mooted when the Treaty of Rome was being written, but Future Development of a Common Transport Policy (CTP 1992), the first Union White Paper on the subject, did not appear until 1992. It had been preceded by numerous regulations or guidelines of a transport nature, but their common attribute had only been a concern with creating *competition neutrality*. They included such important measures as scrapping of ship cargo capacity, mandatory rest periods for vehicle drivers, and similar matters, but they did not amount to a single *transport-policy approach*. The Single European Act of 1986 was still motivated by desires for undisturbed domestic trade and undistorted competition while still it formulated expectations of common European networks..

Two target areas for common transport policy are emphasized. One is a comprehensive measure to encompass the earlier moves to do with competition regulation, i. e. alter the distinct state, regulatory and monopoly conditions that reduce permeability in day-to-day operation of transport. The other is to provide physical conditions for expanding connections between the 12 (then the 15). Both are expressed well in the guiding principle of the 1992 Common Transport Policy (CTP 1992) as a “single network for a single market”. The EU, seeking to exploit existing potentials fully, sought to work first on the plane of linking up existing networks and institutions in adjacent countries, to which member-states had been paying little

heed. This led to the appearance of the TEN—the Trans-European Network—providing EU-level trunk connections not only in transport (TEN-T), but in energy (TEN-E) and telecommunications (TEN-C).

The transport policy adopted in 1992 certainly did reflect the image of Europe prevalent in the period (the later 1980s) when it was formulated. The political changes in Eastern Europe helped to initiate work on the transport networks of a wider Europe, but the requirements in principle of such a pan-European network were honed only at the 1994 and 1997 conferences, so that they took effect only in the second half of the decade. (This is analysed further later in the paper.)

The regulatory/standardizing pillar of CTP 1992 can be expressed in a few key expressions: *inter-operability* (to create uniform technical standards in transport), *inter-modality* (to break down barriers between means of transport), *free, third-party access* (to ensure competition-neutral access to the infrastructure), and of course the *single market*.

The second pillar of common transport policy is to produce a grid of connections between countries, i. e. furthering the idea of a *trans-European transport network*. The EU laid down in 1996 the guidelines and key elements of the TEN network. Thereafter the focus shifted from the network rather to completing 14 *priority projects* connected with realizing this.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERNAL LINKS

It is important to underline that the target of the EU White Paper was not to solve the region's *entire* transport question. It did not deal with all levels of transport, but concentrated on that of inter-regional network connections. The elements lacking bring a problem of continuity in completing the Union's *internal system of connections*, as a usable interlocking network of links between countries for the standardizing internal market. It was seen as essential to the worldwide competitiveness of the common European market to provide paths for a viable system of internal connections.

It is similarly important for transport policy in individual countries to ensure that *national internal connections* operate, so ensuring the country's competitiveness. These are the paths that production and serving units use to connect with each other and imbed their activity into the country's economy. Also required are *good external connections* capable of linking the operating economies to the international flows of business.

In the period when the acceding countries were formulating their national transport policies, with the common transport policy as the pattern, Hungary did not adopt the line of argument or relative coherences (importance of the improvement of

the internal relations), only the project elements of the plan, i. e. priority for the international corridors. The overall corridors, as internal connections, are indeed important components of pan-European competitiveness on the global scene, and this applies to Hungary as well. But it is equally important for Hungary to think through what it is that makes the whole country competitive, within the EU or more widely. The lesson here is the paramount importance of improving this country's internal connection networks.

External and internal connections have different functions—external links can obviously not stand in for paths that ensure internal cohesion, or vice versa. When Hungary builds international corridors at the expense of maintenance and development of its own transport network, it certainly contributes to developing the Union's internal links, but at the same time it neglects the domestic elements through which the country can participate in the future advantages.

EXTENDING TEN-T: THE SYSTEM OF PAN-EUROPEAN CORRIDORS

By the time the ideas formulated in the 1980s became Union documents in the 1990s, the map of Europe had changed. In 1989 the Berlin Wall collapsed and the Iron Curtain disappeared, and it became clear one had to think in terms of a larger Europe still. The process of approving the TEN-concepts had been taking its Union course, but parallel with that, there began in 1991 a process of negotiations called the Pan-European transport conference, in which (1991: Prague, 1994: Crete, 1997: Helsinki) delegates of respective specialist ministries accepted plans for so-styled “Helsinki corridors” or “Pan-European corridors”, i. e. Eastern extension of the TEN.

What did that imply? *Figure 1* shows the TEN network of the 1990s with interlocking internal corridors covering the EU 15:

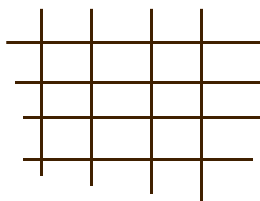


Figure 1. The scheme of the TEN-T network

Eastern extension of the TEN would give a network like *Figure 2*, extending the same type of network to a wider area.

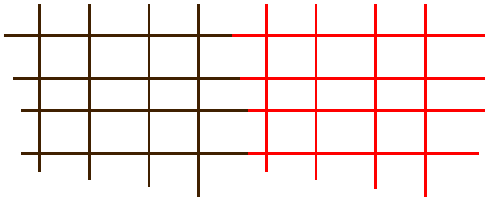


Figure 2. The extended TEN-T network

But this did not happen. No doubt in the euphoria of the 1990s, improving East–West relations seemed on both sides to be the task, and this effort clouded longer-term thinking. Priority was given only to extending the East–West corridors (*Figure 3*).

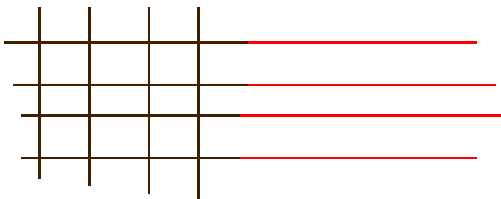


Figure 3. Schematic extension of the East-West corridors

In the event, this East–West was less schematic than *Figure 3* portrays, partly because Europe becomes wider to the East, and partly because there was Western demand for links to the north-east from Italy and south-east from Germany too. This produced something like *Figure 4*, which may even be called a network, but still displays a different pattern from the original TEN-T network designed to *improve internal connections* among the EU 15.

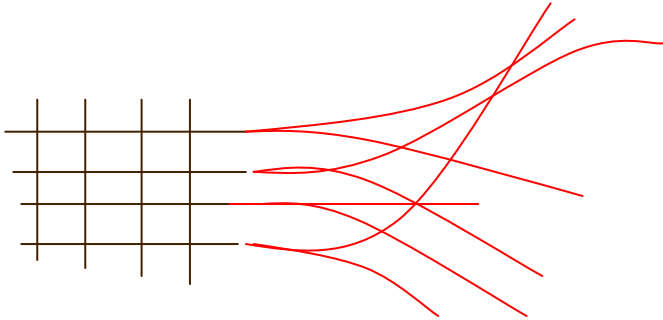
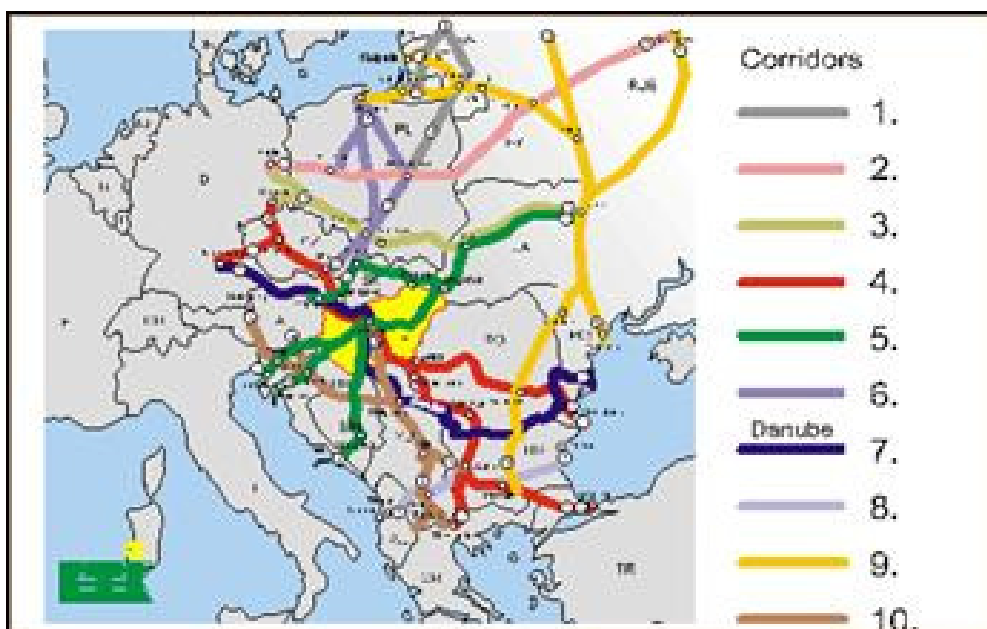


Figure 4. Extension of the East-West corridors of the TEN-T network

In the actual Pan-European network there are no North–South corridors except Corridor 9 (Finland and Greece), only ones going east from the EU 15, then veering north or south (*Figure 5*). The North–South connections established by this are

clearly more accidental than planned. At any rate, whatever has emerged is remote from the original intention of a grid network to balance spatial inequalities.²



Source KTI – GKM <http://www.gkm.gov.hu/data/8568/Image11.gif>

Figure 5. The Pan-European (PEC; or Helsinki) Corridors

Apart from the ten Helsinki corridors, four Pan-European transport areas (PETRAs) were delineated, as bases for water navigation.

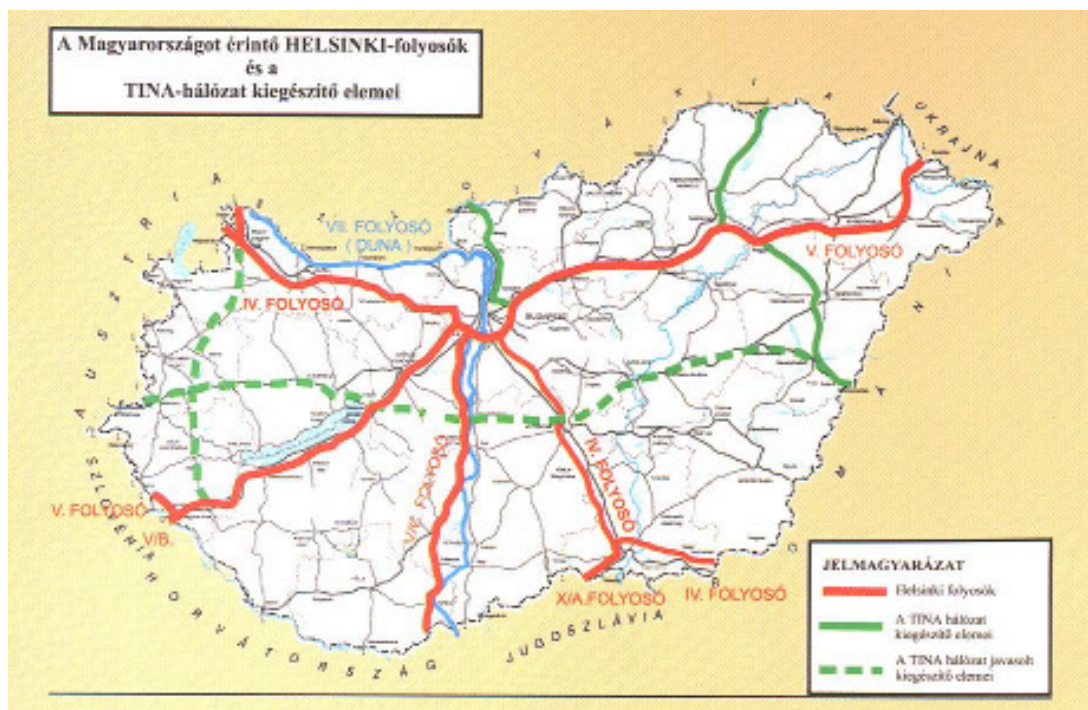
EXTENSION OF THE PAN-EUROPEAN CORRIDORS AS THE TINA NETWORK

The development of the Pan-European network to link with the East-West elements of TINA led to a realisation after the first happiness waned that the Pan-European corridors are far from meeting the demands for inter-regional and supra-national transport connections that emerge in the area brought in by enlargement. For instance, no single Pan-European corridor crosses the East-West borderline be-

² Even recently, some EU documents have not progressed beyond the unilateral effort described here. See White Paper on Services of General Interest. COM(2004) 374 final. Commission for the European Communities, Brussels, 12. 5. 2004. 3. 3. „...the Commission’s policy in the area of Trans-European Networks is improving access to transport, energy and communications networks in the more remote area and will assist in *linking the new Members States with the infrastructure of the Fifteen...*” (this author’s italics).

tween Slovakia and Hungary anywhere to the East of Bratislava – a section more than 600 km long. Because of such problems the so-called Transport Infrastructure Needs Assessment (TINA) process was launched in 1995, still at the time of a series of the Pan-European conferences. In this framework the transport experts of the EU 15 give professional advice to high-level transport administrations of 11 candidate countries (the 12th being Malta) on how to assess their transport infrastructural needs. The 1999 closing report slipped from advice to declaration of further corridors, and defined network elements with primary and secondary priority. The primary corridors – to the glory of the methodological knowledge transferred – were unanimously acclaimed, or at least voted for “without visible opposition”: they should be identical with the Helsinki corridors evolved by that time (TINA Final Report). It was never clearly defined what secondary priority meant, but it seems that these elements did not get TEN-T status (or a chance of EU Cohesion Fund support) after accession.

Up to the completion of the closing paper of 1999 Hungary had two segments of corridor increasing the density of the missing North–South links as TINA elements: the route to Budapest from the north and the domestic section of the Košice–Oradea connection (*Figure 6 continuous lines*). In the following year Hungary tried to add two other corridors to the secondary TINA corridors proposed earlier. (*Figure 6 dotted lines*). This was not successful because the process had been closed, but it seems to make no real difference whether a corridor is an accepted secondary TINA element or just a section developed by the country itself.



Source A 8. sz. főút fejlesztési feladatai... (Development tasks for Route 8...) 2000. szept. 13-15

Figure 6. Domestic Helsinki corridors, and accepted (continuous) and additional (broken) TINA Corridors

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To sum up, three main problems appear in the planning of Hungary's transport corridors. (1) The international corridors take precedence over the domestic. (2) The plan for the overlapping network of the expanded EU is not an interlocking network that considers the internal cooperation of the whole Union, but one that gives priority to East–West extension of the EU 15 network envisaged in the 1990s, to link it with the expanded territories. This priority in the Central-East European region neglects the links of the EU 12 with each other, notably North–South connections. (3) The third problem has only been mentioned in passing: Hungary's transit-corridor development has not only unduly emphasized, but makes the structural mistake of repeating the earlier radial character of the main networks. Not even in outline does it serve to even out regional differences, only to enhance its concentric nature and widen the gap between capital city and provinces. The Hungarian transport policy devised in 1996 may have professed a subtler system of priorities, but in effect helped perpetuate the corridor problems outlined.

TIME TO DECIDE: A NEW WHITE PAPER FOR TRANSPORT POLICY

Nine years after the earlier White Paper came a newer EU transport policy in September 2001 (White Paper 2001).

This begins by reviewing frankly the mixed results with its predecessor. The competitive-market aims were largely fulfilled—consumer prices fell, service quality improved, technology spread, and the closed transport markets were opened up (except for rail)—but the dysfunctional features had not been alleviated. The uneven spatial development remained and so did congestion at the centre, while shortcomings in provision in remoter areas remained typical of the Union as a whole. (“Apoplexy in the centre and paralysis at the extremities” as the documentum writes). There was congestion on main roads and railways, in cities and in the air, mounting health and environmental damage, and shocking accident figures.

This line of development is unacceptable to 21st-century society.

The 2001 White Paper built the environmental recommendations of the 1990s into its proposals, and aimed to ensure that the quantity of traffic would not rise with economic development (“decoupling”). It expressed the purpose of curbing the increase in road traffic by three means: (1) pricing and regulation in the road sector, (2) improving the efficiency of other means of transport, so that they could offer an alternative to road, and (3) in the meantime executing some necessary investment

projects in the infrastructure. These infrastructural developments were automatically associated with the TEN-T network, in a slightly reconsidered, re-examined form.

The tasks of implementing the White Paper were designated in 60 measures in four blocks: (1) changes in the proportions between transport modes, (2) elimination of bottlenecks, (3) development of a user-centred transport policy, and (4) handling the globalization of transport.

All in all, the 2001 White Paper made a significant step forward in its principles. It recognized that for progress in EU transport, it would not suffice to concentrate on inter-country links. Transport-policy objectives had to be harmonized in depth and outlook. It revised the approach of the 1990s and came out firmly for change in environmental and social matters.

RE-EXAMINATION OF THE TEN PRINCIPLES (2004) AND FURTHER EXTENSIONS

As introduced above, the 2001 White Paper followed a timely reconsideration of tasks of the common transport policy while had not touched on TEN, indeed had seemed to confirm it, as the investments to be promoted were all related to TEN. But implementation of the decided 14 projects was badly delayed, and it became clear that most of them were not receiving the kind of priority in each member-state that would allow EU contributions with a ceiling of 10 per cent to provide any incentive to complete them.

In 2003, a committee chaired by the Union's earlier transport commissioner presented recommendations for revising TEN ((Van Miert Report 2003). It stated that improving the execution of the projects called for changes in the TEN guidelines and the appointment of coordinators for each, along with a higher EU financial contribution. It went on to propose further new projects alongside the uncompleted ones.

The re-examination of the TEN guidelines was clearly not concerned with designating the network, revising its structure or envisaging an expanded area (or the problems raised by this). It dealt mainly with the TEN guidelines for priority projects, above all with making the implementation run more smoothly.

The report passed through the Union's bureaucratic forums relatively quickly and was endorsed by the Commission on April 29, 2004, just two days before the accession of the Ten. It gave priority to 30 projects instead of 14 and raised the EU financial contribution from 10 per cent to 20 (Decision 884/2004/EC és Corrigendum to the Decision 884/2004/EC).

The re-examination ignored the network considerations to such an extent that (to this writer's knowledge) it is nowhere recorded officially whether the Pan-European

or the TINA network was to become part of the TEN network after the accessions³. It appears that during the negotiations of the transport operative programmes, the Union treats the Pan-European corridors (the top-priority TINA network elements) as TEN networks that could be supported out of the Cohesion Fund, and not the secondary priority elements initiated by member-states. Confirmation of this can be found in a committee memorandum prepared by DG-TREN that does not deal directly with this question (Guidelines 2007): “Following enlargement, the Pan-European Corridors are now mainly within the EU and thus part of the TEN network.”

This treatment of the Pan-European corridors as appendices of the TEN elements did not mark a break with 1997 or delineation of the Helsinki corridors. A document on the transport infrastructure of the Balkans that appeared in 2002 (TIRS—Transport Infrastructure Study in Balkans) and covers seven countries in that time⁴ (ALB, B-H, BG, CR, SR-M, MAC, RO) laid down that the basic network in Bulgaria and Romania is identical with the corridors decided earlier in the TINA process, while for the other countries, the European Investment Bank (EIB) conducted a survey (Western Balkans Transport Infrastructure Inventory) that named and categorized financially 223 potential projects (TIRS 2002).

³ Undeniable that the 2nd attachment’s 8/F section of the Treaty of Accession (2003) offers maps of the TEN network, containing priority and secondary TINA corridors together with other corridors; while no modifications or comprehensive numbering of TEN elements seem to appear on other relating sites dealing with TEN-T corridors.

⁴ Serbia and Montenegro became two countries since.



Source: Guidelines 2007. Guidelines for transport in Europe and neighbouring regions

Figure 7. Five transnational axes to assist trade and regional integration

The next process, beginning in 2005, took the new neighbourly relations of the EU 27 into account in designating further “transnational axes” labelled “North”, “Central”, “South-East” and “South West”, with the “maritime highways” as the fifth axis (Figure 7).

RE-EXAMINATION OF THE WHITE PAPER: ROAD HAULAGE STRIKES BACK?

While the 2001 transport policy stressed a definite need to halt growth in transport performance and slow the increase in road traffic, the re-examination (Keep Europe moving 2006) can be considered as a significant withdrawal.

It has been noted that the 2001 White Paper examined the mistakes made and stressed the need for significant change. The re-examination in 2006 underlined the continuity of basic principles in transport policy, so reversing the clear turn (“Time to decide”) to environmental friendliness.

The White Paper had pointed out how the share of road transport was still rising despite efforts to curb it: this had to be changed. The re-examination saw this as an achievement: *“The internal market has contributed to creating competitive international road haulage and increasingly also rail operations. Moreover, the last*

five years have seen the effects of globalisation leading to the creation of large logistics companies with worldwide operations.” (Keep Europe moving 2006 p. 5.).

The White Paper had talked of curbing the increase in volume (separating economic growth from traffic growth). The re-examination also sought to separate, but in a different sense: “*Mobility must be disconnected from its negative side effects*”, means ensuring traffic growth rather, not curbing it.. (*ibid* p. 4.).

The principles of the White Paper had seen the curbing of road transport and intervention to that end as a policy task. The re-examination was concerned “*to optimise each mode’s own potential*”, which would mean just avoiding intervention between them. (*ibid* p. 4.). The new document also defined optimization goals (“*each transport mode must be optimised*”, and “*the efficient use of different modes on their own ... will result in an optimal and sustainable utilisation of resources.*”) where these did not tie in with sectorally integrated policy-level assignments. (*ibid.* p. 21.). Rather than openly rescinding the earlier interventionist objectives (*shifting the balance between modes*), it did so in effect by its omissions. Yet although it surrounded it with provisos, the re-examination nonetheless declared that “*sustainable mobility policy therefore needs to build on a broader range of policy tools achieving shifts to more environmentally friendly modes where appropriate, especially on long distance, in urban areas and on congested corridors*” (*ibid.* p. 21.).

Such sentence in the re-examination as: “*The efforts to achieve the goals of meeting growing mobility needs and strict environmental standards are beginning to show signs of friction.*” (*ibid.* p. 29.). sought to imply quite strongly that strict environmental protection should be restored

*So in general, the 2006 re-examination of the 2001 EU White Paper on transport diverged strongly from the progressive line taken in the latter, while trying to emphasize continuity by omitting to say so openly.*⁵

SUMMARY

Growing awareness of environmental problems in the final third of the 20th century shook the foundations of the paradigm based on the assumption of unlimited availability of resources and of unlimited ability of the environmental absorption. It

⁵ Another consideration: the 2001 White Paper, published on September 12, 2001, though prepared before 9/11, and arrived in a world where the globalization processes would be reappraised and neo-conservative and fundamentalist schools of thought become stronger (especially outside Europe and the EU). This had its effect on Europe, even though the underlying ideology was felt less strongly.

emerged globalization covered not only the scope for relations, but the constraints on development emerging as marginal conditions..

All sectors face ecological constraints, though they affect agriculture, water management, commerce, consumption, or transport in different ways.

Direct boosts to the technology development of transport promoted the “opening up” of ever greater areas, its unification. The development of maritime navigation played a huge role at the dawn of the Modern Era in promoting colonization as an early form of globalization. The development of railways offered mass accessibility to the furthest corners of countries, while also easing transport between cities and the communities round them. So transport presaged huge changes both spatially and globally, and the consequences can also be described in terms of continual adaptation of the way of life to the spatial relations defined by the new technical opportunities provided by transport.

For most of the 50-year history of the European Union and its preceding institutions, the bottleneck to broadening the common-market concept was the shortcomings in legal, institutional and regulatory forms, while the physical infrastructures of member-countries more or less sufficed for the mounting international traffic. The main motive behind the transport-related “common-market” regulation of that period was to eliminate factors that were distorting competition, instigated, of course, by those who felt disadvantaged by the absence of uniform regulation and had the power to carry the regulatory action through.

The situation in the 1980s encompassed not only competition-policy institutions, but demand for the standardization, supervision, and where absent creation of inter-regional overlapping physical links on a continental scale. As with the national networks earlier, the technical establishment of the physical links and the increase in the demand for them developed as an iterative process, with the two factors boosting each other.

This period brought the first EU transport White Paper, with the motto “single network for the single market”. The main task was seen to be the elimination of obstacles to contacts between member-states. The ensuing 2001 White Paper marked a strong change of outlook and broad attention to environmental constraints. Its main intention was to curb traffic and reduce the proportion of road traffic. Although tendencies in 2007–8 in relation to climate change meant that more value was being attached to the global environmental dimension again, attention was distracted after 2001 by mounting attention to the criterion of global security. This may have played a part in the fact that the 2006 re-examination of the 2001 White Paper brought some backtracking and rephrasing of objectives compared with the earlier progressive direction that Union transport policy was taking.

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