

SECOND MEETING
OF THE WORKING GROUP FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF BORDER CROSSINGS
ALONG THE PAN EUROPEAN TRANSPORT CORRIDOR X

BELGRADE, SERBIA

18 FEBRUARY 2005

Draft minutes

Item 1: Opening address by the Chair and representative of the Host Organization

1. Mr. Jovic, Deputy Minister of the Serbian Ministry of Capital Investments welcomed all the participants, wishing a good stay and fruitful outcome, stressing out his satisfaction for the high participation.
2. He also mentioned the importance of Corridor X for the participating countries and the E.U., and the need to harmonize the Pan-European Network with the Trans-European Network, which comprises the ensuring of unified border procedures.
3. He informed the participants about the last meetings of the High Level Group (14.2.2005), where the selection of seven multimodal Corridors was discussed, with potential that Corridor X would be included.

4. Mr. Kounadis, Coordinator of the Working Group, cordially thanked the host country and the Deputy Minister Mr. Jovic for the organization of the meeting, and stressed out the importance of Corridor X and the need for elaboration of measures for implementation at border-crossings in every day's practice.
5. Mr. Patsiavos, Chairman of the Steering Committee of Corridor X, thanked the host organization (Serbian Ministry of Capital Investments), the Deputy Minister Mr. Jovic, Prof. Mandic and their staff for the organization of the meeting, their warm hospitality and support.
6. He mentioned that during the kickoff meeting of the Working Group, the preparation of a Memorandum of Understanding had been decided (Athens, 23 January 2004), and clarified that the purpose of the meeting was to move forward, in order to have an agreed version of the MoU as soon as possible.

Item 2: Approval of the agenda

7. Mr. Patsiavos proposed to change the Agenda of the meeting, in order to give emphasis to the MoU discussion.
8. The Chairman of the Group, Mr. Kounadis, accepted the proposal of Mr. Patsiavos, and that was also accepted by the participants.
9. He also mentioned that, after communication with DG TAXUD, a representative couldn't be present at the meeting so the items which had been proposed by the Serbian delegation concerning the EU law on Customs couldn't be presented. He also informed the participants about the expressed interest of DG TAXUD to have the results of the meeting.

Item 3: Adoption of the Minutes of the kickoff meeting

10. There were no comments on the draft version of the minutes, so those were adopted as final.

Item 4: Progress concerning the implementation of the action plan for the improvement of border crossing procedures

11. Mr. Patsiavos and Prof. Taxilattris, Coordinator of the Technical Secretariat of Corridor X, presented the action plan decided during the kickoff meeting and commented the progress made per item.
12. Mr. Patsiavos explained that due to the hard effort to prepare the draft version of the MoU, a second meeting in 2004 had not been made possible. He also stressed out the close relations with DG TREN and Mr. Kounadis' good cooperation with DG TAXUD.
13. Mr. Rasbash, Manager of South-East Europe Transport Observatory (SEETO) took the floor and briefly informed the participants about the establishment of SEETO in Belgrade, and wished success to the works of the meeting.
14. Mr. Patsiavos, thanked Mr. Rasbash for his intervention and invited him for an active cooperation with the Steering Committee and the Technical Secretariat of Corridor X. He also expressed his intention to invite a SEETO representative to the 7th Steering Committee Meeting in Dubrovnik, on March 10th 2005.

Item 6: Results of the First Conference on Customs and cross-border cooperation between the countries of South-East Europe and of the recent meetings of the relevant Working Groups (Athens, 9-10/12/04)

15. Mr. Kounadis had the floor to present the results of the Conference on Customs in SEE and the relevant meetings of the Working Groups. He presented at first the Conclusions of the working group on procedures and administrative capacity (see attached document).
16. Mrs. Novak, from the Customs Administration of the Serbian Ministry of Finance, asked whether the works of the Working Group should be in the same direction with the results of the Conference, and also informed the participants for the “Laufzettel” Project which will begin in the countries of SEE.
17. Mr. Kounadis replied that there should be alignment to the results of the Conference and that the Commission anticipates that the results of the meeting should be in line with the results of the Conference.
18. Mr. Patsiavos added that the framework of the Working Group will be the MoU in line with the conclusions of the Directors Generals meeting results.
19. Mr. Janoski from the F.Y.R.O.M. Customs Administration, set the question how the Group would get in line with the “Integrated Border Management” Program at national level.
20. Prof. Taxiltaris replied that the Action Plan foresees cooperation with other Corridors in the area and other International Organizations, Programs and Initiatives. Nevertheless, he added, this action plan concerns formally Corridor X and in addition it could be concerned as a pilot for other Corridors and Areas.

Item 7: Presentation of the draft Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and detailed discussion on the text of the draft MoU

21. Mr. Kounadis presented the draft version of the MoU and he asked the participants to make their comments and suggestions.
22. Mr. Janoski raised the issue of signatory Ministers.
23. Mr. Patsiavos, replied that basically the Ministers of Transport and Customs should sign the MoU or other authorized Ministers (Police, Agriculture etc.).
24. Mr. Stratiev from the Bulgarian Ministry of Transport and Communications mentioned that the authorization for signing is very difficult and that the Ministry of Transport is less concerned for this MoU.
25. Mr. Kounadis supported that there is direct relation of transport and customs issues, which both concern the movement of persons and goods.
26. Mr. Patsiavos said that the MoU will be signed to facilitate transport along Corridor X, and if there is proposal for MoU signing by other Ministries, that can be discussed.
27. Mr. Adelsberger from the Austrian Ministry of Transport, Innovation and Technology supported that the Ministry of Transport is not in charge for such issues.

28. Mr. Stratiev mentioned that a MoU had already been signed for Corridor X, and the proposed MoU should be a “Joint Declaration”, which would be easier to be signed by all involved Ministries.
29. Mr. Kounadis said that each country could internally handle the authorization for signing and that the MoU signing had been agreed during the kickoff meeting.
30. Mr. Jovic supported Mr. Stratiev’s position, adding that each country has different administrative structure.
31. Mrs. Novak agreed with the MoU signing, but each country should forward the implementation to the responsible authorities and then it should be decided who would be the signing authority.
32. Mr. Patsiavos asked the participants to take position on who should sign the MoU.
33. Mr. Kounadis mentioned that in Greece there is authorization practice.
34. Mrs. Gligorovska from F.Y.R.O.M. Ministry of Transport and Communications proposed that instead of a MoU a Joint Declaration or a Protocol should be signed.
35. Mr. Jovic agreed with the idea of authorization of one Ministry from each country, as expressed by Mr. Kounadis.
36. Mr. Patsiavos proposed to rename the document for signature as Protocol.

37. Mr. Adelsberger said that it is not possible to decide during this meeting the date of signing and who will sign the Protocol.
38. Mr. Janoski commented that during the meeting it should be decided what to propose to the participants' governments.
39. Mr. Patsiavos agreed with Mr. Jovic's proposal for the authorization of one Minister per country, and the signing of a Protocol.
40. Mr. Rasbash suggested that the representatives could make recommendations to their governments for the facilitation of transport and trade.
41. Mr. Kounadis proposed to proceed to the agreement on the content of the Protocol and then discuss about who should sign it.
42. Mr. Stratiev remarked that in the text emphasis should be given to transport, so that the document would be responsibility of Ministers of Transport.
43. Mr. Adelsberger agreed.
44. Mr. Kounadis accepted the proposal to make additions to the text concerning transport aspects at border crossings.
45. Mrs. Berecz from the Hungarian Ministry of Transport and Water Management, who had previously delivered to each delegation a hard copy with the comments of the Hungarian delegation on the MoU text, presented the proposed amendments.

46. Mr. Janoski proposed to insert comments concerning transport in the first article of the Protocol.
47. Prof. Mandic from Serbia agreed.
48. Mr. Jovic informed the participants for the establishment of a joint rail cross border station at Dimitrovgrad (Serbian/ Bulgarian borders).
49. Mr. Stratiev proposed to further define the type of exchanged information described in Article 6.
50. Mr. Adelsberger proposed that the word “Parties” should be replaced by “Signatories”
51. Mr. Janoski agreed with Mr. Stratiev for further definition of kind of information to be exchanged and mentioned the existing technical problems of communication. He also proposed that in Article 5 all written conventions should apply for all the participating countries.
52. Mrs. Novak proposed the simplification of Article 5 by writing “depending on each country’s national and bilateral rules and conventions”.
53. Mr. Kounadis, proposed:
- a. the participants to send their comments and proposals to the Technical secretariat by March 15th 2005,

- b. the Technical Secretariat to prepare a new version of the Protocol by April 15th 2005,
- c. a second reaction by the participants by April 27th 2005, defining the authorized Ministers for signing,
- d. a third meeting of the Group in the end of June – beginning of July 2005, to be organized together with an extra meeting of the Steering Committee of the Corridor, and
- e. organization of Ministerial Meeting by the end of 2005.

54. Mr. Adelsberger mentioned that the time given for submitting the first comments is too short.

55. All the participants agreed to shift the schedule by fifteen days.

56. Mr. Kounadis went through Articles 7 to 15 of the draft text of the Protocol.

57. Written comments were agreed to be sent to the Technical Secretariat.

58. Mr. Patsiavos clarified that each country will decide which Ministers will sign and that Ministers of Transport are not excluded from the Protocol signing.

59. Mr. Kounadis proceeded with the second part of his presentation of Item 6, with the conclusions of the working group on the means to reconcile safety and security, trade facilitation and the fight against fraud.

Item 5: Improvements on border crossing facilities and procedures taking place at the cross borders stations of each country of Corridor X

60. Mr. Patsiavos announced the decision of Greece to improve the railway link between Thessaloniki and Sofia by reducing travel time by two hours (by increase of personnel and control of passengers en route) and informed the participants about the scheduled Ministerial Meeting at Promachon on February 21st 2005.
61. Mr. Barzach proposed to include in the Protocol provision for the management of rolling stock (change of locomotive) and personnel at borders, because, as concluded in the survey of the Technical Secretariat, often delays occur due to such reasons.
62. Mrs. Prinou from the Greek Railways Organization stressed that such issues are caused by the lack of interoperable infrastructure.
63. Mr. Kounadis proposed to include the issue of interoperability in the Protocol.
64. Mr. Janoski mentioned the very good cooperation between F.Y.R.O.M. and Serbia and Greece during the Olympic games of Athens last summer.
65. Mr. Boskovic, Assistant Minister and Mr. Nestic, Head of Department for International Transport in the Serbian Ministry of Capital Investments, presented the Serbian/ Bulgarian project for the establishment of a joint station in Dimitrovgrad. He announced that a relevant bilateral agreement will be signed to extent the agreement in force since 1980 and the necessary infrastructure will be constructed.

66. Mrs. Novak presented the Serbian Customs Administration's plans, projects and development perspectives of the cross border infrastructure and procedures.
67. Mr. Giannimaras, Customs Expert from the Greek Ministry of Economy and Finance, mentioned the high costs that are caused by the procedures, the tolls and the illegal charging, issue that should be also confronted.
68. Mr. Nikovic presented the Association of International Transport Road Hauliers "Medunarodni Transport".
69. Mr. Stanovnik from the Slovenian Customs Directorate informed the participants that the construction of the Obrezje border station is completed and the construction of the Gruskovje border station will be completed by the end of March 2005. He also announced the construction of a Border Inspection Post at Dobova by the end of 2005.
70. Prof. Taxiltaris, on behalf of the Steering Committee and of the Technical Secretariat of Corridor X, congratulated and thanked the Serbian delegation, not only for the hospitality, but also for the progress they present in the border-crossings infrastructure and services sector.

Item 8: Coordination of further activities

71. The participants agreed on the following:
- a. The participants will send their comments and proposals to the Technical secretariat by March 31th 2005,
 - b. The Technical Secretariat will prepare a new version of the Protocol by April 30th 2005,

- c. A second reaction will be made by the participants by June 15th 2005, defining the authorized Ministers for signing,
- d. The third meeting of the Group will be organized in mid July 2005, organized together with an extra meeting of the Steering Committee of the Corridor, and
- e. Organization of Ministerial Meeting by the end of 2005.

Item 9: Conclusions

72. Mr. Kounadis summarized the results and decision of the meeting and thanked the participants for the very fruitful cooperation.

Attachments

1. *Agenda of the meeting*
2. *List of Participants*
3. *Opening address by the Chairman of the Working Group*
4. *Conclusions of the Working Group on procedures and administrative capacity*
5. *Conclusions of the Working Group on the means to reconcile safety and security, trade facilitation and the fight against fraud*
6. *Draft MoU text*
7. *Comments of the Hungarian delegation on the draft MoU text*
8. *Presentation of the draft MoU text*
9. *Presentations by the Serbian Delegation*