

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

ATHENS, GREECE

23 JANUARY 2004

Draft minutes

Item 1: Opening address by the Chairman of the Steering Committee of Corridor X and DG TREN

1. Mr. Patsiavos, the Chairman, welcomed all the participants, wishing a good stay and fruitful outcome. He explained that during the last meeting of the Steering Committee of Corridor X (Bled, Slovenia, 18 July 2003), the creation of this Working Group had been decided, aiming at identifying the cross-border obstacles and establishing common procedures on cross-border controls along Corridor X, based on general principles to be agreed by the involved countries, according to the results of a special survey, which has been elaborated by the Technical Secretariat of Corridor X.

He mentioned that the kickoff meeting aims to define an action plan for the improvement of border crossing procedures through the interoperability of national systems. That process is a very important one for the Steering Committee's work, since the elimination of cross-border barriers and the minimization of delays will increase traffic along Corridor X, both for rail and road transport, thus contributing to the overall development of the region of

South-Eastern Europe. It wouldn't be worth investing in infrastructure development, without at the same time making progress in the confrontation of cross-border problems and other forms of obstacles impeding optimised operation of the Corridor.

He also declared that he counts a lot on the support of European Commission and thanked Mr. Preston from DG TREN for his presence. He mentioned that a contact had been made with DG TAXUD explaining the aim of the meeting, but unfortunately it was not possible for them to participate. He was sure though, that their full support will be available in the future.

2. He then gave the floor to Mr. Preston from DG TREN.
3. Mr. Preston welcomed the participants. He underlined the evolutions concerning the Balkans' Core Network, the forthcoming MoU signing and the decision of location of the SEE Transport Observatory in Belgrade.

He announced the organization of a conference in Santiago de Compostella in June, with the participation of Mrs. De Palacio, concerning the integration of the Pan-European Networks and the perspectives of their extension to Middle East, North Africa and Russia.

He also welcomed the participants on behalf of DG TAXUD and emphasized the need for improvement, not only of infrastructure, but also of the procedures at cross border stations.

4. Mr. Patsiavos announced the MoU signing for the development of the European Transport Corridor Thessaloniki – Istanbul, which took place in Athens on the 22nd of January 2004.

Item 2: Approval of the agenda

5. There were no objections on the provisional Agenda and that was considered as adopted.

Item 3: Results of the cross border survey elaborated by the Technical Secretariat of the Steering Committee

6. Mr. Miltiadou presented the results of the cross border survey elaborated by the Technical Secretariat (See attached document, which was delivered to the participants).

Item 4: Border crossing facilities and procedures taking place at the cross border stations of each country of Corridor X, per mode of transport and type of vehicle

7. Mr. Kaltenbaeck stated that after the accession of Slovenia in the E.U. there will be no problems at the Austrian stations on Corridor X.
8. Mr. Nahtigal from Slovenia confirmed that, except the Gruskovje station, there are no other stations facing problems in Slovenia.
9. Mrs. Palcic from Croatia confirmed the problems at Macelj station, as already-mentioned by the Technical Secretariat.

She mentioned the improvements already made at operational level at the other border stations on Corridor X, after establishing bilateral agreements with Serbia and Slovenia.

She then submitted some information documenting those improvements (See attachment).

10. Mr. Barta from Hungary extensively presented the existing situation in Hungary. He underlined the improvement made at Kelebia rail station since the on-site visits of the members of the Technical Secretariat, where at present 30minutes and 90minutes are required for passenger and freight trains respectively.
11. Prof. Mandic from Serbia proposed that the Group should be renamed to “Working Group for the improvement of border crossings along the Pan-European Corridor X”.
12. The participants agreed and from then and on “Working Group for the improvement of border crossings along the Pan-European Corridor X” is the official name of the Group.
13. Prof. Mandic then presented the improvement plans of the cross border stations in Serbia.

He informed the participants that the situation had been improved since the on-site visits of the Technical Secretariat, due to bilateral agreements with Croatia.

He considered that the general capacity of the former Yugoslavian cross border stations with Hungary and Bulgaria is sufficient, pointing out the insufficiency of the new stations with Croatia and F.Y.R.O.M.

He finally suggested that the direction should be the establishment of common/ “joint” stations.

14. Mrs. Terzieva from Bulgaria submitted a Protocol of the Second meeting of the Steering Committee for Coordination of the Development of the Railway Infrastructure and for

Border Crossing Facilitation between the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of Serbia along Pan-European Transport Corridor X (see attached document).

She informed the participants that the Bulgarian government is taking measures in order to increase the personnel and equipment at the Bulgarian border-crossing points and to introduce a “one-desk payment” system.

15. Mrs. Gligorovska from F.Y.R.O.M. confirmed the bottlenecks observed at Tabanovce station at the borders with Serbia and informed the participants about the existing improvement plans seeking financing. She also submitted a CD-Rom containing information about the Bogorodica and Medzitlija stations reconstruction/ rehabilitation under PHARE-CBC.
16. Mr. Kounadis from the Greek Customs informed the participants that on the occasion of the Olympic Games in Athens, a manual will be issued, for the simplification of custom procedures according to the guidelines of the World Custom Organization.
17. Mr. Vitos from the Greek Customs briefly described the cross border installations at Idomeni, Evzoni and Niki, and mentioned that the rehabilitation works at Evzoni were in final stage.

At the Evzoni station six lanes for entrance and three lanes for exit had been shaped. The procedures are fully automated, while phytosanitary controls are being performed on 24hour basis. The Niki station will be rehabilitated in the near future.

Finally, he supported the need for joint controls and procedures of neighboring border stations.

18. Mrs. Prinou from the Hellenic Railways Organization (OSE) focused on the fact that already a close cooperation is established between customs authorities and railway undertakings based on the community and common simplified transit procedure, according to which, under specific conditions, neither the goods nor the CIM consignment note need to be presented at the border customs offices and no formalities need to be completed there, except the checking of the CIM consignment note and checking of the seals. The affixed seals is a main point for the application of the simplified transit procedure and so a particular attention has to be given for keeping their integrity.

She also mentioned the absence of proper (electronic) equipment for automated custom procedures at Idomeni station.

Item 5: The European approach for border crossing procedures

19. Mr. Preston from DG TREN confirmed the strong support of DG TREN to the speedup and simplification of cross border procedures, and waited for the, DG TAXUD's position, which is the Directorate General mainly in charge for such issues.

Item 6: Open discussion

20. Mr. Patsiavos put the question how is it possible to avoid double controls.

21. He then encouraged the countries to examine the possibility of shaping special TIR lanes for speeding up the transit of TIR trucks.

22. Mr. Adelsberger suggested the execution of controls, where possible, before the arrival at the borders.
23. Mr. Kaltenbaeck from the Austrian Ministry of Finance reported that all the custom controls would be removed after the enlargement, since Austria will stop being country of entrance to the E.U. The police controls will remain until Slovenia becomes a full member of the Schengen treaty.
24. Mr. Taxiltaris set the issue of undefined factors of direct costs for border procedures and the permanent complaints expressed by the transport operators, that not only the delays surcharge (indirectly) the transport cost via Corridor X, but also the various charges-fees etc. (without counting the cost of corruption), that makes the Corridor less attractive.
25. Prof. Mandic underlined the fact that for all countries need visa to enter Serbia, those are issued only at Serbian embassies and consulates and no more at the various cross border stations.
26. Mr. Vitos confirmed that the transit freight trains can run from Austria to Greece without interim controls, with the precondition that all the countries have signed the Common Transit Convention.
27. Mrs. Palcic considered that the Group sets the appropriate framework for bilateral agreements and supported the participation to the Group of all representatives involved in cross borders procedures.
28. Mr. Patsiavos set the political commitment of the countries for improvement of cross border procedures along Corridor X as a precondition to bilateral agreements, via an MoU signing.

29. Mr. Vitos announced that on 26.2.2004 in Thessaloniki the 1st Conference of Southeastern Europe for Customs, with the participation of the DG TAXUD would take place. In that meeting issues of that nature will also be discussed.

Item 7: Definition of an action plan for the improvement of border crossing procedures through the interoperability of the national systems

30. Mr. Taxiltaris presented a proposal of a short-term Action Plan. The final version of that document, as approved by the participants, contains the following items:

- i. The Group will huddle twice a year. One of the meetings would indispensably be held on the previous day of each time meeting of the Steering Committee. Therefore the next meetings of the Group should be organized in June 2004 and Spring 2005.
- ii. Coordinator – contact person with the Steering Committee and the Technical Secretariat is assigned (Mr. G. Kounadis, Greek Ministry of Economy and Finance), for ensuring the alignment of the actions of the Group to the tasks and activities of the Steering Committee.
- iii. Communication – Cooperation with DG TREN and DG TAXUD will be ensured. Meeting with DG TAXUD in Brussels before the 6th meeting of the Steering Committee (27.2.2004) will be organized.
- iv. The website of the Technical Secretariat will be the host for communication and dissemination of information of international interest. Continuous update with evolutions of national and international level, investment issues (infrastructure, equipment, personnel) and legal and institutional issues.
- v. Communication and cooperation with other Pan-European Corridors (in priority with Corridors in the area: IV, V, VII) for uniform confrontation of common problems will be undertaken.
- vi. Cooperation (exchange of information) with UNECE, SECI, TTFSE, TIR, Transport Companies etc. will be ensured.

vii. Preparation of the MoU signing (Spring 2005) and signing of any convention contributing to facilitation of border crossing procedures.

viii. Codification of structural and operational problems concerning cross border procedures, on the basis of the Technical Secretariats' study and the comments, additions or modifications made by the representatives of each country, with emphasis to the identification of the current fees regime per country, will be undertaken.

31. Mr. Patsiavos recommended that Mr. Kounadis should be assigned to be the coordinator of the Group.

32. All the participants agreed on that proposal.

Item 8: Next meeting of the Working Group of Custom Representatives for Pan-European Corridor X

33. Prof. Mandic proposed to organise the next meeting of the Group in June 2004 in Belgrade.

34. All the participants agreed on that proposal.

Item 9: Conclusions

35. Mr. Patsiavos summarizing the results of the kickoff meeting, as described on the approved Action Plan, thanked the participants for their exceptional contribution in the success of the meeting and announced that the next meeting of the Steering Committee of Corridor X will be held in Thessaloniki on 27.2.2004.