

On the Right Track at Last: The Difficult Path of the Euro- Mediterranean Partnership in Transport

Saki Aciman

General Director

Transport Study Centre

for the Western Mediterranean
(CETMO), Barcelona

When the Barcelona Declaration was approved in 1995, it provoked enormous satisfaction for all those who had been involved in the process. In our case, the satisfaction was two-fold because a specific section on transport was also included in the Declaration. Although the section's contents had changed from the initial proposal, and the final wording was general and limited, we were convinced that enormous possibilities were being opened for progress in cooperation in the Mediterranean in the field of transport.

The Transport Study Centre for the Western Mediterranean (CETMO) had been working very hard in this field since 1985. With the official involvement of the Ministers of Transport of the area's countries, CETMO had already created an important environment for sectorial cooperation where multilateral activities had traditionally been limited. The Barcelona Declaration encouraged the region's countries to step up the pace of their efforts, and one of the results was the creation of the Transport Group of the Western Mediterranean (GTMO), established at a sub-regional level, in conjunction and as a complementary organisation to the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership in transport. The creation of this group, together with the creation of the MEDA fund and entry of the European Commission as the principal actor, opened up extraordinary prospects for multilateral cooperation in the region.

However, it was not long before unforeseen or insufficiently evaluated obstacles began to appear. On one hand, these obstacles consisted of the restrictive interpretation of the texts and regulations written to provide administrative support for the Partnership, and on the other hand, the low level of awareness of the decision makers and the European officials responsible for the day-to-day operation of the Partnership.

Moreover, other limitations also appeared, such as the non-allocation of funds for certain activities such as feasibility studies for infrastructures or the all-too-common tendency to impose technical-financial formulas and solutions on less developed countries, which are only valid in countries that have reached a certain level of development.

This provoked the European Commission to bring a halt to the both logical and licit ambitions maintained by the Maghreb countries of receiving MEDA grants to enable them to analyse their priorities of infrastructure and study the integration of their national transport networks with the trans-European networks, a move that led to perplexity and disappointment in those countries. It required considerable effort to convince the Brussels officials of the importance of these proposals and the true needs of the southern Mediterranean countries. The lobbying by the GTMO, with CETMO at the forefront and acting as secretariat, played a crucial role.

It took some time for the results to be seen, but they seemed to be satisfactory. Indeed, with the first Euro-Mediterranean Transport Forum organised by the European Commission in

Malta in 1999, it was possible to include in its conclusions the Partnership's two chief priorities in this field: the definition of an infrastructure network, and the proposal of measures for facilitating transport.

It seemed that we were moving in the right direction, but then another unforeseen obstacle arose. A few months later, as a result of the Commission reshuffle, all the teams were completely restructured. New officials appeared on the scene with new visions, but with no knowledge of the area's situation and needs.

Their initial reductionist approach sought to eliminate any infrastructure-related activity from the working agenda because of its possible financial repercussions. This intention was rejected by the countries concerned.

It was necessary then to start lobbying again, and this time with even greater intensity. Thanks to the tireless persuasive and technical work of CETMO and a greater involvement by the Transport Commissioner, Vice-President Loyola de Palacio, we were able to put the situation back on the right track.

Thus, after continual effort, it was finally possible to launch two projects at the third forum, held in Brussels in 2002, with a total budget of fifteen million Euros, which was to develop consulting teams to tackle the two basic issues for the development of transport in the region: on one hand, the development of an action plan and a series of initiatives to prepare and modernise the industry for the forthcoming free trade area, including issues such as the liberalisation of the transport market, training, new technologies, advanced logistics, regulatory convergence, and so forth. And on the other

hand, the teams also addressed the definition of infrastructure priorities and their valuation.

Furthermore, the publication of the Commission's communication to the Council and the European Parliament «on the development of an Euro-Mediterranean transport network» has enabled the community policy to be clarified on the matter and to outline the path to be followed.

Three points contained in this communication should be stressed: the acceptance of the existence of two differentiated sub-regions, with the possibility of different initiatives and time horizons for the Western Mediterranean and the Eastern Mediterranean; the recognition of the contribution of existing cooperation structures, such as the GTMO and CETMO; and lastly, the possibility of addressing the situation of the southern Mediterranean countries and their infrastructure requirements.

To be fair, we must add that the Commission, at the proposal of CETMO, included a call for international cooperation in the field of Mediterranean transport in 2001, in the Fifth Framework Programme on Research and De-

velopment. And, at the proposal of the Western Mediterranean countries, CETMO presented two projects, which received a positive reception and were accepted by the members.

With the involvement of the region's transport authorities, and for the first time in a European R&D programme, of experts from the Maghreb countries, CETMO has started work on the development of these two activities.

The first is the REG-MED thematic network of «regulatory convergence to facilitate international transport in the Mediterranean»; and the second is the DESTIN project on the «strategic network of transport infrastructures in the Western Mediterranean».

Both projects, led by CETMO in its capacity as public technical cooperation agency, will enable incorporation of the more institutional aspects in determining the region's needs and completing the two studies begun within the framework of the Transport Forum.

Thus, 2003 has ended with a series of activities in progress. In spite of the eight years that have passed since the Barcelona '95 meetings, and the delay this implies for the goal of the free trade area for 2010, these activities

form a significant body of projects which will help lay the strategic foundations for the future development of transport in the Mediterranean.

However, there still remains one major issue: all the participants involved in this process must ensure the durability and continuity of the projects' conclusions and proposals. Everyone, and most particularly the Commission, as main promoter of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, must ensure their transformation into specific actions that will be beneficial for the South Mediterranean countries. In addition, and with a particular importance, continual monitoring and support is required to ensure the ongoing development of the region's transport. And it is in these activities that an agency with experience and an institutional will to continue has a vital role to play for the region.

In accordance with this, all the parties involved – countries, the European Union and Commission, institutions and stakeholder organisations – will ultimately be on the right path to travel united through the next few years, which will no doubt be decisive for our region.

EURO-MEDITERRANEAN TRANSPORT: MAIN INITIATIVES

European Commission, DG for Energy and Transport, Trans-European Networks

The Trans-European Networks project (TEN in the EU jargon) emerged in conjunction with the single market as a medium to facilitate the free movement of goods, people and services.

http://europa.eu.int/comm/ten/index_en.html

Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the development of a Euro-Mediterranean transport network, COM (2003) 376 final, 24.06.2003

With this document the Commission seeks to specify the Euro-Mediterranean Transport Network through the definition of the challenges and characteristics of the network, bearing in mind the limitations involved in the development, including the questions related to security and funding.

http://europa.eu.int/comm/ten/transport/external_dimension/doc/com_2003_376_en.pdf

EU Marco Polo Programme

The aim of this programme is to help to achieve

the more environmentally friendly transportation of goods in transport and logistic activities. The programme is based on the transfer of the growth of international freight from road to rail, short sea shipping and inland waterway. The Marco Polo Programme started in 2003 and will be in force until 2010.

<http://europa.eu.int/scadplus/leg/en/lvb/l24159.htm>

DESTIN Project

The DESTIN Project (Defining and Evaluating a Strategic Transport Infrastructure in the Western Mediterranean) is a research project under the European Commission. Its main objective is to contribute to research on the interoperability between the Mediterranean countries and between the Mediterranean as a region and other European countries. Moreover this project, which started in 2002 and will be in force until 2004, also seeks to collaborate in the definition of operational methods and criteria for identifying and evaluating the development of transport networks in the Mediterranean.

www.destinweb.net

Transport Study Centre for the Western Mediterranean, CETMO

Organisation set up in 1985 in accordance with the recommendations of the Conference of Transport Ministers of the Mediterranean countries held in Salonika under the auspices of the United Nations. The prime objective of CETMO is its cooperation in measures to improve transport conditions in countries in the south of Europe and in the Maghreb, through studies on infrastructures, flows, statistics and legislation and the development of initiatives to facilitate it.

www.cetmo.org

REG-MED Project

A thematic network, which under the Community Fifth Framework Programme aims to set up a common analysis on international transport in the Mediterranean, in order to be in a position to recommend improvement measures.

www.reg-med.net