UNIFE Position Paper on the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion

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Introduction

UNIFE, the Association of the European Rail Industry, very much welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the consultation on the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion.

UNIFE will focus its contribution on the contribution of transport to the Territorial Cohesion of the European Union1.

1. Definition

Territorial cohesion brings new issues to the fore and puts a new emphasis on existing ones.

- What is the most appropriate definition of territorial cohesion?
- What additional elements would it bring to the current approach to economic and social cohesion as practiced by the European Union?

UNIFE would like to put forward the Spanish example to introduce its vision of Territorial Cohesion. When the works for the first Spanish high speed rail line started in 1986, Spain was one of the poorest countries in the European Union, and Andalusia was one of the poorest Spanish regions. However, the Spanish government decided to build a brand new high speed rail link between its capital, Madrid, and the region’s main city, Seville, using the best existing technology. Since then, the country has undergone a dramatic growth, and Andalusia has become a much more competitive region than in the past. This development would never have been possible without the existence of the Cohesion Policy2 and without taking into account since the beginning the territorial effects of the policy.

Since its inception, the Regional Policy has aimed at reducing the gap between the poorer and the richer European regions and it has been very successful in this regard. The territorial dimension of the policy is not a novelty but a motivation of the policy3. UNIFE considers that this should remain a priority of the Cohesion Policy in the future, as the economic and social discrepancies

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1 Please note that UNIFE’s contribution does not include answers to questions 2, 5 and 6, as they do not enter in the scope of association’s activities.
2 The terms “Regional Policy” and “Cohesion Policy” are used indifferently to describe the Regional Policy of the European Union.
3 Cf. Art. 158 EC
between European regions have strongly increased since the 2004 and 2007 enlargements. Along with the analysis of the Commission, UNIFE considers that the Cohesion Policy, through its territorial dimension, can help overcoming concentration of economic activity by better connecting territories and fostering cooperation between them.

In this context, rail transport infrastructure plays a key role in opening up regions to make them more competitive whilst reducing congestion and pollution and tackling climate change.

3. Better cooperation

*Increased cooperation across regional and national borders raises questions of governance.*

- What role should the Commission play in encouraging and supporting territorial cooperation?
- Is there a need for new forms of territorial cooperation?
- Is there a need to develop new legislative and management tools to facilitate cooperation, including along the external borders?

In the field of transport infrastructure, the European Commission can definitely play a role to support the implementation of trans-national projects by fostering cross-border cooperation between Member States.

An example of added value of the EU in this field is the creation of the TEN-T coordinators in order to accelerate the implementation of eight TEN-T priority projects. This initiative started in July 2005, when the European Commission designated a group of six eminent persons to evaluate progress on certain TEN-T projects through annual reports and to make recommendations for the effective implementation of these priority projects. They have proved to be catalysts for cooperation between Member States and more generally for the concerned priority projects.

However, this is by far insufficient, since only 8 out of 30 TEN-T priority projects are covered by this initiative. In the framework of the Regional Policy, such initiative should be extended to all trans-national lines to be upgraded, modernised or built. In particular, this kind of coordination should aim at completing in a harmonised way (technically and time-wise) projects on both sides of the borders.
Even before targeting specific lines and projects, there should be some kind of coordination between Member States, when they define their national priorities for the development of their transport infrastructure. Member States should be given incentives to cooperate in this regard. Also, the European Commission can be very influential when it approves national transport or infrastructure operational programmes and regional operational programmes. Sometimes, the structural organisation of DG REGIO can even be counter-productive, as the system of one unit per one or two countries does not favour the examination of the plans from a European perspective. Therefore, the European Commission should take action in order to limit discrepancies between the national approaches to infrastructure development.

4. Better coordination

Improving territorial cohesion implies better coordination between sectoral and territorial policies and improved coherence between territorial interventions.

- How can coordination between territorial and sectoral policies be improved?
- How can the coherence of territorial policies be strengthened?
- How can Community and national policies be better combined to contribute to territorial cohesion?
- Which sectoral policies should give more consideration to their territorial impact when being designed? What tools could be developed in this regard?

UNIFE agrees on the need to reinforce coordination between territorial and sectoral policies in the field of transport. In particular the Regional Policy should be better linked with the four following objectives of the European Transport Policy:

- the completion of TEN-T priority projects;
- the implementation of rail freight corridors;
- the implementation of ERTMS⁴;
- and modal shift to the most environmentally-friendly modes of transport.

⁴ ERTMS is the European Rail Traffic Management System.
Too often, these four objectives are not sufficiently taken into account by the Member States when they plan the development of their infrastructure and when they apply for EU funding in the framework of the Regional Policy.

- Cross-border sections of TEN-T lines are sometimes neglected to the profit of the national network development.
- ERTMS is not always properly implemented to ensure smooth and interoperable international traffic.
- The Commission initiative on rail freight corridors should be taken into account in the future when planning investments.
- The allocation of funds between road and rail projects is unbalanced. On average, in the new Member States, rail projects receive one third of the money allocated to transport infrastructure.

As already underlined above, there is a need for better coordination between Member States when they define their priorities for the development of their national transport infrastructure and when a cross-border project is at stake.

On the Commission’s side, there is also a need for a reinforced cooperation between DG REGIO and DG TREN. Both DGs need to work hands in hands when dealing with transport infrastructure projects, and in particular rail infrastructure projects. Even if UNIFE agrees that the lead should remain in the hands of DG REGIO, DG TREN should be better involved in the process. Transport/Infrastructure Operational Programmes and the individual projects’ funding decisions could be submitted to the approval of both Directorate-Generals. The impact of this measure should of course be assessed in order to identify its advantages and drawbacks.

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5 This problem is not only due to a lack of coordination between the Regional Policy and the Transport Policy. As stated in the European Commission Green Paper on the review on the TEN-T Policy (COM(2009)44), the problem also lies in the TEN-T Policy itself. Only a few priority projects have been completed so far and most projects are often a combination of national priorities. Therefore, there is also a need to reform the TEN-T Policy in order to achieve better coordination and quicker completion of the projects.

About UNIFE

UNIFE, the Association of the European Rail Industry, represents 62 of Europe’s leading large and medium-sized rail supply companies active in the design, manufacture, maintenance and refurbishment of rail transport systems, subsystems and related equipment. A further one thousand suppliers of railway equipment partake in UNIFE activities through 18 national rail industry associations. UNIFE members have an 80% market share in Europe and supply more than 50% of the worldwide production of rail equipment and services.

UNIFE represents its members’ interests at the level of both European and international institutions. On the technical side, the association works on the setting of interoperability standards and coordinates EU-funded research projects that aim at the technical harmonisation of railway systems.

UNIFE’s mission is to pro-actively develop an environment in which UNIFE members can provide competitive railway systems for increased rail traffic.

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