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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL**

**on the extension of the trans-European transport network (TEN-T) to neighbouring
third countries**

I. Introduction – Scope of cooperation with third countries

The ambition of the trans-European transport network (TEN-T) policy is to provide for seamless, sustainable and effective transport across the Union while strengthening social, economic and territorial cohesion. The policy has been implemented since 1996, and the current TEN-T legal framework is set out in Regulation (EU) No 1315/2013¹ (“the TEN-T Regulation”). On 14 December 2021, the Commission proposed a revision of the current policy framework², notably to reflect the priorities of the European Green Deal³, the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy of the Commission⁴ and the Global Gateway Connectivity Strategy.⁵

The TEN-T represents the highest level of infrastructure planning of the Union. Foreseen to be completed by 2030, the core network of the TEN-T will provide high quality, multimodal connections of all capitals and main transport arteries of the Union, as the cornerstone of the Single European Transport Area. Transport flows, however, do not stop at the Union border. With the increasingly globally interlinked value and supply chains, the provision of cross-border connectivity with third countries has long been gaining importance to the Union.

The TEN-T policy has been a centrepiece in the projection of the Union transport policy to third countries. Drawing on the Lisbon Treaty that articulated the importance of giving priority to cross-border cooperation with the European Neighbourhood (Article 8 of the TEU), Article 8 of the Regulation that sets out the framework for cooperation with third countries was elaborated with a targeted focus on cooperation with the neighbouring countries, which are the subset of third countries falling under the scope of the Enlargement Policy, the European Neighbourhood Policy, the European Economic Area and the European Free Trade Association.

In accordance with Article 8(4) of the TEN-T Regulation, Annex III includes indicative maps of the TEN-T extended to specific neighbouring countries. Since the adoption of the TEN-T Regulation, the Union has extended the indicative TEN-T to:

- The European Economic Area and European Free Trade Association⁶;
- The Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, The Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia)⁷;

¹ Regulation (EU) No 1315/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on Union guidelines for the development of the trans-European transport network and repealing Decision No 661/2010/EU, OJ L 348, 20.12.2013, p. 1.

² Commission Proposal of 14 December 2021 for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on Union guidelines for the development of the trans-European transport network, amending Regulation (EU) 2021/1153 and Regulation (EU) No 913/2010 and repealing Regulation (EU) 1315/2013, COM(2021)812

³ COM(2019) 640 final.

⁴ COM (2020) 789 final.

⁵ JOIN (2021) 30 final

⁶ Commission Delegated Regulation 2016/758 of 4 February 2016 amending Regulation (EU) No 1315/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards adapting Annex III thereto, OJ L 126, 14.5.2016, p. 3.

⁷ Commission Delegated Regulation 2016/758 of 4 February 2016 amending Regulation (EU) No 1315/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards adapting Annex III thereto, OJ L 126, 14.5.2016, p. 3.

*This reference is without prejudice to the status of Kosovo and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on Kosovo declaration of independence.

- The Eastern Partnership (EaP) (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus⁸, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine)⁹;
- Turkey: the comprehensive network of Turkey as incorporated in the TEN-T Regulation.

In addition, as regards the Mediterranean region, the identification of a comprehensive network that will define a trans-Mediterranean network for transport (TMN-T) is still ongoing. The process is carried out with the Southern Mediterranean Partners¹⁰.

The indicative network allows the Union to better target EU engagement, including financial support. The Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI)-Global Europe and the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) III support an enabling environment to facilitate sustainable infrastructure investment, and allow the EU to leverage public and private investments through International Financial Institutions to support connectivity objectives. Such support is framed within the Economic and Investment Plans for the Western Balkans¹¹, the Eastern Partnership¹² and the Southern Neighbourhood¹³. In addition, the Connecting Europe Facility¹⁴ (CEF II) may also be used for co-funding projects mainly located in the cross-border regions of the Union and the neighbouring countries.

This Communication sustains the focus of the TEN-T policy that gives priority to cooperation with neighbouring countries. First, it outlines how to address common challenges with enlargement countries and countries in the European Neighbourhood and how the Union in the future will work together with these partners in the TEN-T policy area, in particular, as concerns the further development of the interoperability of the networks of enlargement and other neighbouring countries with the Union network. Second, it sets out the measures that aim at completing the extended TEN-T in these countries.

The Communication builds on the Smart and Sustainable Mobility Strategy and is closely linked with the Global Gateway Joint Communication. It also contributes to the aim set out in the European Green Deal of developing a clean, sustainable and smart transport network that places the Union and the European Neighbourhood on a sustainable path while achieving socio-economic recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. This Communication is presented together with the Commission proposal for a revised TEN-T Regulation. The Commission proposal includes a slightly amended legal framework for cooperation with third countries. It

⁸ Participation currently suspended by the Belarussian authorities.

⁹ Commission Delegated Regulation 2019/254 of 9 November 2018 on the adaptation of Annex III to Regulation (EU) No 1315/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council on Union guidelines for the development of the trans-European transport network, OJ L 43, 14.2.2019, p. 1.

¹⁰ The Southern Neighbourhood Partners include Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya (observer status in the Union for the Mediterranean), Morocco, Palestine, Syria (Cooperation with Syria is suspended since 2011) and Tunisia. The designation of Palestine shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the Member States on this issue.

¹¹ Communication 'An Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans', COM(2020) 641 final.

¹² Joint Communication 'Reinforcing Resilience: an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all', JOIN(2020) 7 final and Joint Staff Working Document 'Recovery, resilience and reform: post 2020 Eastern Partnership priorities,' SWD(2021) 186 final.

¹³ Joint Communication 'Renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood: A new Agenda for the Mediterranean', JOIN(2021) 2 final, and Joint Staff Working Document 'Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood Economic and Investment Plan for the Southern Neighbours' SWD(2021) 23 final.

¹⁴ Article 5 of Regulation (EU) No 1316/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 establishing the Connecting Europe Facility, OJ L 348, 20.12.2013, p. 129.

removes the provisions on the financing of projects from Article 8 of the TEN-T Regulation to avoid duplicating the legislation on Union financial support. It introduces new provisions that strengthen the two Commission coordinating instruments; the core network corridors and the European Coordinators. In the Commission proposal, a core network corridor is foreseen to be extended to the Western Balkans.

II. General objectives of the TEN-T policy on neighbouring countries

The extension of the TEN-T policy beyond Union borders articulates two overarching objectives: (i) to ensure the consistency and effectiveness of an interoperable and multimodal network between the Member States and their immediate neighbours and partner countries; (ii) to focus the Union engagement (including financial support) in these regions. Moreover, in the broader perspective of the European Neighbourhood Policy and the EU Enlargement Policy, the extension of the TEN-T is a vehicle of closer integrating and, respectively, preparing candidate countries and potential candidates for possible EU accession. Finally, the integration of the transport networks in enlargement and other neighbouring countries with the TEN-T is an enabler of trade facilitation and hence of economic integration, accelerating the convergence with the Union.

The Union engagement takes both the form of hard infrastructure development and soft measures aimed at improving transport connectivity. With regard to hard infrastructure, the extension of the TEN-T to neighbouring countries aims at identifying infrastructure projects and consolidating a network consistent with the TEN-T parameters and objectives, thereby contributing inter alia to the decarbonisation of transport. Having an agreed and stable network in the neighbouring countries translates into more robust connections with better transport services for citizens and business. In view of the strong political commitment of the Union to its neighbourhood, it also allows it to better target EU funding and financing and to provide the certainty needed to unlock investments in infrastructure projects. Moreover, a stable planning and strategic development of infrastructure will help to attract support from international financial institutions. Regarding the investment in new infrastructure, special attention should be paid to achieving the highest standards and requirements on the TEN-T while protecting the assets of a quality infrastructure over time through regular maintenance.

Soft measures aim at the development of Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) for all modes which will help to address safety issues and support transport sustainability. They also include measures for the exchange of multimodal transport data based on EU standards to support efficient cargo flows. 5G infrastructure should also be promoted. In addition, the Union supports regulatory reform and strengthened dialogue at a technical level, building on relevant Union instruments and drawing on the active involvement of the European agencies in the field of transport. In recent years, the Union and a number of partner countries have concluded Association Agreements that aim at approximating the Union transport legislation and at adopting the TEN-T requirements and standards on interoperability.

Also among the important Union priorities is the aim to decarbonise transport and limit the impact of climate change on the Union and its neighbours. The TEN-T policy will contribute to the goals set out in the European Green Deal. In view of this, all enlargement and other neighbouring countries should pursue the objective of the European Green Deal to provide for a 90% reduction in transport-related greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Acting ambitiously and joining forces in pursuit of this agenda will provide the Union and its

neighbours with a first-mover advantage in the global shift towards a sustainable and green transport sector.

The participation of undertakings which are owned or controlled by a natural person or an undertaking of a non-EU country can contribute to the realisation of the TEN-T network in the EU. However, under specific circumstances, such participation in projects of common interest might compromise security and public order in the EU. Without prejudice and in addition to the cooperation mechanism pursuant to Regulation (EU) 2019/452¹⁵, greater awareness of such participation is necessary to allow intervention of public authorities if it appears that they are likely to affect security or public order. The Commission proposal revising the TEN-T regulation therefore provides that Member States shall notify the Commission of any project of common interest in their territory with the participation of a natural person or an undertaking of a non-EU country with a view to allow assessment of its impact on security or public order in the EU. Neighbouring countries should set up a similar mechanism concerning projects implemented on the indicative TEN-T network.

III. Main achievements and prospects of cooperation with neighbouring countries

The European Economic Area and Switzerland

The European Economic Area (EEA) and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) form an integral part of the TEN-T policy on neighbouring countries. For decades, EEA and EFTA States have been closely tied to the development of the Union market as seamlessly integrated trading partners for the EU. With 13.6 million people living in the four EFTA States, Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Switzerland, they comprise the third largest trading partner of the Union in merchandise and the second largest in services.

The extended indicative TEN-T in these States is well developed and on par with the network of the Union. For all modes of transport, the network of EEA/EFTA States is well integrated with the TEN-T even to the extent that two EEA/EFTA States are part of a TEN-T core network corridor. The Scandinavian-Mediterranean Core Network Corridor includes Norway while the Rhine-Alpine Core Network Corridor crosses Switzerland. Accordingly, the European Coordinators are liaising closely with the countries in view of completing the indicative core TEN-T by 2030.

The Rhine-Alpine Corridor is one of the busiest freight routes in Europe. It connects the North Sea ports of Belgium and The Netherlands with the Mediterranean port of Genoa. The Corridor runs through important economic centres such as Brussels and Antwerp in Belgium, the Randstad region in the Netherlands, the German Rhine-Ruhr and Rhine-Neckar regions, the Basel and Zürich regions in Switzerland and the Milano and Genoa regions in Italy. The Corridor alignment includes important projects in Switzerland, including the world's longest railway tunnel, the Gotthard Base Tunnel. Situated beneath the Swiss Alps, the 57 km Gotthard Base Tunnel opened on 1 June 2016. With the Lötschberg and Ceneri Base tunnels,

¹⁵ Regulation (EU) 2019/452 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 March 2019 establishing a framework for the screening of foreign direct investments into the Union (*OJ L 79I*, 21.3.2019, p. 1)

it will increase the competitiveness of rail directly benefiting EU citizens and businesses. Currently a bottleneck on the Union side, the EU should seek to improve the access routes to the Gotthard Tunnel.

The Scandinavian-Mediterranean Corridor represents a critical north-south axis for the European economy. Within Union borders, the Corridor stretches from Finland and Sweden in the North, to the island of Malta in the South, taking in Denmark, Northern, Central and Southern Germany, Austria, the industrial heartlands of Northern Italy and the Southern Italian ports. With the adoption of the CEF II Regulation, the Corridor was extended to Narvik in Norway. In line with the Commission Communication on a Stronger Arctic engagement of the European Union¹⁶, the Corridor was extended to build a presence in the North aimed at facilitating freight transport on land originating from the Arctic and the possible future Northern Sea Route.

Western Balkans

The Western Balkans have long been a priority region for the Union¹⁷. As set out by President von der Leyen in her State of the Union speech of 14 September 2021, “*the future of the whole region lies in the EU*”. With a population of nearly 18 million people, the region is an important market for the Union as well as a significant transit area for the transport of European goods. In 2020, the total trade between the EU and the Western Balkans stood at EUR 50.5 billion. The Western Balkans have a key role to play in the global value chains that supply the EU, and this role could be further reinforced by providing for better transport connectivity with the Union and within the region.

A main achievement has been the adoption of the Treaty establishing the Transport Community (TCT) in 2017¹⁸. The TCT requires the Western Balkans to transpose the EU transport acquis into national legislation, allowing for the integration of the Western Balkans into the EU transport market before their possible accession to the EU. This includes the areas of technical standards, interoperability, safety, security, traffic management, social policy, public procurement and the environment thus supporting the region in its effort to close the gap to Member States. The Transport Community is developing a rolling work plan for the development of the indicative TEN-T core and comprehensive networks while a Permanent Secretariat assists the Western Balkan partners in the transposition of Union transport policy and the implementation of TEN-T projects.

The Western Balkan partners have made significant progress in realising the indicative TEN-T core network. However, the development of a number of key projects on the indicative core network is still lagging behind. While there have been improvements on the building of cross-border infrastructure, such as the Svilaj bridge between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina which was opened for traffic in September 2021, substantial progress is needed

¹⁶ Joint Communication to the European Parliament, The Council, The European Social and Economic Committee and the Committee of the Regions ‘A stronger EU engagement for a peaceful, sustainable and prosperous Arctic’ Join(2021) 27 final.

¹⁷ Accession negotiations are open with Montenegro (2012) and Serbia (2014). Opening of the negotiation with Albania and the Republic of North Macedonia, following the agreement of the Council reached in March 2020, is still pending.

¹⁸ OJ L 278, 27.10.2017

to ensure seamless transport operations between the Union and the Western Balkans. This concerns all modes of transport, with the rail network being particularly in need of modernisation.

In addition, the modal share of sustainable transport remains at a low level. While the Western Balkan partners carry out approximately 70% of their global trade with the Union, only 5% of the total freight volume is transported by rail and the remaining 95% is transported by road. Moreover, rail freight transport has dropped by 40% since 2009 while the share of rail passenger transport of total passenger transport remains in the single digits, with the exception of sub-urban transport in a few major cities. The inland waterway network in the Western Balkans remains underused for freight transport to and from the Union. The Danube and Sava rivers cross several countries in the region, comprising inland waterways that could be further exploited in order to shift traffic from road to more sustainable modes of transport. In the Adriatic Ionian area, there is a need to ensure coordination between national and regional bodies active in the development of the TEN-T.

In consequence, transport connectivity within the region and with the Union suffers, with negative consequences on the economic development and the attractiveness of the region for investors. The effect of such a situation is often seen at the borders with the Union, where the capacity of the infrastructure does not always match the traffic volumes registered, with significant negative knock-on effects not only for the trade between the Union and the Western Balkans, but also affecting the trade between Member States that crosses the region in transit.

Eight years after having extended the TEN-T to the Western Balkans and four years after the entry into force of the TCT, time has come to accelerate the development of the TEN-T. In view of this, it is vital that the Union and the Western Balkan partners carry out a more coherent TEN-T policy. This would help bridging the connectivity gap and improving the overall quality of transport.

To pursue the objectives of the TEN-T policy, the Western Balkan partners can benefit from several EU funding sources, such as the Instrument for Pre-Accession through the Western Balkan Investment Framework. Furthermore, in 2020, the Commission adopted a comprehensive Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans (EIP)¹⁹, which aims to spur the long-term economic recovery of the region, support a green and digital transition, foster regional integration and convergence with the Union. The Plan identifies flagship projects in all aspects of connectivity and sets out an investment package that mobilises up to EUR 9 billion of grants over the next seven years, leveraging up to EUR 20 billion of investments through the new Western Balkans Guarantee Facility. All key transport projects included in the Plan – amounting to EUR 1.1 billion with a leverage of up to EUR 4 billion investments – are located on the extended TEN-T.

The EU also supports macro-regional strategies in the region, such as the EUSAIR and EUSDR²⁰ in order to strengthen the coherence of investments in the Western Balkans. Coordination between Interreg, IPA III and other funding instruments in the framework of EU macro-regional strategies improves the effect of implemented projects and multiplies the impact of new ones.

¹⁹ Communication ‘An Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans’, COM(2020) 641 final.

²⁰ The EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region and the EU Strategy for the Danube Region

The Union should give priority to TEN-T projects that are of strategic interest to the region and to the Union, with the objective of realising a complete, compliant and sustainable indicative core network that connects capitals within the region and with the Union. The Union should seek to speed up the construction of new transport infrastructure, bridging missing links, in particular cross-border projects, and, where appropriate, to upgrade the existing infrastructure bringing it up to the standards of the TEN-T requirements. Digital technology, supported by the development of telecom infrastructure and the exchange of multimodal transport data, should be deployed to enable the interoperability of networks and support more efficient cargo flows. The European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS) should replace legacy systems that create fragmented sections on the network. The deployment of ITS solutions as well should be a priority for the improvement of road safety.

It will be an important priority as well to promote multimodal transport solutions and accelerate the modal shift to sustainable transport, reducing CO² emissions from transport. Green multimodal solutions, such as electric charging stations and multimodal hubs should be developed. Traffic in and around cities should also be improved providing sustainable alternatives to road traffic and avoiding bottlenecks that also lead to higher CO₂ emissions.

The TEN-T policy should also better reflect the geographical situation of the Western Balkans in Europe through a more inclusive approach. Several Member States - Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Greece - share common borders and rely heavily on the infrastructure in the Western Balkans for providing connectivity with the other Member States. The proposed creation of a European Transport Corridor linking the region with the Union, as set out in the proposal for a revised TEN-T Regulation, is a tangible example of what the Union can offer to the region to enhance the implementation of TEN-T projects.

The Eastern Partnership

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) has been instrumental in bringing the Union and the Eastern partners closer together. The economic ties between the Union and the region are strong, and the Eastern neighbourhood is an important transit area for the transport of European goods to the East. During the last decade, EU-EaP trade has nearly doubled making the region the tenth largest trading partner of the Union. For Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, the Union is the largest trading block, while for Armenia and Belarus the Union is the second largest trading partner. Union trade with the EaP totalled EUR 82.8 billion in 2020. EU-Ukraine trade, in particular, is accounting for almost 50 % of the total trade between the EaP countries and the Union. To support this development, the provision of better transport connectivity with the Union and within the region will be of importance to the Union.

Following the extension of the indicative TEN-T to the region in 2018, a significant result of the TEN-T policy is the development of the Indicative TEN-T Investment Action Plan for the Eastern Partnership. Jointly prepared by the World Bank and the Commission, the Plan identifies key priority investments with a total value of EUR 12.8 billion for all transport modes on the extended core network. The deadline for completion is set at 2030. The Plan is intended to assist decision-makers in prioritising strategic investments in transport infrastructure, with the aim of completing the indicative TEN-T network. The elaboration of a single coordinated pipeline of projects for the region will be a key element of success for the implementation of the TEN-T policy. So will the further development of the network, including inland waterways, which were not included with the extension in 2018.

Underpinned by rules-based policy, the investment in sustainable solutions on the indicative core TEN-T network is among the long-term policy objectives of the Eastern Partnership Policy beyond 2020, as outlined in the Joint Communication “Eastern Partnership Policy beyond 2020: Reinforcing Resilience – an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all”. This post 2020 agenda is structured under two pillars, Investment and Governance, and proposes an Economic and Investment Plan to support the socio-economic recovery of partner countries ‘building back better’ in pursuit of the green and digital transition. The Plan will include significant investments in transport (up to EUR 4.5 billion), including projects located on the extended TEN-T.

The Economic and Investment Plan and the Indicative TEN-T Investment Action Plan for the EaP will be instrumental in tackling the numerous challenges of realising an interoperable network at standard with the TEN-T requirements. Both the road and rail connections between the Union and EaP partners remain insufficient and under-developed, with several missing links at border crossings. The road infrastructure is of poor standard, both in terms of quality, capacity and safety. The rail network infrastructure and rolling stock are in several cases obsolete with respect to quality, capacity and safety standards. Moreover, the integration of the EaP rail network with that of the Union faces the challenge that the network in the EaP is equipped with the 1520 mm rail track gauge, whereas the Union standard gauge is 1435 mm. This increases the complexity of realising an interoperable cross-border network and will require the development of advanced technical solutions.

To address these challenges, the EaP should continue building a pipeline of TEN-T projects and bring the projects to maturity in view of meeting the conditions for funding and financing. The EaP should focus on projects located on the indicative TEN-T core network and, in particular, cross-border projects with the Union.

The Union should seek to accelerate the construction of new transport infrastructure, bridging missing links, in particular cross-border projects and multimodal connections that include also maritime transport, and, where appropriate, to upgrade the existing infrastructure and bring it up to standard with the TEN-T requirements. The Union should support the development of innovative infrastructure solutions to resolve the issue of different rail gauge standards. Digital solutions should be deployed to enable the interoperability of networks and multimodality, increase safety and sustainability, facilitate trade and border crossing. The European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS) should replace legacy systems that make up fragmented sections on the network. The deployment of ITS solutions as well should be a priority for the improvement of road safety. Multimodal transport solutions and an accelerated modal shift to sustainable transport should also be a priority in order to reduce CO2 emissions from transport. For road infrastructure projects, the Union should promote the development of green multimodal solutions (such as electric charging stations and multimodal hubs). Upgrading the inland waterway network will also be a priority. Finally it will be important to ensure that these countries maintain the infrastructure, in particular, with regard to key projects developed with EU funds.

South Mediterranean

The South Mediterranean Region is of special political importance to the Union. The region is also a close trading partner. In 2020, total trade in goods between the Union and the Southern Neighbourhood countries amounted to EUR 149.4 billion. There is potential for the

further development of trade, which should be supported by improved sustainable transport connections.

On the basis of the mandate received by the Ministers of the EuroMediterranean region in 2013, the Union and the Southern Mediterranean Partners aim at identifying a Trans-Mediterranean Network for Transport (TMN-T). The TMN-T will be prepared as a comprehensive network. In order to provide better transport connectivity between the Union and the region, it will be particularly important to identify seaports on the indicative TMT-T.

Upon the identification of the TMN-T, the Southern Mediterranean Partners should swiftly develop a TMN-T implementation plan that identifies high-priority projects, with a view to producing a project pipeline. Priority should be given to projects in ports, including last-mile, multimodal connections in view of reinforcing the development of short sea shipping.

The 2021 Joint Communication on a Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood and the accompanying Economic and Investment Plan for the region recognise transport connectivity as a key component for the development of the Southern Mediterranean. They give priority to the development of the Trans-Mediterranean Transport Network and to transport policy reforms identified jointly under the Regional Transport Action Plan (RTAP)²¹. The WestMed Initiative²², promoting the sustainable development of the blue economy in the Western Mediterranean, addresses maritime transport.

In line with the Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood and the Economic and Investment Plan for the region, the Union should step up efforts to adopt the indicative maps of the future trans-Mediterranean transport network (TMN-T) and give priority to projects on this network of particular importance for the Union. Moreover, it should support the implementation of the RTAP, which lays down agreed principles for the development of a multimodal, sustainable and integrated transport system, including the pursuit of regulatory convergence. This approach aligns with the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) cooperation framework on sustainable Transport and Blue Economy.

Turkey

The Union and Turkey are important trading partners and Turkey is a key transit country for Union trade with the Middle and Far East. The Union and Turkey therefore share an interest in developing and upgrading the infrastructure. Progress on project implementation is critical to fully realise the potential of the indicative TEN-T in Turkey. To maximise those benefits for both Turkey and the Union, coordination of infrastructure development is essential, in particular, for railway. A key project under the IPA, Turkey will ensure a valuable access to the TEN-T through Bulgaria with the completion of the Halkali – Kapikule railway, which is co-funded from the IPA instrument with EUR 275 million and co-financed by the European

²¹ Regional Transport Action Plan for the Mediterranean Region (2014-2020).

²² The WestMED follows from the ‘5+5 Dialogue’ involving five EU Member States (France, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Malta), and five Southern partner countries (Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia).

Financial Institutions (EIB and EBRD). The alignment of Turkey with the TEN-T *acquis* remains of key importance.²³ Similarly to what is foreseen for the Western Balkans and EaP region, it is of critical importance to take into account the provision of alternative fuels in the planning of road infrastructure between the Union and Turkey. Finally, a better coordination of the implementation of border infrastructure would contribute to closing infrastructure gaps, improving traffic flows between the Union and Turkey and beyond.

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom was an integral part of the TEN-T until the withdrawal from the Union at the end of the transition period on 31 December 2020. The UK was until then part of the North Sea-Mediterranean Core Network Corridor, with seamlessly integrated transport connections to Continental Europe and Ireland. Following the UK withdrawal, the UK is no longer subject to the TEN-T *acquis*.

Of special interest to the Union is the safeguarding of the connectivity of Ireland with the Union mainland. The Union is therefore acting to ensure that the UK withdrawal will not significantly disrupt the Irish transport network, in particular, the connectivity with Continental Europe. With the UK withdrawal, the Union initiated special measures aimed at protecting the interests of Ireland and hence the Union. With the adoption of the CEF II Regulation, Ireland became located on two TEN-T Core Network Corridors for the first time. In addition to remaining on the North Sea-Mediterranean Corridor, Ireland was included in the Atlantic corridor, with the three core ports of Dublin, Cork, and Shannon-Foynes being linked to two French ports, Le Havre and Nantes Saint-Nazaire.

The Work Plan for the North Sea-Mediterranean Corridor indicates the continuous commitment of the Union to protecting the transport connections of Ireland with Continental Europe. Objectives for the development of the Corridor include the further development of maritime sea links, and the improvement of hinterland connections to seaports. Specific reference is made to plans to encourage a range of projects including the Ringaskiddy road connection to Cork, and the Alexandra Basin in Dublin. The Plan commits to ensuring connectivity to mainland Europe by sea, recognised as the most significant border crossing of Ireland. Further investment in the port capacity of Ireland is identified as a potential means of reducing the dependence of Ireland on the UK land bridge.

IV. Conclusion

The extension of the TEN-T policy to neighbouring countries has been of critical importance to the Union in the pursuit of developing an interoperable and multimodal transport network. The TEN-T policy has been an important vehicle for the integration of enlargement countries, providing better transport connectivity and acting as an enabler of trade facilitation, accelerating the convergence with the Union. Presented alongside the proposal for a revised TEN-T Regulation, this Communication aims at further deepening the external relations of

²³ Commission Staff Working Document ‘Turkey 2021 Report’ SWD(2021) 290 Final/2.

the Union, taking in the priorities of the European Green Deal and of the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy of the Commission.

For the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership, in particular, there is the strong need to accelerate the development of the indicative TEN-T to further improve transport connectivity with the Union. In order to move from a patchwork to a network in these regions, coherence in project implementation must be strengthened and the building of sound project pipelines must be sustained at a faster track, articulating clear prioritisations of the most critical projects and giving priority to projects located on the indicative core network.

There is, in addition, the urgency of bringing the existing infrastructure up to standard and to ensure maintenance of existing assets. The further development of the indicative TEN-T should aim at providing a network of high quality standard. Moreover, it should aim at providing for the development of a resilient infrastructure to withstand the challenges of climate change.

In view of this, the Commission will undertake to:

- Achieve a compliant indicative core network, which is multimodal, sustainable and resilient.
- Speed up the construction of new transport infrastructure, bridging missing links and removing bottlenecks, in particular, across borders, and upgrade existing infrastructure to reach compliance with the TEN-T requirements and ensure alignment with the European Green Deal.
- Support the promotion and deployment of digital technology to enable the interoperability of networks, in particular, ERTMS, ITS and multimodal freight information systems and 5G infrastructure. The deployment of digital technology should ensure high performance across the network and reach higher levels of automation.
- Encourage partners to take in due consideration, and implement, optimal maintenance and operation of existing and new assets.
- Give priority to TEN-T projects of strategic interest to the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership regions and to the Union, to better link enlargement and other neighbouring countries with the Union.
- Assess the need to review the existing indicative TEN-T network in the enlargement and other neighbouring countries and, where necessary, initiate the process to update it.

The European Parliament and the Council are invited to endorse this Communication that will also be presented to the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.