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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Preparation for the Regional Steering Committee of the Transport Community on 28 March 2023 - Information Note from the Commission

In view of the meeting of the Working Group on Transport - Intermodal Questions and Networks on 24 February 2023, the Commission services have provided the attached information note including draft EU positions for the meeting of the Regional Steering Committee (RSC), planned to be convened on 28 March 2023 in Belgrade.

The preparatory documents for the RSC will be found in WK 2243/23.

ANNEX

INFORMATION NOTE

Coordination in preparation for the Regional Steering Committee of the Transport Community on 28 March 2023[1]

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This information note is presented by the Commission services on the basis of the agreed agenda (see annex) in view of providing information or coordinating EU positions for the upcoming Regional Steering Committee of the Transport Community.

The Regional Steering Committee will cover the following areas of EU relevance:

- Information by the Permanent Secretariat on the completed studies and the Technical Assistance in 2022;
- Endorsement of Action Plan (Roadmap) on implementation of the Social Acquis;
- Presentation by the Permanent Secretariat of results of the communication and visibility campaign on level crossings safety;
- Information by the Permanent Secretariat on Transport Observatory Data Information System (TODIS) phase III follow-up actions;
- Information from the European Commission on the revision of Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) indicative extension in the Western Balkans;
- Information on preparations for the Connectivity Summit;
- Presentation by Permanent Secretariat of the Final Report on Western Balkans Road Safety Observatory implementation;
- Information from the European Commission on Safe and Sustainable Transport Programme;
- Outline of cooperation between Transport Community and observing participants;

[1] 09:30 – 12:00, Belgrade, Serbia, |TCT Headquarters ("Beogradjanka" building, Masarikova 5, 8th floor, 11000 Belgrade). As in previous Regional Steering Committee meetings, the possibility of remote participation will be provided (online connection).

- Presentation by the Permanent Secretariat of the draft report on the Budget 2022 accounts;
- Review of the interim audit report (January- June 2022);
- Endorsement of the Annual Operational Report 2022;
- Education allowance for the staff of the TCT and rules on secondment and locally contracted experts;
- Discussion on the possible changes to the Rules on reimbursement of expenses to participants at the meetings organised by the TCT Secretariat;

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PART I – GENERAL

Article 24 of the Treaty establishing the Transport Community ('TCT')[2] establishes the Regional Steering Committee. It is responsible for the administration of the TCT and for ensuring its proper implementation. For this purpose, it makes recommendations and takes decisions in the cases provided for in the TCT. Notably, the Regional Steering Committee:

- prepares the work of the Ministerial Council,
- decides on the establishment of technical committees,
- as regards newly adopted EU acts, takes appropriate action, notably through the revision of Annex I to the TCT,
- appoints the Director of the Secretariat after consulting the Ministerial Council,
- may appoint one or more Deputy Directors of the Secretariat,
- lays down rules of the Secretariat,
- may review, by way of a decision, the level of budget contributions, on request of any Contracting Party,
- adopts the annual budget of the Transport Community,
- adopts a decision specifying the procedure for the implementation of the budget, for presenting and auditing accounts and for inspection,
- takes decisions on disputes brought by the Contracting Parties,
- adopts general principles in the area of access to documents, in respect of documents held by bodies established by, or under, the TCT,

[2] OJ L 278, 27.10.2017, p. 3

- adopts annual reports to the attention of the Ministerial Council on the implementation of the Comprehensive Network;
- in respect of certain Union acts, establishes time limits and ways for the transposition by the South East European Parties.

The Regional Steering Committee is composed of a representative, and an alternate representative, of each of the Contracting Parties. Participation as observers is open to all EU Member States.

The Regional Steering Committee acts by unanimity.

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PART II – DETAILS

RSC Agenda part 1 (policy)

Agenda item 1

Information by the Permanent Secretariat on the completed studies and the Technical Assistance in 2022

This is an information point from the Transport Community Permanent Secretariat. It will present progress on the following technical assistance projects during 2022: i) technical assistance for baseline assessment and financial implications to e-tolling interoperability across the Western Balkans; ii) technical assistance for capacity building in management and operations of the border crossing points along the indicative TEN-T Network in the Western Balkans; iii) technical assistance for deployment of e - freight in Western Balkans and implementation of the Regulation (EU) 2020/1056 on electronic freight transport information; iv) assessment of the rail market in the Western Balkans in terms of capacities, policies, economic and technical level of development of freight and passenger transport segments.

Union position

- To acknowledge the information presented by the Transport Community Permanent Secretariat.
- To underline the importance of technical assistance to the Regional Partners to help them deliver on the commitments contained in the Transport Community Treaty.

Agenda item 2

Endorsement of Action Plan (Roadmap) on implementation of the Social Acquis

The 3rd TCT Social Forum held on 11 May 2022 agreed to set up a Social Acquis and Passenger Rights Action Plan and recognised that not enough progress has been made regarding the implementation of the EU road social acquis. It called for relevant authorities to make further efforts to improve the current situation and transpose and implement fully road and rail social acquis and passenger rights listed in the Annex I.2 and I.3 of the Transport Community Treaty.

In addition, the Conclusions of the 2nd and 3rd TCTs Social Forums clearly highlighted the importance of streamlining more attention to the rail and road social issues and passenger rights to improve the working conditions, make the sector more inclusive and attractive, and advance the enforcement of passenger rights and accessible travel.

The TCT Permanent Secretariat has therefore prepared a draft Action Plan, which is focused on the rail and road transport sectors. This follows recent initiatives covering these two sectors in previous years (2021 Year of Rail, 2022 Year of Smart and Sustainable Roads). Social and passenger rights measures related to other modes of transport, such as Inland Waterways and Maritime, are already indicated within the Action Plan for Waterborne Transport and Multimodality.

The Commission services have examined the draft Action Plan and are of the opinion that the focus on the rail and road transport sectors is duly justified. In addition, the draft Action Plan is perceived as an appropriate commitment for the implementation of social and passenger rights in the region – the Commission services consider this plan as a good monitoring and reference tool for the implementation and enforcement of the relevant rights, in conjunction with the TCT Treaty.

Union position

- To underline the importance of achieving more progress on social and passenger rights, in view with the commitments contained in Annex I TCT.
- To endorse the proposed Action Plan on social and passenger rights.

Agenda item 3

Presentation by the Permanent Secretariat of results of the communication and visibility campaign on level crossings safety

This is an information point from the Transport Community Permanent Secretariat. It will present the results of its public awareness campaign "It's a Thin Line", which targets a wide Western Balkans audience via dedicated events, printed materials, social media, TV and other communication channels to increase public awareness about dangers of rail/road intersections.

The campaign was organised taking account of the facts that road safety is a key objective of the Transport Community and 55% of all accidents on level crossings in the region result in fatalities or severe injuries. The public awareness campaign is part of soft measures to improve safety and reach "Vision Zero" by 2050, having in mind that level crossings in the region need to be upgraded and their safety improved.

Union position

- To acknowledge the information presented by the Transport Community Permanent Secretariat.
- To thank the Transport Community Permanent Secretariat for its support and invite Regional Partners to continue with efforts to improve road safety in the region.

Agenda item 4

Information by the Permanent Secretariat on Transport Observatory Data Information System (TODIS) phase III follow-up actions

This is an information point from the Transport Community Permanent Secretariat on the ongoing development of the Transport Observatory. It follows up on the discussion in the 15 December 2022 RSC meeting, in which the Secretariat was asked to provide further information on the possible implications from the proposed approach for the major TCT deliverables, such as the five-year rolling work plan for the indicative TEN-T extension. The accompanying note builds upon an earlier version, which was discussed during the 29 November 2022 Intermodal WP meeting.

The Transport Community Permanent Secretariat is proposing to reconsider the approach for phase III of the Transport Observatory (completion of the regional transport model), in view of high costs (up to EUR 1.2 million) and identified challenges for completion. In particular, the proposal is to postpone the decision on the development of phase III (regional transport model) to 2025, while using the successfully launched phase II (Transport Observatory Database/Information System) to improve the second iteration of the five-year rolling work plan on the indicative TEN-T extension in 2024. In this regard, the Transport Community Secretariat notes that the completion of phase II (TODIS) in the beginning of 2023 will contribute to a more coherent and consistent project planning and prioritisation framework, thereby already leading to an improved second iteration of the five-year rolling work plan in 2024.

Union position

- To support the proposed approach on the development of phase III of the Transport Observatory.

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Agenda item 5

Information from the European Commission on the revision of Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) indicative extension in the Western Balkans

This is an information point from the European Commission on the revision of the maps of the indicative TEN-T extension of the core and comprehensive networks in the Western Balkans. On 21 February 2022, the Council was informed on the intention of the Commission to negotiate a High-Level agreement between the EU and the Western Balkans partners on the adaptation of the indicative maps of neighbouring countries within the meaning of Article 49(6) of Regulation (EU) No 315/2013 (TEN-T Regulation).

During this agenda point, the Regional Partners will be informed of the next steps in the process leading to the review of the existing indicative maps of the Western Balkans network, based on a high-level agreement within the meaning of Article 49 (6) of Regulation (EU) No 1315/2013 to be signed between the Union and the Western Balkans partners. This follows several bilateral meetings in 2022 and early 2023 with each Regional Partner, which reviewed in details their proposals to revise the TEN-T network.

Agenda item 6

Information on preparations for the Connectivity Summit

This is an information point from the Transport Community Permanent Secretariat. The Permanent Secretariat will present its plans for a Connectivity Summit in Montenegro, to be organised together with the Secretariat of the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA).

The aim of the event is to bring the attention of the wider community of professionals and political stakeholders on issues related to sustainable and efficient transport and logistics, as prerequisites for attracting investments and enhanced trade within the region of Western Balkans, as well as between the region and EU.

The Connectivity Summit, currently planned for 15-16 May 2023, is scheduled to take place over two days and include both political and technical sessions.

Planned deliverables for the Summit include a declaration on the extension of the Green Lanes, to be endorsed by competent authorities (Sherpas, Ministers in charge of transport, relevant border agencies) of the Western Balkan Partners and neighbouring EU Member States. During the Connectivity Summit, it is also foreseen to sign the High-Level Agreement on the revision of the indicative TEN-T maps to the region.

During a Ministerial working lunch, the Ministers for Transport from the Western Balkans and the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia will have the opportunity to discuss lessons learned and synergies between the Solidarity Lanes and the Green Lanes.

Union position

- To welcome plans for the Connectivity Summit in Montenegro.
- To invite the Transport Community Permanent Secretariat to provide more details about the planned event, as they become available.

Agenda item 7

Presentation by Permanent Secretariat of the Final Report on Western Balkans Road Safety Observatory implementation

This is an information point from the Transport Community Permanent Secretariat on the implementation of the Western Balkans Road Safety Observatory (WBRSO). The Observatory was established with the support of the EU, Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) and the World Bank and was announced during the July 2021 TCT Ministerial Council.

Its ultimate objective is to offer a regional platform for the exchange of information and a tailored solution to set and monitor regional road safety targets as well as contribute to the improvement and harmonisation of road safety data. An Information system will serve as a tool to reach this goal. The WBRSO Online Information System will serve as a platform for exchanging road safety data between Regional Partners. This is the first time that a regional road safety platform is made available for the Western Balkans region.

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Union position

- To acknowledge the information presented by the Transport Community Permanent Secretariat.

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Agenda item 8

Information from the European Commission on Safe and Sustainable Transport Programme

This is an information point from the European Commission. At the EU-Western Balkans Summit in Poznan in 2019, the European Union pledged EUR 15 million financial assistance to improve road safety, the efficiency of operations and the quality of infrastructure at border and common crossing points on the TEN-T network in the Western Balkans. Following the adoption of strategic documents in 2020, such as the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy, linking transport with the European Green Deal and thus the need to invest more targeted into the Green Agenda in the Western Balkans, the European Commission decided in 2021 to step up its engagement and allocate EUR 80 million to a 'Safe and Sustainable Transport Programme' (SSTP).

The aim of the programme is to provide financial assistance to small scale projects that contribute to enhancing safety and sustainability mostly in the road and railway sectors, in line with the objectives of the Green Agenda. During the summer of 2022, with the assistance of the Transport Community Permanent Secretariat, the European Commission engaged with the Western Balkan Partners to better understand their needs, in particular through the establishment of an indicative single project pipeline.

In the end of 2022, the European Commission reached an agreement with the World Bank Group, which will be the lead International Financial Institution to implement the SSTP. As part of the RSC agenda point, the European Commission will inform the Western Balkan Partners of the state-of-play of the operationalisation of the SSTP, as well as the next steps in the process.

Agenda item 9

Outline of cooperation between Transport Community and observing participants

During the 15 December 2022 RSC meeting, the Transport Community Permanent Secretariat was asked to produce a more detailed outline of the elements to be covered under the structured cooperation between the Transport Community and Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia.

Following the endorsement of the joint statement on the closer association of Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia in the work of the Transport Community during the November 2022 TCT Ministerial Council meeting in Brussels, the TCT Permanent Secretariat has held a round of meetings with representatives of Ukraine, Georgia, and the Republic of Moldova, during which the Permanent Secretariat introduced the Transport Community scope of work and primary documents essential for TCT functioning.

The document shared by the Permanent Secretariat outlines a sort of work plan for 2023, with a list of TCT events, to which the observing participants will be invited, as well as plans to include dedicated sections to the observing participants in some of the major TCT reports, such as the TEN-T annual report, 5 TCT Action Plans, Progress Report on acquis implementation, as well as the TCT Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy.

Union position

- To thank the Transport Community Permanent Secretariat for the presented outline of engagement activities with the observing participants.
- To support the plans for the closer involvement, as outlined in the presented work plan.
- To invite the Secretariat to report on progress achieved during the RSC meeting following the one in March 2023.

RSC Agenda part 2 (administration)

Agenda item 10

Presentation by the Permanent Secretariat of the draft report on the Budget 2022 accounts

This is an information point by the Transport Community Permanent Secretariat, which will present the 2022 TCT budget execution. Preliminary data[3] suggests that the 2022 budget execution rate is 83.26%, or 87.43% excluding the reserve. For comparison the execution rates of 2021 budget were 77.03% and 83.06% respectively.

Union position

- To acknowledge the information presented by the Transport Community Permanent Secretariat.

[3] Final numbers pending closure of the accounts by 31 March 2022.

- To thank the Transport Community Permanent Secretariat for its efforts to implement the TCT during 2022, as suggested by the 2022 budgetary execution rate.

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Agenda item 11

Review of the interim audit report (January- June 2022)

This is an information point by the Transport Community Permanent Secretariat, which will present the interim audit report of the independent auditor for the first half of 2022.

Union position

- To acknowledge the information presented by the Transport Community Permanent Secretariat.

Agenda item 12

Endorsement of the Annual Operational Report 2022

In line with Article 59(3) of the Financial Rules and Auditing Procedures applicable to the Transport Community[4], the Secretariat must prepare an Annual Report by 30 March of each year. The Annual Report includes an operational report explaining the work carried out by the Secretariat and the results achieved, giving an overview of the progress towards the objectives set in the annual Work Programme of the Secretariat, and also a financial report on the budget implementation.

The 2022 Annual Operational Report on the activities of the Transport Community Secretariat ('TCT Secretariat') outlines key actions and achievements in the period from 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2022.

The Commission services have examined the 2022 Annual Operations Report and are of the opinion that it covers all necessary information, in view of Article 59 of the Financial Rules and Auditing Procedures applicable to the Transport Community. The report presents activities undertaken by the TCT Secretariat, relevant developments concerning the Social Forum and the Transport Observatory, other TCT Secretariat reports and strategies, as well as an overview of administrative

[4] Decision No 2022/02 of the Regional Steering Committee of the Transport Community.

and human capital developments and financial management aspects during 2022, among other information.

Union position

- To take note of the presentation by the TCT Secretariat of the 2022 Annual Operations Report.
- To thank the TCT Permanent Secretariat for its efforts and the progress achieved in fulfilling the TCT objectives and goals.

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Agenda item 13

Education allowance for the staff of the TCT and rules on secondment and locally contracted experts

These items were presented as part of the Commission information note for the Regional Steering Committee meeting of 14 November 2022. They were discussed during the Council Intermodal Working Party meetings of 28 October and 8 November 2022. The respective Council decision[5] on the position to be taken on behalf of the European Union in the Regional Steering Committee of the Transport Community was adopted on 5 December 2022.

During the RSC meetings of 14 November 2022 and 15 December 2022, several Regional Partners raised considerations on the introduction of an education allowance for the staff of the TCT, which necessitated the postponement of the RSC vote on the proposed rules to the subsequent RSC meeting.

Union position

- The Union position has been established in Council Decision (EU) 2022/2410.

Agenda item 14

Discussion on the possible changes to the Rules on reimbursement of expenses to participants at the meetings organised by the TCT Secretariat

Currently, there are two separate sets of reimbursement rules applicable to external experts and to participants taking part in TCT events. The latter refer to people outside of the TCT Permanent Secretariat, which participate in the meetings of the official bodies of the TCT, such as the Regional

[5] COUNCIL DECISION (EU) 2022/2410

Steering Committee or the technical committees. The current rules provide for a daily subsistence allowance for experts, but not Regional Partner participants in official meetings of the TCT bodies.

Some of the Regional Partners have previously underlined difficulties to participate in different TCT events and official meetings due to government restrictions on travel costs. This has in many instances resulted in inability to ensure physical presence in meetings. In addition, it has also led to significant additional administrative burden for the TCT Permanent Secretariat, with the majority of Regional Partners participating in events requesting exception and prepayment of participation, resulting in travel and accommodation being prearranged by the TCT Permanent Secretariat.

During the RSC meeting of 8 June 2022, the RSC agreed in principle to the TCT Permanent Secretariat proposal to start working on proposals for amendments to the rules on reimbursement of persons outside of the TCT Permanent Secretariat. Such amendments concern in particular the possibility to increase the maximum number of participants in events from one to two.

To take account of these issues, the TCT Permanent Secretariat has prepared a short note to serve as a basis for discussion on the possible changes to the rules on reimbursement of expenses to participants at the meetings organised by the TCT Secretariat. Possible changes could result in increasing the number of supported participants per delegating institution from one to two, as well as the harmonisation of rules applicable to external experts and Regional Partners participants, including the introduction of a daily subsistence allowance equivalent to the one applicable to TCT staff.[6]

Increasing the maximum number of participants in TCT events could result in up to EUR 400 000 of additional costs, depending on budget availability.[7] The possible harmonisation of rules for external experts and RSC participants and introduction of a daily subsistence allowance could results in up to EUR 34 000 additional costs for one participants and double that amount if the maximum number of participants per delegating institution is increased to two. The intention of the Transport Community Secretariat is to accommodate the possible changes to TCT reimbursement rules within the overall budgetary ceiling (EUR 3.06 million in 2023), i.e. not requesting any additional resources.

[6] See RSC Decision 2020/04 - the DSA applicable to TCT staff includes the costs of paid accommodation and meals, gratuities and other incidentals. The DSA rates applicable to EU-funded external aid contracts applies at its most recent scale - https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-09/Per%20diem%20rates%20-%2025%20July%202022.pdf

[7] Depending on the availability of funding, it might be that some events in the course of 2023 will be organized in hybrid mode or online.

Union position

- To underline that potential increase in reimbursement costs stemming from the increase in the number of maximum participants should be subject to funds availability within the already agreed budgetary framework.
- To support the proposed approach on revising the TCT reimbursement rules.
- To invite the Transport Community Permanent Secretariat to present a concrete drafting proposal on the revision of TCT reimbursement rules.

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DRAFT AGENDA
19th Meeting of the Regional Steering Committee of the Transport Community
28 March 2023 | 9:30 to 12:00 |Belgrade, TCT Headquarters and online

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	POLICY	**Materials**
1.	Information by the Permanent Secretariat on the completed studies and the Technical Assistance in 2022- outcomes and follow up - tour de table	ATT I Info note
2.	Endorsement of Action Plan (Roadmap) on implementation of the Social Acquis. - tour de table	ATT II Action Plan
3.	Presentation by the Permanent Secretariat of results of the communication and visibility campaign on level crossings safety	ATT III Report
4.	Information by the Permanent Secretariat on Transport Observatory Data Information System (TODIS) phase III follow-up actions	ATT IV Info note
5.	Information from the European Commission on the revision of Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) indicative extension in the Western Balkans	ATT Va Annex to the Proposal for the TEN-T Regulation ATT Vb EU Transport Corridors map
6.	Information on preparations for Connectivity Summit: - Info note with draft agenda - (possible): Signature of High-Level Understanding between EU and Western Balkans Contracting Parties on the revision of the TEN-T	ATT VI Info note with draft Agenda
7.	Presentation by Permanent Secretariat of the Final Report on Western Balkans Road Safety Observatory implementation	ATT VIIa Report ATT VIIb Info note
8.	Information from the European Commission on Safe and Sustainable Transport Programme	
9.	Outline of cooperation between Transport Community and observing participants.	ATT IX Document
	ADMINISTRATION	
10.	Presentation by the Permanent Secretariat of the draft report on the Budget 2022 accounts	ATT X Report
11.	Review of the interim audit report (January- June 2022)	ATT XI Audit Report

12.	Endorsement of the Annual Operational Report 2022	ATT XII Annual Operational Report
13.	The decision of the Regional Steering Committee of the Transport Community on: a) the rules on education allowance for the Transport Community Permanent Secretariat. b) the rules on secondment and locally contracted experts	ATT XIIIa Decision – Education ATT XIIIb Decision – Secondment
14.	Discussion on the possible changes to the Rules on reimbursement of expenses to participants at the meetings organised by the TCT Secretariat	ATT XIV Info note

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