



TEXTS ADOPTED

P8_TA(2016)0408

Improving the connection and accessibility of the transport infrastructure in Central and Eastern Europe

European Parliament resolution of 25 October 2016 on improving the connection and accessibility of the transport infrastructure in Central and Eastern Europe (2015/2347(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its resolution of 9 September 2015 on the implementation of the 2011 White Paper on Transport: taking stock and the way forward towards sustainable mobility¹,
- having regard to its resolution of 2 December 2015 on sustainable urban mobility²,
- having regard to its resolution of 10 May 2012 on the future of regional airports and air services in the EU³,
- having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, in particular Article 170 thereof,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1315/2013⁴,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) No 1316/2013⁵,
- having regard to the report entitled ‘Road Safety in the European Union’, published by the Commission in March 2015⁶,
- having regard to the conclusions of the Danube Ministers Meeting of 3 December 2014 on effective waterway infrastructure rehabilitation and maintenance on the Danube and its navigable tributaries⁷,

¹ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2015)0310.

² Texts adopted, P8_TA(2015)0423.

³ OJ C 261 E, 10.9.2013, p. 1.

⁴ OJ L 348, 20.12.2013, p. 1.

⁵ OJ L 348, 20.12.2013, p. 129.

⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/transport/road_safety/pdf/vademecum_2015.pdf

⁷ <http://ec.europa.eu/transport/modes/inland/news/2014-12-04-danube-ministrial-meeting/conclusions.pdf>

- having regard to the Łańcut Declaration of 3 March 2016 on strengthening the cooperation in the area of transport in the Carpathians and continuation of the Via Carpatia development¹,
 - having regard to the Berlin Process and the 2014 Conference of Western Balkan States, the 2015 Vienna Summit and the 2016 Paris Conference,
 - having regard to the Action Plan for the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (SEC(2010)1489),
 - having regard to the Action Plan for the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (SWD(2015)0177),
 - having regard to Rule 52 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Transport and Tourism and the opinion of the Committee on Regional Development (A8-0282/2016),
- A. whereas the connectivity and accessibility of transport infrastructure have a major impact on the economic growth, economic competitiveness, employment and territorial cohesion of the EU and its regions; whereas Central and Eastern Europe is an essential part of the European single market with the potential to attract investment and contribute to economic growth in the entire EU, and all modes of transport, without exception, should contribute to enhancing competitiveness, intermodality and ecological transition in order to better serve the development of the single market;
- B. whereas improving the connectivity and accessibility of transport infrastructure in Central and Eastern Europe is a means of achieving the objectives of cohesion policy, especially as regards the desirable economic development of border regions;
- C. whereas the transport infrastructure in most regions of the central and eastern parts of the EU has remained underdeveloped compared with that of other European regions, and whereas the poorly developed transport infrastructure in Central and Eastern Europe exists side by side with the densest and most highly developed networks in the world, in the centre of Europe; whereas citizens expect that Member States, with the support of the EU, will work together on its improvement;
- D. whereas European Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds have been the main source of public transport investments in Central and Eastern Europe and whereas the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) constitutes an important funding instrument in further developing the transport infrastructure in the region as part of the TEN-T core network corridors; whereas lack of administrative capacity in national, regional and local administrations can lead to low absorption of EU funds and therefore Member States in Central and Eastern Europe, as in other parts of the EU, have not always maximised their use of EU funding for various reasons, including insufficient preparation and efficiency; whereas capacity building and technical assistance should be mobilised in order to boost the emergence of more good projects and support public administrations in the management of EU funding;
- E. whereas intensifying work on important projects such as the Via Carpatia and Rail Baltica, as well as developing the Orient/East-Med and the Baltic-Adriatic core network

¹ <http://mib.gov.pl/files/0/1796967/deklaracjalancucka.pdf>

corridors, the Adriatic-Ionian Corridor and TRACECA, would provide an important stimulus for improving the connectivity and accessibility of the transport infrastructure in this part of the EU; whereas supporting closer communications between neighbouring third countries and Central and Eastern European EU Member States, including in the area of rail transport and infrastructure, will help improve rail links between the European Union, neighbouring countries and regions, and Asia;

- F. whereas well-developed cross-border transport connections are essential for regional competitiveness and for fostering expansion of SMEs in border areas and, with regard to public transport in particular, for supporting the social inclusion of economically vulnerable populations; whereas good transport connections, in particular rail connections, which cross national borders are still lacking in many Central and Eastern European Member States; whereas inefficient connections between different modes of transport and the lack of network facilities between basic and general transport mean that there is insufficient interoperability between different modes of transport, while such interoperability would not only reduce prices for passenger and freight transport and improve the flexibility of transport services, but also help to address ecological and social concerns;
- G. whereas coordinated improvements of transport infrastructure can have positive impacts on the environment and the energy efficiency of transport;

Horizontal aspects

1. Stresses the need to enhance the connectivity and accessibility of the infrastructure for transport to, from and within the central and eastern parts of the EU, taking into account the needs of the economy and the principles of sustainable development; reiterates the TEN-T objectives of bridging missing links, removing bottlenecks and ensuring seamless connections for long-distance and regional transport, particularly in cross-border regions, for passengers and freight; considers that the use of EU funding must reflect the real investment needs for completing the TEN-T core network by 2030 in the region; notes that in addition to creating new infrastructure the EU needs to invest in modernising and completing current transport infrastructure;
2. Underlines the importance of coordinated project planning by and among Member States, taking into account as far as possible national master transport plans and coordination with candidate countries, while conducting realistic assessments of transport needs, in line with the EU White Paper on transport and including cost-benefit analysis and stakeholder consultation; notes that the ex-ante conditionality of drafting master plans for transport has helped the Member States in prioritising their transport investments; considers that the responsible services of the Commission must assess and provide for a follow-up of those master plans in order to ensure that these plans also comply with EU objectives and priorities;
3. Strongly advises making better use of existing policies and instruments for regional cooperation, such as European Territorial Cooperation (ETC), Interreg and especially European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs), to enhance cross-border transport between regions and remove bottlenecks;
4. Considers that macro-regional EU strategies, such as those already established for the Baltic, Danube and Adriatic-Ionian regions and a possible future strategy for the Carpathian region and the Black Sea region, offer an innovative governance framework

for tackling transport policy challenges which cannot be solved by Member States alone, so as to ensure better transport conditions;

5. Welcomes the completion of the initial TEN-T core corridor work plans of 2015 and the adoption of the new maps further extending the TEN-T network to the countries of the Western Balkans; stresses that the implementation of the core network should also stimulate the development of the comprehensive network, in particular for connections that have cross-border relevance and have an impact on the consolidation of corridors; stresses the importance of urban nodes and their role in enhancing transport flows, for both passengers and freight;
6. Stresses that the disparities in terms of infrastructure developments and quality between the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) region and the rest of Europe can be reduced through a clear, concrete and integrated EU-wide strategy;
7. Reminds the Commission of its obligation under the 2011 White Paper on transport until 2020, in which it adopted an implementation plan of 40 specific measures on developing a competitive and resource-efficient European transport system; recalls that one of its long-term goals is to shift 30 % of road transport over 300 km to rail or waterborne transport by 2030, and more than 50 % by 2050, thereby significantly reducing traffic in Central and Eastern Europe;
8. Considers the development of transport hubs to be a key element for interlinking long-distance, regional and urban transport, thus promoting efficiency, intermodality and regional business development, bearing also in mind the vast opportunities digitalisation can provide to increase the performance of the whole logistic chain, including making data available for all stakeholders (sharing data) for the development of new services and practices;
9. Emphasises that the construction and modernisation of road infrastructure in Central and Eastern Europe should take account of the needs of cyclists, where appropriate; emphasises the importance of developing cycling infrastructure in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, which will increase safety, reduce the number of road accident victims, and improve the quality of life and the health of people in the EU; underlines that the EuroVelo cycling network, particularly route No 13 (Iron Curtain Trail), the East Europe Route and the Atlantic – Black Sea Route, combined with railway connections, offers interesting potential for the tourism SMEs in the Central and Eastern European macro-regions, and should therefore be promoted;
10. Points out that enhancing the coherence of the economic development of the Member States in the western, central and eastern parts of the EU requires large investments; underlines the need for better coordination among European and national authorities, especially with regard to the realisation of the core part of the TEN-T network; recalls, however, that the coordination required at European level must take account of the specific challenges in the Member States as well as the differences in their economies, social security systems and infrastructure quality, and demographic change; emphasises the potential of jobs in a better functioning railway sector; calls for the dismantling of any arbitrary barriers to the free movement of goods and services and insists that countries refrain from introducing such barriers;
11. Invites the Member States and the Commission to ensure synergies and mutual complementarity of funding under the CEF, the ESI Funds, the Instrument for Pre-

accession Assistance and instruments of the EIB and EBRD when implementing transport infrastructure projects in the central and eastern EU, in order to significantly improve their utilisation and diversification; highlights the need for exchange and dissemination of experience and knowledge for project preparation and utilisation when financed via different instruments (so-called 'fund blending'); recalls the importance of using the means of the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) in a timely manner to advance commercially viable market-based projects; urges the Commission, the EIB and the European Investment Advisory Hub to intensify their work with the project promoters in Central and Eastern Europe to ensure that EFSI is used for quality infrastructure projects in innovative and sustainable transport modes; stresses the importance of EFSI in developing transport infrastructure projects of all types; notes that, so far, most of the infrastructure projects planned to be financed by EFSI are located in Western Europe; calls, therefore, on the Commission, in connection with the EFSI, to encourage investors to support project platforms focused on the Central-Eastern European transport infrastructure projects; emphasises how important cohesion policy funding is for the development of the transport infrastructure in countries in Central and Eastern Europe, the quality of which often lags far behind that of the transport networks in Western Europe, and with that in mind, calls for the necessary resources and level of funding to be guaranteed in the next multiannual financial framework;

12. Recalls that EUR 11 305 500 000 were transferred from the Cohesion Fund to the CEF to be spent in the transport sector in Member States benefiting from Cohesion Fund support; underlines that the use of all this readily available funding should be given priority, especially in the context of the current absorption rate, over investment participation by third parties in cases where this investment is driven by political considerations rather than business interests;
13. Calls on the Central and Eastern European Member States to ensure a high level of transparency and close scrutiny of the use of EU funds and to publish details of their allocation at the earliest opportunity;
14. Draws attention to the possibilities that hybrid public-private partnership projects offer, by linking sources of infrastructure investment funding from EU grants (up to 85 % of the total eligible costs), public funding in the form of the co-financing that the beneficiary is required to provide, and money from private enterprise; emphasises, at the same time, that EU funds and budgetary resources are a factor in increasing the reliability of investments, as they reduce the risk to the private sector; points out that, at the same time, the private sector benefits from stable, long-term contracts that are not dependent on economic, political and budgetary fluctuations within countries; encourages the Member States, therefore, to make use of public-private partnerships where appropriate, which can be an advantageous way of investing in infrastructure, in particular as regards the implementation of complex infrastructure projects requiring extensive expenditure and generating a low level of return, on the one hand, and a desire to guarantee the effective provision of a high-quality public service, on the other hand; in this context, calls on the Commission to provide Member States in the CEE region with technical assistance, in light of the fact that some of these countries have little experience in working with financial instruments and with involving the private sector in large projects; also asks the Commission, in cooperation with the national, regional and local administrations, to present a regular overall overview of transport projects with the corresponding amounts co-financed through the different EU funds;

15. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to streamline and simplify procurement procedures, to issue guidelines for PPP, to ensure an adequate State aid framework and to simplify the permitting procedures, in order to facilitate the implementation of transport projects, in particular cross-border projects;
16. Stresses that ESI Funds can be used in the development of the missing links in the border areas across Central and Eastern Europe, and in the consolidation of existing infrastructure, in order to ensure full access to the single market and to further promote economic growth; stresses in this regard that, as transport is key to regional development, adequate and properly funded local infrastructure is a basic and inevitable requirement in bringing about economic, social and territorial cohesion;
17. Recalls that ESI Funds could also be used to increase the administrative capacity of the intermediate bodies and beneficiaries, which could otherwise undermine the EU's support to transport investments in the region; notes that the JASPERS assistance mechanism in particular has proven helpful in this role thus far and might, therefore, apart from simply being continued, be considered also for a more permanent, institutional setting; points out that the technical assistance offered through the European Investment Advisory Hub should help public and private project promoters to create a stable pipeline of mature and well-structured projects in order to benefit from the financial instruments for a long period of time; recalls that European coordinators for core network corridors do have a political mandate, but do not have sufficient administrative capacities; calls on the Commission and the Member States to take steps to streamline the public management of such resources in order to avoid unnecessary red tape;
18. Calls on the Commission and the EIB to cooperate better and coordinate their efforts to ensure a wide consultation with all stakeholders on the financing of transport infrastructure, the exchange of best practices, the promotion of financial instruments and the early mapping of potential projects, and to provide regular information to Parliament thereon; stresses that any steps concerning projects aimed at improving the connectivity and accessibility of transport infrastructure should be taken as a matter of the greatest urgency;
19. Encourages regions and Member States to adopt or continue with measures to move towards more environmentally friendly transport options; encourages the use of the ESI Funds for projects aimed at generating demand for public and more sustainable transport options, e.g. through simplified cross-border ticketing and investment in electrical charging point systems;
20. Stresses that equal attention should be paid to east-west and north-south transport corridors within the European TEN-T network, which can contribute to the economic development of the participating countries by creating new opportunities for employment in SMEs, start-ups, trade exchange, science, research and technologies, as well as to enhancing road safety and reducing transport costs; underlines the importance of multimodality and transport innovation for the development of trade and tourism, as well as for environment protection, and supports the integration of the inland waterways into the multimodal logistic chain, given that the connection between all transport modes would ensure the economic development of the area and would also reduce bottlenecks in the transport system;
21. Welcomes the extension of the TEN-T network to the Western Balkans countries; calls on the Commission to ensure the integration of the Western Balkans accession countries into

the TEN-T network and the cooperation on transport links with Ukraine, Moldova and other neighbouring countries, including those which are part of the TRACECA corridor; stresses the importance of adapting the financial criteria so that accession and candidate countries may benefit from EU financial instruments on a broader scale, especially for cross-border projects; stresses that investments, in particular through the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) and the Western Balkans Investment Framework, and traffic optimisation measures should be coordinated at regional level to contribute to the extension of the core network in the region;

22. Believes that improvements to the transport infrastructure and connectivity in the central and eastern EU are an important tool in strengthening the stability, economic development, regional cooperation and security of the Union's eastern border and in the Western Balkans and in increasing the upward convergence of transport conditions in the internal market; underlines in this regard the importance of the Orient/East-Med corridor;
23. Stresses the absolute necessity of preserving the Schengen area for an efficient, cost-effective transport system in the EU based on the free movement of goods, services and persons across open internal borders; recalls that in June 2011 the Commission had already urged all Member States to take the decision on enlarging the Schengen area to include Bulgaria and Romania;
24. Stresses the need to improve connectivity and accessibility of the transport infrastructure so as to promote the development of the tourism sector in the EU; stresses that an expanded and efficient European transport network is an important asset for the tourism sector, helping make regions more appealing to tourists; takes the view that countries in Central and Eastern Europe have enormous potential as regards development of their tourism sectors, which could be better exploited with the further development of the transport infrastructure;
25. Points out the favourable environmental and economic aspects of the synergies of interlinking different transport modes with a view to making better use of the inherent advantages of each;
26. Stresses that the development of combined transport in Central and Eastern Europe requires improving the characteristics of freight rail corridors and supporting the construction of publicly accessible intermodal terminals;
27. Sees enormous potential in international infrastructure projects such as the New Silk Road with regard to helping Central and Eastern Europe make better use of the potential of the global economy; takes the view that thanks to its favourable geographical location, Central and Eastern Europe can become an important logistics centre and communications hub between Europe and Asia;
28. Emphasises that increasing transport accessibility in Central and Eastern Europe and the investment involved in doing so should provide an impetus for the development of local firms and businesses; points out that tendering procedures and the implementation of projects should be SME-friendly; calls on the Commission to pay more attention to the problem of the major contractors and subcontractors involved in projects engaging in unfair cooperation, the victims of which are very often the lowest-skilled workers;
29. Maintains that there is a need to take into account the needs of those living in regions that are sparsely populated and difficult to access, such as mountain areas, in the planning of

infrastructure solutions in Central and Eastern Europe; maintains that a lack of access to transport can lead to social exclusion and calls on the Commission to take into account the needs of those who use local transport routes; emphasises that the profitability of transport links cannot be the only criterion for assessing their usefulness;

Road transport

30. Recalls that the development of cross-border roads is essential to facilitate cooperation between populations and enterprises in border regions; calls on the Member States to continue modernising roads, to continue developing missing links, to build safe and accessible parking lots and to strengthen regional and local connectivity to the TEN-T network, since joining up with TEN-T is an important basis for the economic growth of regional centres;
31. Underlines the need to ensure fair road charging systems in the EU; points out that certain flexibilities should be kept for Member States, owing to their particular characteristics, when establishing such systems while safeguarding the technical interoperability at an appropriate level; maintains that those systems should be designed in cooperation with the business community and commercial road users, and that the latter should not be required to pay any additional or disproportionate charges that would render their business activities less profitable;
32. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to address the urgent need to enhance the road infrastructure network along the eastern border of the EU, starting in Estonia, passing through Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria and ending in Greece; considers that such efforts should build on the long-standing planning done already under the Via Carpatia project on which representatives of the countries concerned signed a declaration in Warsaw on 3 March 2016 on further cooperation on the development of the corridor and updating the route; takes the view that, with the construction of the Via Carpatia, outlying regions of the EU will have the opportunity of accelerated development and will be able to catch up more quickly with more developed areas of the EU; points out that the construction of the route will also stimulate investment and business growth, and improve security for the EU as a whole, in particular in the context of the armed conflict in Ukraine; believes that the possibility of opening the Rhine-Danube corridor to the north of the EU through the Via Carpatia should be exploited and believes that Via Carpatia should receive a proper budget allocation; calls therefore for the 'Via Carpatia' project to be incorporated into the TEN-T core network in order to ensure appropriate EU funding; encourages the Member States as well to set up financing for that project using every possible financial instrument, such as the Connecting Europe Facility and the European Fund for Strategic Investments;
33. Reiterates that the quality of road infrastructure has a direct impact on road safety; considers, therefore, that road safety should also be assessed when constructing road infrastructure; is concerned that road fatalities and serious injuries remain relatively high in many Central and Eastern Member States; underlines that measures to improve road safety should be further promoted at Member State and EU level; considers that appropriate funding should be provided for infrastructure rehabilitation projects in Central and Eastern European Member States;
34. Underlines that safety and sustainability of the transport sector are key priorities when developing infrastructure; calls therefore on the Commission and the Member States to further encourage digitalisation and automation in all modes of transport; calls for

infrastructure investment projects to include transport solutions that reduce the risk of death or serious injury in road accidents, and for account to be taken of the needs of people living near routes with high volumes of traffic;

Rail transport

35. Stresses the priority of constructing, modernising and maintaining railway lines for the coherent, sustainable growth of rail transport and cohesion in the central and eastern parts of the EU; emphasises that railways have an important role to play in reducing the climate impact, air pollution and road accidents and expects such efforts to have positive impacts on industrial development, freight logistics, the quality of public services and reliable passenger mobility; calls on the Member States to eliminate cross-border and national bottlenecks and to expand operational capacities with the aim of reaching the 2030 and 2050 modal shift targets laid down in the 2011 Transport White Paper;
36. Stresses that some regions of Central and Eastern Europe have a significant rail network, which however urgently requires infrastructure modernisation in time to prevent future deterioration that might result in it ceasing to operate; criticises the underinvestment in cross-border railway lines and the low level of passenger rail services in many border areas; calls on the Member States to (re-)establish missing connections and to remove bottlenecks; suggests that the railway network should be scrutinised, using the planning methodology for the TEN-T comprehensive and core network, to identify possible further missing links – in particular cross-border links – both between EU Member States and with neighbouring non-Member States; encourages Member States to develop close and constructive cooperation to close such gaps and to improve territorial integration and cohesion; asks the Commission to provide effective financial support for all such efforts;
37. Reiterates its support for the deployment of the European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS) on all TEN-T core network corridors; believes that the full and swift implementation of the ERTMS must be an absolute EU priority in order to create a fully interoperable, functioning, efficient and attractive European Railway Area capable of competing with other modes of transport;
38. Calls on the Member States to adopt clear, long-term rail transport development strategies and to remove barriers to rail projects implemented using EU funding;
39. Underlines the need to step up investment in improving the quality of the railways in order to make them more accessible and attractive in the fields of both passenger and freight transport and to increase their share of the modal split, in accordance with goal no 3 on shifting to other modes as formulated in the EU White Paper on Transport;
40. Notes a lack of road-rail connections to and from ports; highlights that most airports in Eastern Europe are located close to the rail infrastructure and that integration is still technically possible; calls on the Commission to fully support the further integration of multimodal transport connections (road-railway-airport) in Central and Eastern Europe;
41. Calls on the Commission to continue supporting investment in rolling stock in Central and Eastern European countries, as this will make it possible to restore the potential of rail within those countries' public transport systems;
42. Highlights that the sustainable development of a European rail transport infrastructure must not end with the mere construction of the network but has to encompass maintenance

measures in order to be cost-efficient in the long run; considers that a significant proportion of the financial means should be dedicated to such measures given the importance of maintenance activities;

43. Underlines the common benefits of the Rail Baltica link as one of the priority projects in the North Sea-Baltic Corridor and its significant strategic importance for all the Member States involved, as well as for the whole region from Finland (with the possible 'Bothnian extension'), through Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and on to Germany, the Netherlands and southern Europe; welcomes the progress made in the construction and preparation of the Rail Baltica project and emphasises that good co-operation among the interested and involved countries is crucial for the project to move forward without any further delays and fall-backs, and to avoid any risk of failure to commit allocated financial resources to this project; stresses that if the European Commission's rules are not respected the EU co-funding of around 85 % will be lost and future funding conditions will never be as favourable as they are now; urges the countries involved to recognise and to strengthen the role of the RB Rail Joint Venture as the optimal body for managing a cross-national project on such a scale, to submit joint applications for EU funding, to proceed with both joint and national public procurement, to co-ordinate work on the project and, finally, to demonstrate that they are able to co-operate;
44. In view of the stagnating share of rail in the European freight and passenger transport markets, underlines the importance of the Shift2Rail initiative, especially in the field of freight transport, in order to increase competitiveness and efficiency; takes the view that there should also be investment in improving the quality of rail in the area of freight transport; welcomes joint international initiatives taken by the Member States in the region with a view to developing and modernising rail infrastructure, such as the creation of the new rail freight corridor No 11, the so-called Amber Corridor, linking commercial and industrial centres in Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Slovenia by means of joint action in the allocation of traffic capacity for international freight trains; points out that such projects promote rail as a means of international freight transport, boost the competitiveness of rail transport and ensure that better use is made of existing international freight traffic capacity;
45. Notes that there are many sources of funding available for the railway sector from various EU programmes; believes that the uptake and effective use of these funding sources is essential due to the fact that financial constraints put severe restrictions on the amount of public money that national governments are able to invest in railways;
46. Draws attention to the supplements that are commonly used in Central and Eastern Europe in cross-border regional passenger rail transport, which are often imposed by rail companies as a part of international rail fares, resulting in a decrease in the attractiveness of using cross-border rail links;
47. Stresses the need to ensure that the countries of Central and Eastern Europe are interconnected with the high-speed rail network in western Europe in order to increase the competitiveness of the rail transport sector and support economic growth in that region; calls on the Commission and the Member States to encourage cross-border projects for high-speed railway connections throughout the TEN-T corridors;
48. Emphasises the need to support joint projects and investment with non-EU countries, paving the way for the complementary exploitation of the potential of rail transport

corridors that have been modernised using EU funding, for example, in links between the EU and countries in Asia;

Inland waterways

49. Highlights the importance of inland waterway transport as a cost-effective and sustainable means for multimodal transport and for logistics across the EU; considers it necessary therefore to modernise inland waterway transport infrastructure for carrying passengers or goods, and to improve interoperability with other forms of transport;
50. Notes that Central and Eastern Europe has significant development potential as regards its inland waterways, as well as its river and sea ports; considers that this potential may only be exploited while showing due respect for the Union acquis on the protection of the environment, biodiversity and water, and that placing more emphasis on the use of ports and railways could help to support the goal of enhancing multimodal transport in the region;
51. Welcomes the creation of the NAIADES programme, as well its continuation with NAIADES II up to 2020, and underlines the importance of having a European strategy and an Action Plan for inland waterways;
52. Believes that exploiting multimodality in inland waterway ports is crucial for their economic potential; underlines the role of adequate last-mile access and rail connections with interconnecting rail infrastructure at inland waterway terminals as well as transport hubs in port catchment areas for attracting users;
53. Underscores the role of the Danube River as the key transport waterway in the Danube macro-region; notes that the region's potential for inland waterway transport ought to be further utilised and therefore recalls also the need for Member States to maintain the operability of inland waterways which are under their responsibility; invites the riparian states to ensure the continuous navigability of the Danube and to implement their master plan for fairway rehabilitation and maintenance endorsed in 2014, while in the meantime taking the environmental aspects into account and taking special care to preserve natural habitats, the environment, biodiversity and water, thereby conserving and promoting sustainable agriculture, fishing and tourism SMEs; emphasises that links between the Oder, the Elbe and the Danube could boost the transport and communication capacities of the entire region on the North-South axis, which would lead to the creation of jobs and the development of SMEs;
54. Encourages the Member States to increase their efforts to upgrade and achieve class IV navigability of other inland waterway infrastructures, in particular river sections in the TEN-T core network; stresses that an important upgrading of the Elbe River is needed to allow full navigability, which is essential for the Orient/East-Med corridor; stresses the need to upgrade the Oder River to class IV navigability; highlights also the importance of international waterways E40 and E70 as regards improving the integration of Central and Eastern European countries into pan-European inland transport routes; emphasises that the establishment of good multimodal connections between those waterways and the Baltic-Adriatic core TEN-T corridor would be a significant boost to the investment potential of eastern regions in the EU;

Maritime ports and airports

55. Underlines the potential for further developing attractive shipping to ports in the Baltic, Black, and Adriatic Seas in the context of the 'Motorways of the Sea' concept; highlights the importance of expanding capacities in the energy sector, including sustainable fuels for shipping, and of ensuring efficient railway connections to port hinterlands;
56. Points out that sustainable port development in the Baltic, Adriatic and Black Seas must not be impeded by other undersea infrastructure; is concerned that pursuits on projects such as the North Stream may undermine and block investment in the region, in particular in the Baltic Region; insists that any undersea pipelines must respect draught requirements at port entrances;
57. Considers that maritime ports and airports best serve the economic development of the Central and Eastern EU if they are hubs in an integrated multimodal transport system interconnected with a high-performance rail infrastructure;
58. Highlights that the northern Adriatic ports must strengthen their cooperation through regional coordination for the common promotion of traffic flows for maritime trade in the North Adriatic and to fully integrate the Italian ports with those of Slovenia (Koper) and Croatia (Rijeka); calls on the Commission, in this regard, to include the port of Rijeka in the Baltic-Adriatic corridor in order to enable the full transport connection of northern Adriatic sea ports towards Central Europe and the Baltic Sea;
59. Recalls that the Commission identified the issue of gaps in connectivity in the recently developed Aviation Strategy for Europe; notes, however, that the proposed solutions are of a limited potential and encourages the Commission to monitor air connectivity within the EU, especially in the CEE region, and to develop further proposals aimed at reducing the gaps in access to air transport services; believes that air links within this part of the EU need to be further developed as the connectivity of EU13 is 7,5 times lower than that of EU15¹; is concerned that while airport infrastructure in the region undergoes constant modernisation, the vast majority of new air routes are only oriented to the west; invites the Commission to analyse whether the relevant legislation is fit-for-purpose and, if necessary, to propose new initiatives to guarantee sufficient connectivity between the peripheral areas and the centre of Europe;
60. Stresses that the region of Central and Eastern Europe has a lower number and poorer quality of air connections than the western part of the EU; points out that these connectivity gaps were identified by an independent analysis conducted at the request of the Commission;
61. Calls on the Commission to examine air connectivity in and between Member States and to establish measures to improve air transport services in terms of quality of services for consumers;
62. Notes the enormous potential that small and medium-sized airports have in terms of transport accessibility in Central and Eastern Europe, especially for business travellers and tourists; reiterates that in recent years many regional airports have been built and modernised in Central and Eastern Europe, but that their potential is not being sufficiently exploited owing to a lack of decent links between those airports and the major transport

¹ Commission Staff Working Document accompanying the Communication from the Commission entitled 'An Aviation Strategy for Europe' (SWD(2015)0261).

routes; highlights the need for these airports to be used more effectively via the building of new road and rail links;

63. Recognises the diverse roles of regional and local airports in the development of regions in the Central and Eastern EU and in facilitating economic growth, trade, competitiveness, inclusive mobility and tourism, and barrier-free access for persons with a handicap as well as PRMs; stresses the contribution regional airports make to increasing the attractiveness of their regions; maintains that for any new facilities, traffic demand and potential must be duly assessed and use of EU funds strictly limited to economically viable and sustainable projects; stresses that financial support to develop existing capacities should be granted accordingly; takes the view that the role of regional airports will grow if they have modern infrastructure and a network of transport links (above all rail links) that correlate well with the region and with the country, making it possible to reach the airport quickly from various parts of nearby cities or towns; stresses the importance of the development of existing and new regional and local airports which contribute to economic growth, including in the tourism sector, in underdeveloped and isolated regions through improving accessibility and connectivity, making these regions more attractive for investment and competitiveness, thus accelerating socio-economic development; suggests that the Commission considers the development of a network of airports at regional level so as to ensure better connectivity also between and within Member States;

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64. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission, and to the Committee of the Regions.