

The European Traffic Policy from the 1950s to the 1980s – Development and implementation of political interest among Germany and the European Union

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Traditions of European Transport Policy

Transits are essential for international economic relationship. From the 19th century on many efforts were made to create a European transport system to overcome national borders. While in the United States the *Commerce Regulation Act of 1887* was a breakthrough for the organisation of interstate transport, in Europe transport stayed primarily a national issue. For a long time for the European nation states economic and military aims were more important than the advantages of international cooperation.

The challenge of creating a European transport system turned out to be difficult, not only because of the different technical and organisational standards, but also because of the different scientific grasps. The split of transport and infrastructure construction between public and private sphere made the situation even more difficult. While the construction of road and inland waterway systems traditionally belonged to public sphere, transportation by lorry and barge was accomplished by small private companies.

Railroad transport has developed differently. As a result of a process of concentration and socialisation during the 19th and early 20th century, the railway system was a public concern, controlled by huge public companies, e.g. the Reichs- and Bundesbahn in Germany or the Société Nationale de Chemins de fer Français (SNCF). Burdened with public duties and responsible for the construction of the railway lines, these national monopolists were unable to work cost-covering and became an increasing problem to the national budgets.

Losses of railway companies were the most obvious and discussed, but not the only problem for transport policy. The economic crisis of the 1930s had proved that inland waterway transport was in a structural over-capacity crisis. Most governments tried to fight this crisis by regulation of capacity and a system of freight allocation (tour de rôle system). Only the international transport on the Rhine was exempted, whose freedom was guaranteed by the Mannheim Act of 1868 and approved by the Treaty of Versailles. Furthermore railway and inland waterway companies had a modernisation deficit in most European countries. The problems in the transport

sector were already manifold when a new competitor came up with the increasing mass motorisation. Road transport became a more and more threatening competitor for national railway companies even on longer distances. Lorries were flexible, fast and delivered door-to-door.

Most Western European governments reacted on this challenge with a regulatory policy to achieve a balance between the modes of transport. In Germany tariffs were fixed by the government for all kinds of transport with exception of the international transport on the Rhine. Other countries, as France and the Netherlands, primarily regulated market access. In spite of public intervention, road transport took away freight from the railroads and – on a limited scale – from inland waterways and increased their crisis.

International transport and transit traffic were organised in bilateral contingents. International infrastructure projects were primarily subject of bilateral contracts.

In the middle 1950s increasing motorisation resulted in such high losses for public railway companies that European governments had to look for a new policy. The European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) worked out a system of international tariffs for transport related to coal and steel industry. The cutting off of these transports from general transport market, however, just seemed to increase problems.

Thus, when the heads of governments came together to discuss the treaties of European Atomic Energy Community (EAE) and the European Economic Community (EEC) in Rome in 1957 the situation on the European transport market was as follows:

- national transport markets were isolated and largely regulated
- international transport was organised by bilateral contracts and in bilateral contingents
- international transport on the Rhine was free of public intervention
- public railway companies produced high losses
- inland waterway transport was in a long time crisis, because of too high capacities
- cargo transport by lorry became a more and more threatening competitor for the railways

Despite the manifold problems, politicians agreed on the importance of a common transport policy for the European integration process. For this reason transport policy is mentioned in the Treaty of the EEC (Part II, Title IV, Art. 74–83) as one of the central policy areas of the Community. While the title about transport policy can be seen as a diplomatic masterpiece between the free market position of the Netherlands and the regulatory policy of Germany, the price for a compromise was the absence of implementation rules. The elaboration of a common European policy was allocated to the Commission and the Council.