

Reflections on the Maltese Presidency of the Group of Transport Ministers for the Western Mediterranean

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It is a great honour for me to address some reflections on this occasion as Malta takes on the Presidency of the Group of Transport Ministers of the Western Mediterranean – GTMO 5+5 for the next two years. At the outset may I take this opportunity to thank all the previous presidencies for their contributions over the years, and of course the Mauritanian Presidency for its good work and efforts in these last very challenging months and of course last but not least the Technical Secretariat CETMO, which supports our cooperation.

Our meetings provide us with an important forum to discuss our common challenges, to explore opportunities and cooperation in the West Mediterranean. As decision-makers, who perhaps nurture diverse opinions and cultures, this is an opportunity to meet and exchange ideas and ideals and to explore ways that lead towards a more streamlined transport regime that improves economies through investments and the creation of jobs.

As a result of initiatives of the GTMO 5+5 through various studies, including participation in transport fora in the EU and in other international fora, and through collaboration at our regional level, transport plans taking into consideration our needs have been drawn up leading to the planning and roll out of important transport infrastructure. Malta fully supports this collaboration as an important outcome of the Barcelona Process.

In order to address transport connectivity at this challenging time when the transport sector is still overcoming the consequences of the Pandemic, and when the whole sector is searching to become more environmentally sustainable, we will need a multidisciplinary approach with solutions for the whole of our region. During this period the valuable technical work of our experts and CETMO will be crucial in guiding us to ensure that the transport sector in the Mediterranean transitions out of the Covid crisis, more efficient, more resilient and better equipped, to contribute to the emission reductions to address the climate issues also in our region.

It is for this reason that Malta has chosen 'Enhancing connectivity with GTMO African countries within the European framework' as the theme for our Presidency.

Transport Connections in our region need to further evolve, in order to keep up with the pace set by our economies, which now demand new timings for delivery of goods not only by industry but also to address the mass online purchasing that has evolved. These changes brought about the need for more efficient logistics as the need for intermodal links between producer and consumer became more pressing. We now have the opportunity to examine these supply chains and identify the weakest links in order that these may be addressed, as it is likely that acquired consumer patterns are here to stay post Covid. Transport industries, that today are synonymous with intermodal logistic chains, continue to serve our national economies involving transport operators and transport users.

Indeed, during the pandemic, our experience in Malta has been that while mobility of persons came almost to a standstill, the logistic operations of freight have stood the test, providing urgently needed medication and supplies in general. This does not mean that this was the case everywhere, and that there was no fine tuning in our operations to enable the continuation of these freight movements. On the contrary, statistics show there was a 35% to 40% drop in cargo handled by ports in the Mediterranean as a result of substantial reduction of the main line carriers.

Of course, there is no doubt, that the aviation and cruise sectors so important for our connectivity and mobility of persons, not least tourism, were the worst hit by the pandemic, with airlines suffering staggering financial losses running into billions of euros. At this stage while we are all trying to instil passenger confidence, it is important to also ensure that these important sectors also address their sustainability. Further improvements in air navigation in our region as well as the use of sustainable aviation fuels, the use of airside and ship-to-shore electricity could all contribute to making transport greener. Of course, although we are talking about transport, an important driver for our economies, we are also dealing with social impacts and sustainable development and here it is important to adopt a bottom up approach in order to ensure that all voices are heard. May I compliment IEMed and CETMO for coordinating and contributing to the very informative reflections found in the Policy Study " Mediterranean Transport and Logistics in a Post-COVID-19 Era: Prospects and Opportunities" which provides a number of different angles to the current transport issues facing our region.

At a regional level we need to ensure that the digitalisation and the decarbonisation processes well under way, now more than ever, are managed rather than stifled, thereby providing our

economies with the impetus for the much needed recovery while at the same time incorporating these important transitions.

Of course, these are the recent processes and other transport improvements remain nevertheless relevant. Here, I refer to the importance of standards that these keep up with technology and innovation, legislation that provides the right framework to balance the rights and obligations of the stakeholders concerned, work practices, safety and security, these all remain very important areas that need to be dealt with.

In the process, we are of course working also in a global context, we would not be doing ourselves any good if we were to not take into consideration developments at a European and at an International level. At a European level, the so called 'fit for 55' package of measures adopted by the EU Commission in June aims to make Europe's energy, climate, transport and taxation policies fit for reducing net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels in order to reach climate neutrality by 2050. At an international level, both ICAO and IMO are adopting global standards in an effort to reduce emissions from transport at a global level.

It is in this context that our work during the next months will take place and it is our firm belief that it is only through close collaboration at a regional level that together we may steer all transport sectors to move out of the current downturn and take on the changes that are required. In these important transitions governments need to clearly define policies and act as catalysts whilst soliciting industry-driven solutions. The consistently increasing participation of the private sector in transport is the key towards enhanced efficiency and more importantly effectiveness. It is in this spirit that Malta supports the initiatives of the Conclusions before us today.

It is a natural progression of events that similar initiatives like ours, coupled with and complemented by projects in the transport field under the Barcelona Declaration, the EuroMed Transport Forum that led to the Regional Transport Action Plan and the institution of the Union of the Mediterranean, continue to receive the support of our governments and that of the European Union and the Arab Maghreb Union. We welcome the continued close co-operation of GTMO 5+5 with the Union for the Mediterranean as this can only lead to maximization of synergies and will avoid duplication of efforts.

It is crucial that our initiatives continue to take into consideration and complement similar projects undertaken to date by the various fora already mentioned, in order to ascertain consistency,

continuity and to further capitalize on existing resources. We also look forward to the valuable insights of the International Transport Forum, following their participation for the first time in the GTMO5+5 Ministerial Conference.

Malta fully supports the Statement of Conclusions adopted during the 10th Conference of Transport Ministers of the Countries of the Western Mediterranean since we strongly believe that the proposed initiatives, conclusions and recommendations effectively contribute towards a better understanding amongst the policy makers and industry stakeholders and further their endeavours to establish legislative and procedural mechanisms that facilitate the different transport sectors.

We are well equipped and we have collaboration in place with important international stakeholders participating also in the GTMO5+5 framework so that we may build on the work already achieved.

Finally, from our part, Malta pledges its commitment during its Presidency within the GTMO5+5 so essential for the development of transport connections in our Mediterranean region.