

Brussels, 23 January 2006

First Ministerial conference in Slovenia to promote Motorways of the sea

The first Ministerial Conference on the preparation of the future Motorways of the sea, will be held tomorrow in Ljubljana, Slovenia. Co-hosted by European Commission Vice-President in charge of transport, Jacques Barrot, together with the Slovenian Minister of Transport, Janez Božič, the conference will gather over 100 participants from industry, Member States and the European Parliament to discuss the challenges and opportunities of the Motorways of the sea. Part of the trans-European networks, this new initiative aims at replacing the heavy trucks on European highways with maritime transport. Key issues on the agenda of the conference include the selection of ports and port regions, maritime links and the question of financing.

Highlighting the importance of the initiative, Vice-President Barrot said: *“In order to remain competitive, European industry needs an efficient and reliable transport system. Shifting more freight transport to the sea will contribute to more environmentally friendly traffic and reduce congestion. Motorways of the sea can be a practical and relatively low-cost solution.”*

Motorways of the sea represent a new concept of intermodal transport based on high quality, frequent and regular maritime links between sea routes and a limited number of ports or port regions with sufficient capacity and with very good hinterland connections. In addition they can bypass natural barriers such as the Alps and the Pyrenees and will ensure better access to peripheral regions.

The current challenge is to concentrate the efforts of all actors concerned - both public and private - in order to identify the routes and subsequently implement the projects. The preparatory work is already underway. Four Motorways of the sea corridors have been designated as priority projects under the Trans-European Transport Network, encircling almost the whole of the European Union: Motorways of the Baltic sea, Motorway of the Sea of western Europe, Motorway of the Sea of south-eastern Europe and Motorway of the Sea of south-western Europe.

Road freight transport in the European Union is currently expected to increase by 70 % by 2020 and even double in the new Member States. Motorways of the sea will offer a competitive alternative to road transport, and can absorb a significant part of this increase. Intermodal transport based upon short sea shipping is more energy efficient, emits fewer pollutants, is less noisy and takes up less land compared to road transport – the success of the project will help to make the European transportation system more sustainable.

The Commission has produced a video entitled “Motorways of the sea”, which will be broadcast by Europe by Satellite on the 24th of January 2006 (please refer to the EbS schedule below for the exact time of broadcast).

For additional information please see:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/transport/intermodality/motorways_sea/index_en.htm

EbS broadcast schedule:

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/avservices/ebs/schedule.cfm>