



Perspective changes in freight transport between Europe and the emerging countries

Introductory speech to the 46th ISTIEE Conference

The 46th ISTIEE conference - held in Trieste on June 6-10, 2005 and entitled “Perspective changes in freight transport between Europe and the emerging countries” – focused on the main transport corridors and their role in a globalised economy. The recent emergence of new productive poles, particularly in Asia, strengthened the integration of markets and spurred an increase in traffic for all modes of transport.

Transport and logistics play a decisive role in a globalised economy, supporting the productive effort of firms located in dispersed and varied areas and satisfying diffused and large consumption needs.

All modes of transport are required to contribute and both the infrastructural and operating aspects are relevant, not to mention issues connected to energy, safety and environmental aspects.

There is no doubt that the international scenario is rapidly changing thus inducing a change in past conceptual schemes: there is no such a thing as a narrow, developed area of the world and a poor, undeveloped one. There are mature economies, struggling to maintain their wealth, surrounded by a multitude of countries which aim to rapidly catch up, showing surprising growth rates. Whether such countries are located in the Asian continent or not is just a contingency, since in the not far future similar cases will appear in South America or Africa.

Today’s challenge is between countries, presently lagging behind that knowingly strive to catch up and countries that try to defend their privileged but lack a clear vision on how to do it. Within such a framework actions are taken that rapidly modify the existing productive setup via delocalization processes searching to regain competitiveness and conquer new markets.

Within such a dynamic (to say the least) contest, the transportation sector plays a decisive role, as in many other instances in the human history. Today’s role is possibly even more crucial and determinant because of the globalised structure of the world production systems.

As it was often the case, maritime transport plays a central role. In the last years of the XX century and in the beginning years of the new century, maritime transport showed an extraordinary evolution both in terms of goods transported and, especially, in the structural change of the industry obtained via mergers and acquisitions which confirms and strengthens the oligopolistic setup of the market.

In effects, few shipping companies play a dominant in the market, and not only in the maritime market, since their influence extends well beyond the port activities to

encompass the modal integration processes enabled by the increasing reliability on the container technology.

In parallel to the rapid development of maritime transport, ports enhanced their activity levels. Some ports more than others benefited from the growth trends thanks not only to their structural and locational characteristics but also to the fact of being chosen by powerful shipping companies able to make the fortune or the misfortune of a port.

The issue of port development is a central one since it influences the definition of the intercontinental maritime transport routes. Such routes are complemented by the terrestrial transport routes meaning road and rail transport, except the privileged case in which the inland navigation option is available.

Various issues are still to be solved in the terrestrial leg of the main international routes, both relative to the infrastructure and to the operations. In the short term and considering the rapidly increasing transport demand, the operations represent the central issue. This determines the present focus on logistics as a useful tool, together with innovation, to face the competitive pressures derived by cheap labour costs. In the long run, the infrastructural projects need to be completed. Their ambitious goals are not supported by adequate funding and strongly opposed on environmental grounds.

In such a briefly summarised perspective it is easy to forecast that for quite some time road transport will bear the burden of most of terrestrial transport. It is hence important to seek solutions to restrain its main economic and environmental adverse effects. The papers presented to the conference will hopefully clarify many of the aspects so far briefly mention. In an historical contingency which poses serious doubts on the constitutional premises of the European Union, an effort, non only at the infrastructural level, aiming at improving and developing the connection among goods and people within the Union, can help support the European integration process. ISTIEE (Institute for the Study of Transport in the European Economic Integration) was created – when the European Economic Community comprised 6 member states – because colleagues and citizens, with good farsightedness, believed in the historical, political, economic and social importance of an integrated Europe. Within this tradition, we continue to believe in the European dream and work to realise a coherent European transport policy.

The present issue includes the papers by G. Giannopoulos, M. Doubrovsky and D. Cazzaniga presented at the 46th Istiee Conference.

Giacomo Borruso, Editor-in-chief