

Transport Community delegation joined the Serbian Minister of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure Mr Tomislav Momirović and the President of the Assembly of Autonomous Province of Vojvodina Mr Istvan Pasztor on the visit to the border crossing Horgos/Roszke between Serbia and Hungary on 21 March 2022, to witness the start of construction works for **enlargement and modernisation of the crossing**. Traffic volumes for both passengers and freight



at Horgos border crossing are among the highest in the region and physical interventions to improve the traffic capacity and remove bottlenecks are a priority. Expansion to four new traffic lanes for passenger cars and busses to enter Serbia will make transport more efficient. This crossing also has the potential to implement the Green Lanes concept. For this to happen, it is necessary to have special lanes that would be used for the priority passage of trucks.

Establishment of a **well-functioning Green Corridor** and integrated border crossing Tabanovce - Presevo between North Macedonia and Serbia reduced waiting times and accelerated export, import and transit of goods. North Macedonia and Serbia were the first Western Balkans regional partners to establish joint border controls and ensure joint execution of border and customs formalities. The visit on 17 March 2022 with the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) to Tabanovce-Presevo crossing together with the representatives of customs authorities of Greece, Serbia and North Macedonia was an opportunity to review the operations of the Systematic Electronic Exchange of Data (SEED). Electronic exchange of data has been implemented since 2010 and has enhanced management of the crossing points in the Western Balkans. During the last EU-Western Balkans Summit in Slovenia in 2021, the leaders supported extension of Green Lanes to the borders between the EU and the Western Balkans and the visit was an important step towards realisation of this goal.



On 7 March 2022 in Podgorica, Transport Community organised a workshop aimed at providing guidance on legislation and procedures regarding customs controls on railway border crossings. Experts from Estonia, Poland and Romania shared the best practice from the EU and advised regional partners how to implement the rules in the Western Balkans. Joint rail border crossings in the region were cited as good examples of regional cooperation that lead to lower waiting times. Currently, the only functional joint rail border crossing is between Montenegro and Albania. Transport Community will continue supporting regional partners to apply the same model at other crossings in the region. Rail border agreements exist between Montenegro and Serbia, Serbia and North Macedonia, and North Macedonia and Kosovo\*, but the opening of joint rail stations in Bijelo Polje, Tabanovce and Hani i Elezit is still not taking place. Establishing additional joint rail crossings with improved customs procedures will serve the citizens and businesses and facilitate easier travel and commerce.

On 7 March 2022, Director Zakonjšek met in Sofia with the Bulgarian Minister of Transport and Communications Mr Nikolay Sabev for discussions how to improve connectivity between Bulgaria and the Western Balkans. Interlocutors reviewed progress on construction of essential transport links such as Rail Corridors VIII and X. Completion of the route from Serbia to Bulgaria (Corridor X) and establishment of one-stop rail border crossing in Dimitrovgrad is expected to reduce border waiting

\*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244(1999) and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

time by 50%. Railway line between Skopje and the Bulgarian border (Corridor VIII) has been identified as one of key projects of European Commission's Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans. Corridor VIII is an essential east-west route, connecting the Albanian Adriatic port of Durres to the port of Varna via North Macedonia. Last year's Memorandum



of Cooperation on the construction of sustainable infrastructure along Pan-European Corridor VIII was a sign of clear commitment to finalise this important project with the EU's support.

The 7<sup>th</sup> session of the **Road Technical Committee** was held in Podgorica on 10 March 2022. Participants reviewed implementation of Road Action Plan, technical assistance to regional partners and plans for the Road Summit in Tirana, which will be focused on safe, smart and sustainable roads of the future.

On the occasion of **International Women's Day** on 8 March 2022, Transport Community organised the conference "Women in transport: towards gender-balanced transport in the region". In her remarks, Deputy Director Ms Ljupska Siljanoska highlighted the importance of political support to empower women to join the transport sector. Promotion of education opportunities, giving greater visibility to employment in the transport sector and offering training and professional development were noted as necessary preconditions to encourage women's participation.

Meeting with the Director of Serbia's Traffic Safety Agency Mr Duško Pešić on 14 March 2022 was an opportunity to highlight importance of Serbia's membership in the EU's road safety statistics system CARE and to present Transport Community's **regional campaign to improve safety of level crossings in the region**. On the same day, we met with the Director of Serbia's Ports Governance Agency Mr Vuk Perović to discuss Danube and Sava River ports as a key enablers of sustainable transport, moving cargo from roads to inland waterways and **regional cooperation as precondition for modal shift**. On 17 March 2022, Transport Community representatives participated at the Traffic Solutions Expo in Novi Sad and presented the Overview on the TEN-T standards compliance of the Western Balkans rail network. In parallel with the construction of new rail lines, the maintenance of the existing network is a basic precondition for an efficient transport system which can facilitate steady development of the region's economy. The EU has been funding construction and upgrade of transport corridors in order to remove bottlenecks and promote sustainable and seamless transport. Promoted under the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) policy, the projects contribute to the completion of Core Network that will connect EU and the region.

The 15<sup>th</sup> **Regional Steering Committee** met on 15 March 2022 for discussions on TEN-T network extension, plans for the upcoming Ministerial Council in Pristina and the Road Summit in Tirana on 7 June 2022. During a visit to Brussels on 18 March 2022, Director Zakonjšek met with the Ambassador of Montenegro to EU Mr Petar Markovic with whom he discussed



Montenegro's EU accession negotiations with focus on Chapters 14 Transport Policy and 21 Trans-European Networks. On 22 March 2022, Director Zakonjšek, participated as the speaker at the 46<sup>th</sup> International Road Conference CESTE in Rovinj. Zakonjšek addressed the participants and discussed the 2022 as the year of roads, emphasising the importance of sustainable and smart mobility, as well as importance of reliable data for improving the road safety in the region.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Transport Community **Budget Committee** meeting chaired by the European Commission met on 24 March 2022 to review the 2021 Annual Operational Report, selection of auditor for 2021 and 2022 accounts, 2021 budget execution and the budget outline for 2023.

At the Invest in Balkans regional meeting organised by the French Chamber of Commerce, Director Zakonjšek highlighted importance of green, digital investments in rail infrastructure as well as our organisation's focus on supporting projects which are part of the European Commission's Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans.