

Speech given by Jean-Pierre Loubinoux

Honoured Guests, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and honour to stand in front of you all on the occasion of this kick-off meeting of the SEESARI initiative and project.

It is excellent to see so many of my distinguished railway colleagues as well as representatives from research institutes, universities, transport organisations, construction companies and other potential investors.

You are all key players necessary for the important but difficult tasks which lie ahead. There are nearly 60 representatives gathered here today from 14 different countries.

I would feel that the nationalities represented here should give an indication of the importance of this initiative officially presented by Dr. Peter Verlic at the Conference – about the need and possibilities of railway investments in the South East European region – here in Belgrade on 27 January 2016.

Besides most of the so-called Balkan countries we also welcome guest from France, Austria, Germany as well as Turkey! Albania – not able to attend this meeting today – has also informed us about the willingness to sign the SEESARI Memorandum of Understanding.

As you all know the important task you all are interested in to contribute to, is to support the development, update, and linking and the innovation of the transportation network in South Eastern Europe (SEE) with a specific focus on rail and in close cooperation.

Yes, this is a very important task indeed, not only for the benefit of yourself, your organisation, your country or even for South East Europe. It is much wider than this – and this would also explain the interest and presence of representatives from beyond the borders of this region!

South East Europe as a gateway for traffic to and from Asia and the Middle East. It is a strategic area, a vital organ in the body we call Europe so to say. Unfortunately it might not be recognised as such well enough.

On the one hand – because of very unfortunate circumstances in the past and recent history – the development and even the maintenance of the transportation network has suffered, previously existing cooperation and cross-border connections have been ruptured.

On the other hand it looks as if parts of South East Europe have been developing at different speeds.

In fact the core task for South East Europe – in close cooperation and coordination – is turning the metaphoric spotlight on this vital part of Europe and this is exactly what the ambitious SEESARI Project is all about!

The aim is to get all transport stakeholders and those who see the importance of the transport system as the life blood of a strong economy to harness their collective energy and turn South East Europe into a powerhouse for the European economy. A strong railway system is the key to sustainable mobility in a low-carbon society. It is also essential to economic growth, especially also in this SEE region, social cohesion and people's expectations of dynamic mobility.

With all the advantages that rail has in terms of capacity, connectivity, convenience and low carbon, it is evident that rail should be considered as the fundamental transport backbone of modern-day Europe. This however is not always the case as, for a number of reasons including the lack of suitable and reliable infrastructure and effective cross-border connections, rail is, at least in certain areas of Europe, seen as something more secondary. Action is certainly needed here!

As with the SEESARI project, generating the right levels of interest and cooperation amongst a wide range of stakeholders is also one of the preoccupations of the UIC and why I am delighted to be here with you today along with Simon and Dennis.

It is the attractiveness of the products that rail can offer (price, reliability etc), coupled with good connectivity that the customer is seeking but rail suffers when either the infrastructure or the rolling stock (or both) fail to live up to those customer expectations.

It is by linking all of these points together that the system becomes whole and rail can ONLY work efficiently if it is designed, constructed, operated and maintained as a well connected system.

We are here in the area of South East Europe that collectively has an important role to play in the connectivity of Europe as a whole and which forms a strategic part of the bridge between Asia and Europe. However, in order for this to be effective, it takes the strong cooperation of all stakeholders working collaboratively, identifying the issues and resolving them together so as to stimulate economic and social growth.

This event today – the official kick-off of the SEESARI project – is the first important step in the development of the future shape of rail transportation in this area and to identify the requirements that need to be developed in order to achieve this vision.

Even though the need for mobility of people and freight is growing, rail's market share is not where it should be and there is much that can and should be done to attract customers to use rail as the principle transport mode of choice. This was also the core message set out in the Rail Sector vision for 2050 "Challenge 2050" that was published in early 2013. Building on the main pillars of policy, technology and services and amongst others the core components of capacity, cost, competitiveness and above-all attractiveness of rail to the customer, the next phase was to produce the Rail Technical Strategy, Europe that was coordinated by the UIC and which sets out how the vision of the future can be enabled – you can download both these documents from our website – www.uic.org.

We all know that the transport sector accounts globally for 23% of energy consumption and emissions but that rail accounts for only 1%. We all know as well that over the past 10 years the rail sector's energy consumption and emissions have decreased by 30% and there is still more than can be achieved. Rail, therefore, has a lot of technical and social added-value that needs to be taken fully into consideration.

The challenge now is to couple that strong rail sector position to an equally strong rail investment programme that focuses on infrastructure in particular and supports the development of a sustainable Future European Railway System.

There are many issues upon which a sustainable system can be built and everyone you talk to has his or her favourite. What is important is that the politicians and potential investors can feel comfortable backing the development of the Future European Railway System as a really good, solid investment in the future of Europe and the South Eastern Europe Area in particular.

I consider "accessibility" as one of the key words for rail. Accessibility to the 'network', to 'information', to 'knowledge' and finally accessibility to 'other modes'.

Accessibility to the network is key to not only developing an attractive rail system that the customer wants to use, but also to encouraging new operators and traffic flows on to the system. This can only happen if the infrastructure is suitable to the various types of service and accessible to the train operator, and it is obvious that for that to happen that there has to be targeted investment for renovating the existing networks and developing new options both regionally and intra-regionally as well as cross-border and linking to the European corridors, harbours and airports.

There is a clear thirst to connect these various parts of the system, with the help of European funding, in the development of corridors linking regions together for the benefit of freight and passenger mobility across Europe or between Europe and the eastern markets. However, at this moment – and as I have mentioned before – the vital importance of the whole South East European region might not be recognised as such well enough. Many of the countries do not have access to any of this European funding yet. I hope – also driven by the output of the SEESARI project – this situation will change for the better in the near future!

The UIC has for many years developed and delivered a successful projects work programme to help its members to develop their business models. More recently we have been embracing the latest innovation instrument in Europe – Shift²Rail – and supporting a number of small and medium-sized rail operators (IMs and RUs) in the development of a consortium that will enable these companies to be a part of this major European innovation programme by taking part in the S2R internal Calls for proposals, the first of which has just been opened.

Here in South East Europe, I know that there is a very serious ongoing reflection on how the companies here can embrace these innovation opportunities. It is good to know that the S2R Open Call for Proposals – the first of which has also just been published – is open for all interested parties from this region, belonging to one of the Member States, Associated or candidate State or other!

On another note, knowledge is also very important. Not only the information that we impart to our customers to make their rail experience one that they would wish to repeat but also the education that we provide for our staff – the people that run the railway 365 days a year. We know that we have to prepare the next generation of railway personnel who will construct, design, operate and maintain the railway system of tomorrow.

This calls for a new approach, one that embraces the differing cultures that run through the railways of Europe but which also embraces the emerging technologies and harnesses the two.

Governments and opinion-formers need to get on board with this important concept of knowledge through better training processes and to help that development, the UIC has launched a new and unique programme of training development at various levels including a new and prestigious – as well as affordable – international railway MBA that is gathering a lot of interest. A few opportunities to register for the first MBA course are still open!

Last but not least, there is accessibility to other modes. It is not possible for us in this century to continue to grow modes separately and in ignorance of each other. We need to optimise what we have and what we will develop, learn where we can collaborate with other modes and build on the many strengths that rail has to offer so as to maximise the transport opportunities for the people and the economy of Europe. Connections are important not only to urban areas but also to harbours and airports!

Again this takes a long-term political vision, strong cooperation and a healthy dose of real willingness to make the best of all modes in the interest of society at large and foster inter-modal development rather than intra-modal competition.

These are of course not the only aspects which would benefit the SEE area. Many of the railways in this area are key to the development of the interoperable Future European Railway

System, not least amongst which the identification and coordination of projects aimed at improving capacity, removing bottlenecks and facilitating seamless transport.

Naturally this area is part of the wider European logistics chain and it is important that the right infrastructure is in place and that the operational processes are robust enough to ensure a regular, reliable and effective transport of people and different types and quantities of goods.

The method by which innovation becomes really strong is through standardisation. The UIC has been involved in this activity for all of the 90 plus years of its life and the UIC leaflets (now emerging as International Rail Standards) are the foundation of this structure. This standardisation strategy supports a range of rail system aspects including new ways to improve the technical, commercial, operational and environmental performance of rail transport, reduction of costs, and finally to support our members and the wider rail sector in their plans to improve the business of rail transportation.

UIC would be very happy to support the SEE in developing the future success of rail in the area and thus leading to greater attractiveness of rail and providing social and economic advantages.

So, the challenge of moving towards a reliable, sustainable and attractive railway system in the SEE region can significantly benefit from collaboration amongst all the stakeholders as foreseen here through this SEESARI project. This in turn will create a strong alliance that can collectively identify the main challenges and collaboratively develop and deliver them.

By working together, we can make much more of the capacity potential of our rail network and the combined opportunity to provide modern services to the customer and efficient trade links – an improved Europe with rail at the very heart.

Thank you for your attention and I hope that these few considerations can help you in further developing your vision and strategy and that together we can identify the core issues, develop the plans, encourage the right investment backing and collectively deliver a stronger more attractive rail system in this South East Europe Area and its links to the wider European rail system and vital transport nodes.

I would like to thank you all for your efforts and wish the very best to all those gathered here today to build on the development of a sustainable and customer friendly transport system for South East Europe and to turn the spotlight on this important region. The UIC is ready to support you.

