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Inspire Policy Making with Territorial Evidence

South Europe at the crossroads

Are we making the right decisions about accessibility investments for the future?

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'Aligning accessibility investments with asset-based competitiveness strategies' – speech by Ilona Raugze, Director of ESPON EGTC

Dear Mr. Sessa, dear guests

I would like to cordially thank the Italian Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport for hosting our transnational conference today.

It is my pleasure to welcome you on behalf of ESPON, the European Territorial Observatory Network. The three keywords of this conference are accessibility, investments and decisions. These are supposedly frequently recurring words in your professional life. Undoubtedly, accessibility is a strategic element of every local, regional, national or macro-regional development strategy. Many of you are working on a daily basis with strategies, their implementation and evaluation. And presumably many of you have been confronted with choices, seeking the best possible utilisation of available resources.

Over the last decade, South European regions have seen considerable investments in transport. The efforts to increase and improve the accessibility to markets and public services for citizens and businesses in Southern Europe have benefitted from European funding and lending. Within the multiannual financial framework 2007-2013, transport spending in the Southern convergence regions of Greece, Spain, Italy and Portugal alone amounted to **18.7 billion EUR**. In addition, loans worth over **50 billion EUR** in total have been made available by the European Investment Bank to leverage the transport and infrastructure investments in the Southern EU regions between 2007 and 2017.

The monitoring of the accessibility dynamics over time can secure valuable insights about the territorial impact of transport and infrastructure investments and provide support for future decision making, helping to mitigate risks of unbalanced developments.

Yet, measuring accessibility might be a challenging task. Accessibility indicators are not provided by statistical agencies. They can't be simply collected but are output of accessibility models. For more than a decade, ESPON has been accompanying transport investment policies by designing accessibility

models. ESPON has become the main source for comparative accessibility indicators for European regions, supporting a number of strategic decision-making processes on European, national, regional and local level.

Today, we brought together scientists who can well articulate the recent accessibility dynamics as well as policy makers who can make use of this evidence to steer future investment decisions.

As the title of this conference implies, our focus today is on 9 South European EU Member States: Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Romania and Spain. These regions may have different transport priorities but share commonalities when it comes to potential accessibility. In a European perspective, they form a Southern periphery pattern with below-average potential accessibility.

Potential accessibility is a model that takes into account both infrastructure and population development. Despite possible infrastructure upgrades over the next decade, a glimpse into 2030 suggests no major potential accessibility changes due to anticipated population decline.

Another common feature is that all Southern regions have a comparably low continental hinterland accessibility. This impedes the exploitation of their geographical asset, being natural gateways for intercontinental seaborne traffic from and to Asia. Today, about a quarter of the traffic from Asia enters Europe through the Mediterranean ports after passing the Suez Channel. The majority of shipping routes lead instead through Gibraltar to the Northern ports, particularly to Rotterdam, Antwerp or Hamburg. The Mediterranean rim has large container ports but their performance is limited as a result of the less dense motorway and freight village networks and poorer rail connections as compared with the hinterland infrastructure of the Northern ports. This has severe repercussions for trade flows passing through Southern Europe. For the European importer and exporter, the access to European intercontinental ports outweighs the connection between Europe and overseas ports. This challenge has also been captured by the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian region. Its Action Plan projects that the North Adriatic ports would secure 6m TEU containers per year by 2030, which would account for more than 11 per cent of the entire EU market, provided that the hinterland accessibility improves.

The outer peripherality of Southern Europe in terms of potential and hinterland accessibility is not the only predicament. A territorial occurrence known as Inner Peripherality is of another major concern. This complex phenomenon entails the socio-economic disconnection from neighbouring territories, typically exhibiting low access to services of general interest. ESPON has identified the Southern areas that are classifiable as Inner Periphery and a number of others, which are at risk to become one.

Over the next few hours, our scientists will delve into more details relating to different modes of passenger and freight transport, TEN-T, maritime accessibility as well as access to services of general interest. All these aspects call for your attention when designing future accessibility strategies.

I'd like to extend an invitation to all of you to share your views. I hope that the following snapshots will provide ample food for thought, stimulating a debate between the science and policy making. As our programme indicates, we are convinced that a sound knowledge base engenders good decisions.

Accessibility is not a term constrained by the availability of a good transport network. It is a multifaceted concept consisting of two main components: the available economic activities and population in a certain location on the one hand and the transport infrastructure leading to these points of interest and population on the other hand. Low accessibility values are consequently not only driven by poor transport infrastructure but also by low service endowment, low levels of economic activity and low population.

Moreover, the two main elements influencing accessibility might change in different ways and can counteract each other, i.e., improvements in the transport network do not systematically lead to increases in economic performance or in population.

There are regions with high accessibility but only moderate or even below-average GDP. Some of these regions are located in core areas with very high accessibility rates, mainly in Germany and in Benelux countries in old-industrialised areas or around larger agglomerations.

On the other hand, there are regions that have low or very low accessibility but a high GDP. Regions in Northern Italy and North-Eastern Spain belong to this group of regions performing better than their location would suggest.

Transport investments are not an isolated development priority by default. Regions and macro-regions in Southern Europe need to better understand the causality between infrastructure, population and market potential. Investments in transport infrastructure need to be combined with support for businesses and human capital development in order to achieve a sustainable economic and social development. In this context, ESPON advocates a place-based rationale, where the starting point for reflections on improved accessibility are the needs of the existing economic activities, their development perspectives, and perspectives for improving the living environment of their inhabitants.

I would like to thank our scientists from the past and ongoing ESPON projects for their valuable contribution to the policy debate on transport and accessibility. At the same time, I would like to encourage the policy makers among us today to make use of their findings, which are available on the ESPON website.

I very much welcome the fact that we gather today guests from different regions and territorial levels on a unique occasion to exchange beyond administrative borders. I am confident that you would share these sentiments. Indeed, very often we neglect the benefits of acting together and continue to deal with policy challenges and ideas in the belief that these are regional peculiarities. In this context, let me draw your attention to a special ESPON service that provides Targeted Analyses for policy development on local, regional and national level in Europe. Groups of policy makers have the opportunity to develop and submit their proposals for a Targeted Analysis that would secure data availability and a scientific

knowledge base for future policy processes. The next cut-off date for submitting a proposal is 26 January 2018.

We hope that today's forum will offer the opportunity to exchange with your counterparts on the evidence needs and build new partnerships.

With these words, let me wish you a very fruitful exchange, insightful experience and new partnerships.

Thank you.