

ICCR
Stresa 2002

Presentation
Draft 23.5.2002

Decision-making in the alpine transport policy

The role of the actors

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1 Introduction / Starting point

In 1985 the European Community launched the Single Market. In an economic area without frontiers freight transport was to be a major service industry.

Alpine transit increased thereby in importance. The EC negotiated individual transit treaties with Austria and Switzerland between 1988 and 1992. Under these Switzerland was able to keep the 28 tonne limit for trucks, and in return promised to build the NEAT (New Railway Alpine Transit) base tunnels under the Lötschberg and the Gotthard, so that the growing freight traffic could continue to be carried by rail.

As a consequence of the Swiss rejection of the European Economic Area land transport became again a theme in the following bilateral negotiations. The 28t limit could not be defended. Instead the EC accepted the fiscal solution of the LSV (Leistungsabhängigen Schwerverkehrsabgabe), the usage-dependent heavy transport tax. In parallel to the negotiations with Switzerland the directive on road charges for heavy traffic was negotiated within the EU. The aim was to make the two dossiers compatible and to find an equivalent solution for Austria.

Various actors exerted greater or lesser influence on this policy development. The following description should show which actors were involved and how the goals, strategies and actor networks are directly linked.

2 Actors

Political decision processes are determined by various actors. Although as a rule the state organs are the real decision makers, external actors can have a greater or lesser influence on the decision process. Policy networks are thereby established, in which the actors interact. According to the relevant policy, a network can exhibit a very complex structure.

Let us show this by taking the land transport negotiations between Switzerland and the EC in the 90s as an example. At the centre of the transport policy stood, beside other aspects, freight transport policy in international traffic and especially transit traffic. This starting point could have produced a network which was relatively easy to understand. In fact it was not so. The increased complexity arose especially from the fact that besides the transport aspects a major role was played by the policy issues of relations with Europe, the environment and the economy. European relations and economic aspects stood at the centre especially because with the other dossiers in the bilateral negotiations the integration of the Swiss economy in the European internal market would be settled. On the other side the European Commission and individual EU Member States concentrated on important the framework for transport, especially freight transport. The interests had therefore many layers.

The following actors played a great or lesser role.

A Switzerland

a) The Swiss Federal Council / the departmental head (minister)

The complete Federal Council (roughly equivalent to the cabinet ministers in other countries, but small, representing all major parties, and without a prime minister, the cabinet being chaired by the members in rotation) determines the political guidelines in the foreign and European policy, for instance in the form of mandates for negotiation. It is the captain and motor. In the framework of alpine transit it set critical cornerstones. It conceded the 28 tonne limit in favour of market instrument, the usage-dependent heavy traffic tax. LSVA. The minister responsible for transport had great influence on the negotiations in critical political questions.

b) Federal Office for Transport BAV

The Federal Office for transport implements Swiss transport policy. It was the operational leader in the transport negotiations. The Director was at the same time the responsible negotiator for Switzerland for land transport. Since the 90s BAV has a decisive influence on Swiss transport policy.

c) General Secretariat of the Transport Department

The central staff office for the transport minister, which administratively coordinates the different transport interests between the different offices. The former Overall Transport Policy Service was formerly part of the General Secretariat, today it is integrated into the Federal Office for Environmental Planning. It took the lead in the development and implementation of the LSVA.

d) Federal Integration Bureau

It manages the European relations policy of the Federal Council and coordinates the negotiation dossiers on European policy. It generally adopts an open position on relations to the EU. The Integration Bureau functions as a direct, central coordination point between the Federal Council and the principal negotiators for the individual dossiers.

e) Swiss Embassy in Brussels

This is the diplomatic representation in Brussels. It functions both as a communication channel and as a major actor in the transport negotiations.

f) Finance Department

The Finance Department is the key ministry in respect of the financing of the rails infrastructure through the Alps (NEAT). Financial guarantees for the rail infrastructure represent a decisive factor in Swiss internal politics with significance for external politics. The department set important strategic foundations for the negotiations, in particular through the support for the LSVA solution.

g) Federal Office for the Environment

The Federal Office is taking on technical, and increasingly also political environmental tasks. It has especially supported the Federal Transport Office in questions relating to the environment, however without any decisive influence on the negotiations.

h) Cantons

The cantons concentrate on their regional transport interests. Greatly affected transit cantons (Basel, Uri, Ticino) want to avoid more transit freight on the roads. The cantons have strengthened their position during the course of negotiations at the federal level. They long have had an external office in

Brussels, and since 1996 they have close links to the European relations policy of the Federation through a representative in the Integration Office.

i) **Parties**

In the 90s the transport policy was dominated at the party level by the social democratic SPS and the liberal democratic party (conservative) FDP. The SPS pushed hardest for the LSVA. Significant for the alliance between the left and the conservatives was the linkage between two central questions: a progressive, market-driven transport policy (LSVA) and the successful financing of the infrastructure (NEAT). A decisive factor here was also that the transport minister (Leuenberger, SPS) and the finance minister (Villiger, FDP) each belonged to one of these parties.

Other parties could exert little or no influence on the course of the negotiations.

j) **Parliamentary transport committees**

As a standing committee it prepares the transport agenda for both chambers and can have an according influence on what is on the table. The committee played an outstanding role in the last phase of the negotiations. In the context of the finance gap for the construction of the NEAT it was the committee chairman who officially launched the idea of giving up the 28 tonne limit and to cream off the productivity gain through a tax.

Because of its all-party composition the interests are naturally heterogeneous. However, the goal of preparing proposals capable of winning a parliamentary majority is important.

The networks are striking and far-reaching – cross-party, up to government level and extending to political actors who can be examined in hearings.

k) **Private institutions**

- **Swiss Business Association (today: "economiesuisse")**: the association is active in defending the political interests of the Swiss private sector, especially in the context of the federal policy on relations with Europe. It has very good connections right up to the federal Council, and it too has a lobbying office in Brussels.

- **Swiss railways**: the railways are strongly challenged by the restructuring and privatisation in the European context (railway reform). Competition and competitors have increased. The railways wanted to compensate for the loss of the 28 tonne limit by an optimal LSVA. Among other things short-term flanking measures were demanded to protect the railways from road transport competition.

- **Road freight association ASTAG**: the association represents the interests of road freight traffic at both the technical and political levels. There are good links with the European parent association. In Switzerland the association lost influence in the 90s.

- **Environmental associations (VCS, Alpine initiative, WWF, Greenpeace)**: these represent ecological interests. Thanks to the large number of members and strong grass-roots connections in the aware population they can force referenda. They therefore have a democratic weapon in their hand. Through the Alpine protection initiative a central ecological pillar could be established at the beginning of the transport negotiations. The main goal of the associations is the transfer of freight onto rail. The 28 Tonne-limit was too long a important transfer-strategy.

B EU

- a) **Council of Ministers:** the Council is really several councils, each comprising the responsible ministers in specific areas. The Transport Council determines transport policy and with the European Parliament finalises and passes transport-related legislation. It laid down the mandate for negotiations with Switzerland. COREPER, a committee of the non-specialist permanent representatives of the Member States supported by national specialists on specific questions, is responsible for the preparatory work for the Council deliberations.
- b) **European Commission**
The "Commission of the European Communities" provides the administrative services for the European Community and a limited secretariat for the other pillars of the European Union. It has substantial influence, but less power and legislative competence than the comparable administrative services in individual European countries. Particularly important in the current question is that it conducts negotiations with third countries on behalf of the EC and EU. The Commission plays a leading role in thinking on future Community policy. It is extensively supported in this by committees of relevant officials and experts from the Member States, extensive networks and through external studies. The Commission engages itself for a relatively progressive transport policy.
- c) **Member States playing important roles in this question**
- **Germany:** Germany has great influence on EU transport policy and has a major direct interest in transit across the Alps. With change of government the preceding deadlock was broken, and a breakthrough for the transport negotiations with Switzerland was made. The south German "Lands" (provinces with substantial autonomy), especially Bavaria and Rhineland-Palatinate, had a great influence on the transport dossier.
 - **Austria:** Austria is as affected by transit traffic as Switzerland, but was confronted with different interests. Austria fought for high taxes in the negotiations with Switzerland, in order to gain the same advantages for the Brenner at the same time. In Austria especially citizens' movements (Transit Forum Tyrol) and the Tyrol region took a stand for an ecological Brenner transit policy. Together with representatives of Italian regions a representation of Tyrolean interests has been established in Brussels in order to defend wider regional interests.
 - **Italy:** In the road/rail policy Italy has long given preference to moving passenger traffic rather than freight to rail, especially through subsidies creating low public transport fares and high taxes on fuel and large cars. In the case of international freight traffic there is a conflict of interests. Italy, especially the export-oriented, highly productive Po basin, is vitally interested in fast and low-cost transport across the Alps. A major export is agricultural products needing more rapid and finely distributed transport to the customers than can easily be provided by rail. As a result, not only the road transport lobby, but the other affected economic interests have a strong influence on Italian government policy.
 - **Netherlands:** The Netherlands has chosen a radically different environmental solution from Switzerland with extensive separation of passenger and freight traffic and giving priority to passenger traffic rather than freight on rail, on the argument that the private car is the biggest polluter, while economic considerations already force road freight to be as efficient and non-polluting as possible. The haulage industry is a major and influential sector in the economy and politics. The abandonment of the Swiss 28 tonne limit was long demanded,

on the grounds that it forces economically and ecologically bad solutions, either the use of smaller vehicles with worse pollution/load ratios on the direct route or too many kilometres for larger vehicles on the indirect route bypassing Switzerland.

d) **Private institutions**

- **International Road Transport Union (IRU)**: this represents the technical and political road transport interests at an international level. Thanks to a powerful lobby in Brussels and close cooperation with the UNICE (Union of Industrial and Employer's Confederations of Europe) there is substantial influence on the EU institutions.

- **European Federation for Transport and Environment (T&E)**: this association represents ecological interests at a European level. It is characterised by expert knowledge and wide network connections at the international level.

- **Transitforum Tirol: The comparable association to the Swiss Alpine Initiative**: The Forum has ever been had a strong and direct relationship to the President of the Land Tirol. His Party again has very good formal and informal networks to the Austrian Government. This was one of the important aspects in the transit-negotiations with the EC at the end of the eighties.

e) **Other actors**

– **Media**: the media often serve the actors as a vehicle for their information and demands. Thereby – especially in the where they are used as an instrument – they become important power resources for the actors, even though they do not directly pursue any transport policy.

– **Experts**: the experts have a major importance for the actors in the provision and processing of base data. They do not influence strategies directly, but provide important documentation on which decisions are based.

3 Decision processes

Following the overview of the key actors I would like to speak about some components of the decision process in the land transport negotiations.

- The 28 tonne limit
- the Protection of the Alps initiative and the implementation plan
- selected European actors in the land transport negotiations.

In this I will concentrate especially on actors who consult citizens' or regional interests.

3.1 The 28 t-limit

The history of the 28t limit reflects the increasing internationalisation of Swiss transport policy. Three phases can be distinguished:

- 1 The 28 t-limit gained increasing importance in the cross-Alpine transport. EC Single Market interests faced increasing concerns over the environment (dying forests, the lorry avalanche through Switzerland).
- 2 Swiss/EC transit traffic negotiations: Switzerland defended the 28 t-limit. This was accepted in the transit treaty as a time-limited special case.

- 3 The 28 t-limit was sacrificed in favour of a market economy, EC compatible solution in the form of the LSVA.

Actor goals, actor strategies and actor networks

Two interest blocks can be distinguished: on one hand the actual transit cantons such as Uri and Ticino but also other mountain cantons (Valais, Graubünden), which feared an increase in emissions and so increased pollution, and as an expression of solidarity placed the protection of the Alps at the centre of their interests. On the other side were the cantons in the central plain, who were afraid of a reduction in railway services. The acceptance of the 40 t-limit did not increase until the decision was made to let a part of the LSVA money flow back to the cantons.

In decentralised Switzerland the cantons have great policy influence, politically (representation in Parliament, conferences of the cantonal governments) and formally (rights in the official consultation procedure). At the level of policy on relations with Europe is further improved through the inclusion of a cantonal representative in the Integration Bureau. The network relationships are thus intensified at the European level.

An outstanding example for achieving interest goals was provided by the mountain regions, especially Uri. As a Gotthard canton it managed to use important platforms at the decisive moments. Among these were on one hand the public alliance with the national environmental interests, on the other the skilful co-operation with the media in the context of the Alpine protection referendum. This made it possible to convince the population, i.e. the electorate in referenda. The 28t limit was viewed by the cantons until 1996 as the cornerstone of Swiss transport policy. Federal Councillor Ogi (transport minister until 1994), himself coming from a mountain region, represented this view consistently, both nationally and internationally. The mountain cantons succeeded in anchoring their main argument at grass roots level and at the top political level. They experienced a marked loss of influence when the parties and the government came under pressure from other countries and had to search for new solutions. The further disadvantage should be mentioned that the neighbouring regions in Austria and Italy had no interest in the retention of the 28t limit, because it transferred extra traffic to the neighbours.

3.2 Alpine protection initiative and implementation concept

Starting point

The emergence and implementation of the Alpine protection initiative (referendum) is a perfect example for the growth and death of the power influence of the actor "Association for the Alpine Initiative". The association was founded and built up by politically left and green initiators from several mountain regions. The goal was to protect the Alps from the growing transit traffic by means of a referendum for an amendment to the constitution. The initiative, approved by the electorate in 1994, had as goal measures to prevent growth in Alpine transit traffic and to transfer traffic to rail.

Actor goals, actor strategies and actor networks.

The main goal of the actors is environment-compatible transit traffic. The implementation of the successful Alpine protection initiative stands in the foreground.

The association always placed the environmental needs in favour of the Alps in the foreground. It so managed to bring a central socio-political theme as a concrete example capable of achieving consensus close to the citizens. The messages were comprehensible and could be communicated in accordingly simple form. The goal is transparent and comprehensible.

The association had strong roots in the political left and ecological circles. Because it represented the justified demands of a whole alpine region, it had close relationships with the democratic base in almost all political camps. Finally the leaders of the association (primarily as representatives of the Social Democrats in the Federal Parliament) in strong and active positions at the national political level.

In consideration of the vote on the initiative the association used widely effective communication channels. The power resource media made a decisive contribution to the shaping of public opinion in favour of the Alpine initiative. The initiators were so able with great efficiency to make the national sympathy for a region visible. Here especially the close co-operation with eminent regional politicians in joint, media-effective appearances played a decisive role. Further, the association could count on many well-organised sympathisers in its own ranks. On the other hand, there were deficiencies in the international network contacts, which were not maintained in depth until the end of the 90s.

With the "yes" to the Alpine initiative in 1994 the association achieved in a short time great weight in transport policy. With the implementation of the Alpine protection in the constitution it suffered a clear loss of influence. In this phase it was unsuccessful in creating new impulses or actively bringing new ideas. Here the (allied) Social Democrats now the leading role. They succeeded in countering the growing European pressure through solutions also compatible with Europe, namely the usage-dependent heavy traffic tax, LSV. The SPS co-operated in this phase with the conservative and business interests and followed a directly Europe-oriented course so as not to endanger the complete bilateral packet. The Alpine Initiative Association operated here too long too defensively and paid the penalty of a rapid loss of political significance again, without ever winning it back.

3.3 Selected European actors in the land transport negotiations

A distinction must be made between regional actors and citizens' interests.

It was clear during the negotiations, that especially the economically strong regions with good connections to the relevant national ministries could achieve good visibility for their interests.

Germany: In Germany it was primarily the affected regions which were able to reach a strong position. Here the Lands Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria deserve special mention. The networks are emphasised in both formal and informal political respects, namely through the direct representation of the Minister-Presidents of the Lands in the Federal Council and through direct contact at the administrative level between the national and regional ministries. In addition the Lands have their own lobbies in Brussels. They are thus closer to the political developments in Europe and so in a position to act faster and more efficiently than the Swiss regions. Because of the geographical position (particularly Bavaria) there were in addition especially informal and problem-oriented contacts with Austria. It has emerged that the Lands with the increasing political significance of the road transport dossier promoted their interests more strongly and more successfully at the national level. Germany also visibly oriented its position towards the interests of the south German Lands after these actively promoted their interests via the formal channel of their Minister-Presidents.

Austria: Although the Austrian Lands (provinces) were formally involved in the negotiating rounds, the citizens' initiative "Transit Forum Tyrol" must be classed as the most influential actor. The forum is a fore-thinker for the Land Tyrol and has a strong and much respected national media presence. Transit Forum and the Land Tyrol share the common goal of making the transit traffic ecologically bearable. It is surprising in comparison to Switzerland that the media presence continues and so has a long-term effect and serves the cause. A further difference to Switzerland is that the central protagonists are politically independent and can concentrate exclusively on the transit goal, without needing to consider other European political goals. Although the question of alpine transit is a cross-border concern, co-operation between the ecological regional interests in Austria and Switzerland was weak.

4 Conclusions

I try to strike a balance with the help of some hypothesis and some figures:

- *The more an actor is able to influence important actors, the greater is his power:*
Let's take the environmental associations (esp. the Alpine initiative). They won the alpine protection initiative, which forced the Swiss government to change their strategy in the negotiations - and the EU was forced to interrupt the negotiations for several months.
- *Actors without a direct contact to the centre of the political decisions are able to improve their position and influence by the help of brokers:*
Three different examples can show you the role of the brokers.
 - the Alpine initiative has ever been had a strong and direct relationship to the SPS, which is one of the four parties of the Swiss government. As long as the SPS and the Alpine initiative had the same opinion about the strategy in the negotiations, the SPS was a perfect broker for the Alpine initiative. After the change of the negotiation-strategy which was meant to give up the 28 t-limit - especially pushed by the SPS - the role of the SPS as a strong broker for the environmental associations was lost.
 - in Austria, the Länder like Tirol were directly involved in the formal negotiations. Because the Transitforum Tirol and the government of the Land Tirol have the same opinion about the transit-problem and work together with a common strategy, the government of Tirol is a perfect broker for the transitforum - and it still works for more than 10 years...
 - or take the German Länder in the South. Traditionally their minister-presidents have a good and direct network to the Kanzler and his cabinet, so they we're able to bring in their economic interests into the negotiations between Switzerland and the EC.
- *Raising the resources helps to improve the political influence. The more important these resources for other actors are, the better is the won position of an actor in the political process:*
Let's take the Canton Uri with its transit-problem. Normally, not half of Switzerland takes care of an individual problem of a Canton. But because the government and the citizens of the Canton won the sympathy of the media, probably one of the most important political resources today, more than half of Switzerland felt perplexity - and said "yes" to the alpine initiative.
- *The mobilisation of the public opinion - for example over the media - can become a strong and powerful resource as figura above has shown.* As you can imagine, this lasts not forever. You can jump in a higher and stronger position

with the help of the public opinion. But if you do not dispose of strong arguments, long-term strategies, enough know-how and other important weapons, you won't stay in a influential political position for ever.

5 Future approaches to solutions

- Model approach Public Private Partnership PPP
- Round Tables
 - project- and / or problem-oriented
 - involvement of recognised and creative leaders
 - strong chairmanship by state institutions and representatives.
- More "democracy" for a sustainable mobility