

## EUROPEAN TRANSPORT SYSTEMS 1990-2010

*What have been the trends and what are the prospects for European transport systems?*

- A** It is difficult to conceive of vigorous economic growth without an efficient transport system. Although modern information technologies can reduce the demand for physical transport by facilitating teleworking and teleservices, the requirement for transport continues to increase. There are two key factors behind this trend. For passenger transport, the determining factor is the spectacular growth in car use. The number of cars on European Union (EU) roads saw an increase of three million cars each year from 1990 to 2010, and in the next decade the EU will see a further substantial increase in its fleet.
- B** As far as goods transport is concerned, growth is due to a large extent to changes in the European economy and its system of production. In the last 20 years, as internal frontiers have been abolished, the EU has moved from a 'stock' economy to a 'flow' economy. This phenomenon has been emphasised by the relocation of some industries, particularly those which are labour intensive, to reduce production costs, even though the production site is hundreds or even thousands of kilometres away from the final assembly plant or away from users.
- C** The strong economic growth expected in countries which are candidates for entry to the EU will also increase transport flows, in particular road haulage traffic. In 1998, some of these countries already exported more than twice their 1990 volumes and imported more than five times their 1990 volumes. And although many candidate countries inherited a transport system which encourages rail, the distribution between modes has tipped sharply in favour of road transport since the 1990s. Between 1990 and 1998, road haulage increased by 19.4%, while during the same period rail haulage decreased by 43.5%, although – and this could benefit the enlarged EU – it is still on average at a much higher level than in existing member states.
- D** However, a new imperative – sustainable development – offers an opportunity for adapting the EU's common transport policy. This objective, agreed by the Gothenburg European Council, has to be achieved by integrating environmental considerations into Community policies, and shifting the balance between modes of transport lies at the heart of its strategy. The ambitious objective can only be fully achieved by 2020, but proposed measures are nonetheless a first essential step towards a sustainable transport system which will ideally be in place in 30 years' time, that is by 2040.