Explanations
concerning the Regulations governing information on the implementation of networked incident management in the Alpine region

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Preamble

In the wake of several serious accidents in Alpine tunnels at the turn of the century, the transport ministers of the Alpine states Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Slovenia and Switzerland decided on a shared platform for the management of security and traffic problems in the Alpine region (Zurich Process, www.zurich-process.org). At a periodic conference of ministers held in Vienna in 2009, they resolved to develop an information system for the networked management of incidents occurring on the main transit axes through the Alps. If emergency measures have to be taken on one of the axes, the state in which the incident occurred should take all reasonable measures in accordance with the following two principles and based on mutual trust: First the principle of subsidiarity, i.e. to try to find a domestic solution of the problem before involving the neighbouring countries and second the principle of the mildest measure, i.e. to apply the mildest measure first. This general approach applies to all traffic measures, but expressly does not apply to notification about the incident as such, which has to be made internationally without delay.

Previous experience in managing major incidents had shown that neither the mutual exchange of information about such incidents, nor their management, had functioned internationally in a structured manner, despite the fact that the impacts of serious disruptions on a transit axis frequently also had repercussions in neighbouring countries and on their transit routes. The Ministers transferred this task to the Zurich Process steering committee which they had established and the committee in turn appointed a group of experts to consider the issue. The main objective of the resolution adopted by the involved transport ministers is to introduce structured regulations in order to secure the reliable cross-border provision of information following the occurrence of an incident and during and after its management. This objective is to be achieved by creating a network of national contact points (NCPs) that permits the rapid and reliable exchange of information among the involved countries. It is then up to each individual country to decide how it wants to internally distribute the information it has received via this system, and to what extent the information concerned is to be passed on to its authorities, such as the transport ministry in particular.

The information system is not intended to process every incident, but rather will only be used for those occurrences which, in accordance with the defined criteria, result in lengthy interruptions to traffic flow on certain major transit routes through the Alps. The system will be supported by an information website with additional information on these major transit axes.

How cross-border information on an incident is structured is an important aspect of incident management as such. Permanent and correct information is key to the basic idea that every Alpine country affected by an incident should do everything in its power to handle traffic disruptions on its main transit axes itself, without involving neighbouring countries. It therefore follows that intensive, structured activities to provide information are relevant for judging what, if any, domestic or in some cases cross-border measures are to be taken in all the Alpine countries concerned.

Chapter 1   Definitions

Article 1   Incident

The system is not intended for the exchange of information concerning incidents of a short-term nature. This would give rise to an undesirable flood of information without any resulting significant gains for the involved parties. The intention is to distribute information about incidents which, as a result of the anticipated or effective duration of the interruption to traffic flow, could significantly change the behaviour of road users, and in particular of drivers of heavy goods vehicles.

From past experience with all kinds of incidents involving transalpine road traffic, it may be deduced that disturbances lasting less than two days are unlikely to give rise to significant changes in route planning. As a rule, the impacts of losses in terms of time are less severe than those resulting from lengthy diversions with the related extra costs per kilometre for transport companies, or from the use of less suitable transit routes with a higher accident risk and higher wear-and-tear costs (e.g. brake systems). Changes in plans – e.g. changing haulage schedules, diverting to other routes, transferring to rail – are normally only considered when the probable or effective duration of the disturbance is longer than two days. In view of this, for the purposes of these regulations a major incident is defined as an event with a probable or effective duration of at least 48 hours.

In terms of content, the definition of a major incident encompasses both the immediate threat to traffic flow as well as the occurrence of an unexpected event resulting in a serious disruption to traffic on the route concerned. Such events may take the form of natural disasters of all kinds, e.g. earthquakes, landslides, rockfalls, mudslides, floods or avalanches. The definition also covers "technical" occurrences such as collapsed structures (e.g. bridges) or serious accidents resulting in damage to infrastructure, as well as activities such as strikes and terrorist attacks. However, it does not include disturbances that can be scheduled, e.g. closures due to maintenance work or construction-related detours.

Article 2   Major transit axes

The information system does not cover the entire road network in the Alpine region, but is limited to the main transalpine traffic routes, namely:

   a. Nice-Ventimiglia (France-Italy): Nice - Savona
   b. Fréjus (France-Italy): Chambéry - Torino
   c. Mont Blanc (France-Italy): Annecy/Genève - Aosta
   d. Grand St Bernhard (France-Italy-Switzerland): Martigny - Aosta
   e. Simplon (Switzerland-Italy) Brig - Domodossola
   f. Gotthard (Germany/France-Switzerland-Italy): Altdorf - Chiasso
   g. San Bernardino (Germany/Austria-Switzerland-Italy): Chur - Bellinzona
   h. Brenner (Germany-Austria-Italy): Rosenheim - Verona
   i. Tauern (Germany-Austria-Slovenia): Salzburg - Jesenice
   j. Pyhrn (Germany-Austria-Slovenia): Linz/Wels - Maribor
   k. Southern corridor (Austria-Italy): Graz - Udine

Source: Swiss Federal Office of Topography

Article 3   National contact points

Each Alpine country is to designate a national contact point (NCP), with the exception of Germany, which is to designate two (one for Bavaria and one for Baden-Württemberg). Each country is free to designate its NCP at its own discretion. The only requirement here is that the designated NCP must operate round the clock, every day of the year.

The office in charge of the website (Webmaster, Chapter 4, Articles 8-11) is also to be integrated into the NCP system. In this way, the flow of information can be recorded for internal use, and above all the administration of the NCP system can be kept to a minimum. The involved countries are to notify the webmaster about their NCP, providing all necessary information, especially concerning any changes of location or other important details. The webmaster will then compile a complete list of NCPs based on the information received, and will make this list available exclusively to all NCPs by posting it in a protected area of the website.

One difficulty is the language to be used. Communication in English would be desirable, particularly as it would concern as far as possible standardised multiple choice reports. But apparently not all NCP staff can be expected to have knowledge of English. Therefore the rule is that reports should be sent in the national language of the NCP, and if possible also in English. If a recipient does not understand the sender's language, he/she is required to request the information from another NCP. Each NCP is responsible for the translation of messages into the country's official language.

The system is structured in such a way as to require virtually no administration. The exceptions have to do with the management of the information website defined in Article 10 and fall to the webmaster. Clearly, therefore, in exceptional cases certain administrative tasks may also be shifted to the webmaster function.

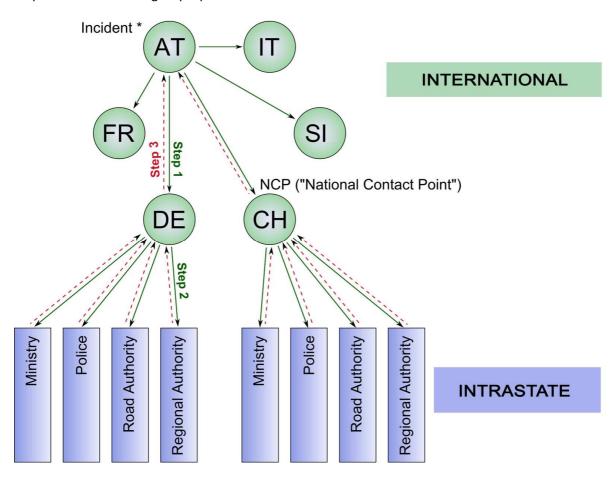# Chapter 2   Information flow

Article 4   Cross-border information flow when an incident occurs

If an incident in accordance with Article 1 should occur on one of the defined routes, the report is dispatched in accordance with internal procedures to the country's own NCP for distribution within the system. The NCP concerned ensures that it possesses all the information that is required (in accordance with the pre-prepared "Road information form for incidents" checklist) for reporting the incident properly to the other NCPs. If necessary, it requests the required information from internal sources.

The NCP that is transmitting the report does so with the aid of the corresponding checklist, simultaneously in English and – if it was first prepared in the country's official language and subsequently translated – in the local language. English is to be used because it is the language that is common to the NCP system, and the local language is also to be used because this may be of use to other NCPs that use the same language. All reports are transmitted by fax and e-mail via a prepared distribution list, the preparation of which is the responsibility of the webmaster.

At the same time as the transmitting NCPs send the "Road information form for incidents" they switch the corresponding transit axis to "Disruption" on the information website.

All NCPs that receive an incident report are required to confirm receipt thereof as soon as possible (immediately) by sending a corresponding message to the transmitting NCP. Should the transmitting NCP receive no timely confirmation of receipt, he or she becomes active again and expressly requests such confirmation. This ensures full cross-border distribution of all incident reports. The NCP sending the report is responsible for ensuring its proper distribution.

The NCP system is expressly intended to channel cross-border information (see diagram), and this can be achieved by securing the flow of messages between the NCPs. In view of this, no NCP is required to respond to requests from other countries unless they come from the NCP concerned. Requests from other entities are referred to the NCP of the country of origin.

Article 5   Internal information flow

Each country is responsible for its own internal information flow. No binding regulations exist in this regard. Each country distributes information internally in accordance with its own requirements, and thus has to decide how much information it wants to pass on, and to which authorities (transport ministry, police, traffic management centres, traffic information centres, local authorities (cantons, provinces, municipalities, etc.).

Requesting information from other authorities in the country of the transmitting NCP is not envisaged. In the same way as an NCP is to refer requests from other countries to the NCP of the country concerned (as described in Article 4), NCPs should not refer requests from their own country to that of the transmitting NCP. If any clarifications should be necessary, the receiving NCP carries these out directly with the transmitting NCP and then informs the requesting party in its own country.

Chapter 3   Reporting during and after incident management

Article 6   Information flow during and after incident management

The NCP system is also intended to channel information concerning the status and type of incident management. For this purpose, the transmitting NCP specifies the intervals at which follow-up reports will be sent to the other NCPs. The intervals depend on the type of incident and the extent to which other countries are affected. In terms of content, this concerns reporting on the traffic situation, the implemented measures and the anticipated duration of the incident management.

This cross-border information flow is prepared in the same way as the original report, i.e. by completing the "Road information form for incidents" in English and in the local language of the transmitting NCP, while the internal distribution of information is the responsibility of each NCP.

The NCP in the country affected by the incident informs the other NCPs and the webmaster, through a final announcement, that the measures taken to manage the incident have been completed, and makes this visible on the information website by switching the corresponding axis back to "normal".

Article 7   Information documents

Once the incident management has been completed, the transmitting NCP sends a summary to the other NCPs of the main steps taken to provide information during the incident management process. The summary can take the form of a rough journal or be more detailed. The NCP is itself not necessarily the author of the summary, but rather ensures that the latter is made available swiftly and contains the necessary key data. The other NCPs are then asked to provide feedback by a specified deadline.

The transmitting NCP then evaluates the feedback it receives, supplements the summary where necessary and subsequently sends it to the other NCPs and the webmaster for information. The webmaster makes the summary available to the members of the Monitoring Group established under Article 12. Should the Monitoring Group feel the need to discuss the summary in any way, it shall do so at a specially convened meeting of the Monitoring Group. As a rule, however, each incident is closed upon delivery of the summary of the main information measures taken.

Chapter 4: Information website on the major transit axes

Article 8 Content and structure of the information website

The Zurich Process organisation operates an information website on the major transalpine axes as part of the "Information on incident management in the Alpine region" system. As part of the main website of the "Zurich Process", this website is linked to the latter.

The website is structured in such a way that a start page (portal) contains a map showing in schematic form the transit axes listed in Article 2. This map meets two objectives. The main objective is to display an incident that has occurred visually on the corresponding axis. In the normal state, an axis is shown coloured in blu; if an incident has occurred, the colour of this axis changes to red, accompanied by a symbol indicating an incident/disruption. The second objective of this map is to serve as an entry point to other pages by clicking on the axis or the navigation tree about which information is being sought on the other pages.

The portal therefore gives access to the individual axes. Four pages are available per axis. Three contain the most important information about the axis concerned. These pages have a static structure and are revised periodically, only once or twice a year. It therefore does not contain any information about the incident that has occurred, but permanent information such as restrictions on driving times, weight limits and the like. The fourth page contains a list of links to websites on the axis and to websites containing public service information, such as school holidays, public holidays, etc. As a rule, it also provides access to current information on an incident.

Article 9   Design of the website

It is essential here that the website should be able to be consulted in all national languages (French, German, Italian and Slovenian) and in English. The individual NCPs provide the webmaster with the information to be placed on the network in the relevant national language. The webmaster subsequently has the documents translated into English. The NCPs are responsible for the further translations. The webmaster provides the English version of the texts to be translated to the NCPs, which in turn provide a translation of the texts in their national languages to the webmaster, who incorporates the texts on the website.

Since it concerns static information, the individual NCP can be expected to organise (and if necessary to pay for) a translation of an English text module into its national language and then to forward the result to the webmaster.

Article 10   Servicing the information website

The Regulations delegate the appointment of the webmaster to the Monitoring Group. The webmaster's main task is the administration of the website. He makes the up-to-date list of NCPs available to all NCPs in a protected part of the site. The webmaster periodically - i.e. once or twice a year - updates the contents of the other pages accessed via the portal (permanent information about the individual axes, links to axis-related websites and public service information). In addition, he procures the necessary information from all NCPs and ensures minimum servicing of the entire information system.

Construction of the website is a time-intensive task. Switzerland has stated that it is willing to carry out the technical construction work. Thanks to the consistent restriction to static and semi-static information, servicing the website, on the other hand, is a task that requires little time and effort. It is essential, however,

that the person should be easy to reach and that a substitute be available. This is specifically not a 24-hour service.

Chapter 5: Concluding clauses

Article 11   Costs

Operation of the information system as such is to incur very few costs. Accordingly, each country participating in the NCP system has to bear any costs itself. No costs of any kind are billed between participating countries. The country that provides the webmaster is also responsible for paying the related costs in full. This principle also applies to any translation costs, in particular in connection with the website. The country that provides the webmaster bears only the costs of translating incoming messages into English; the cost of translating the English texts back into the individual national languages is to be borne by the individual countries.

Article 12   Monitoring Group

The information system requires a minimum of monitoring and system evaluation. The system is not likely to be used very frequently, and some core knowledge will need to be maintained on how it functions if it is to be and remain operational. It therefore makes sense to maintain the present working group that is building the system for the subsequent operating phase and to rename it the Monitoring Group. The Monitoring Group should meet once every two years, so to ensure some continuity. If necessary, for example should the information process relating to a specific incident not have proceeded smoothly, the Monitoring Group can convene additional meetings to discuss the problems that arose. The Monitoring Group also appoints, at its periodic meeting, the webmaster for the information website.

The members of the Monitoring Group are selected by the Steering Committee. The ministers do not need to be burdened with this task.

Article 13   Entry into effect, duration

The NCP system is scheduled to be ready for test-operation by 1.10.2012. The resolution is expected to be adopted by the transport ministers at the conference to be held in the first half of 2012, and the regulations are therefore scheduled to enter into effect on 1.6.2012. They will be valid for an unspecified period.

Article 14   Termination, dissolution

Each participating country may terminate its participation in the NCP system at any time as no legally enforceable obligation to take any action applies. The NCP system is intended to function as a helpful information tool for the involved countries. A "termination option" with a notice period of 6 months as of the end of a calendar year has nonetheless been included in the regulations.

The NCP system and the implementing regulations as a whole can of course be dissolved or amended at any time by a resolution of the conference of ministers of the countries of the Alpine region.