



All roads lead to Europe: The E-road network 1950-1970

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1. Introduction.....	1
2. The Origins of the E-Road Network.....	3
3. Defining the E-Road Network	6
4. Making the E-Road Network a Reality.....	9
5. Epilogue	13

1. INTRODUCTION

If there is a road network that would qualify as truly European, it would surely be the E-road network. Today, the green plates marking the E-routes along Europe's highways are a familiar sight and maps present the E-roads as the main arteries running through the continent. Still, very little is known about the inception of the network and its subsequent development. Laid down in the *Declaration on the Construction of Main International Traffic Arteries* in 1950, the E-roads were intended to connect Europe from the northern tip of Sweden to the southern coast of Sicily. The network covered the continent with trunk lines and branch lines, but did not do so in a uniform way, some places being more connected than others, and many not being connected at all.

The network was concluded under auspices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE, 1947), but many other organisations participated in its development too. The International Road Federation (IRF, 1948), a non-governmental organisation representing the interest of road builders world-wide and enjoying consultative status at the United Nations and its subsidiary bodies, was heavily involved from the start. Competing organisations of the ECE like the European Conference of Ministers of Transport (ECMT, 1953) also tried to get a say in the network. While paying their respect to the ECE for having supervised the Declaration's conclusion, they wanted to play their own role in the European transport field and therefore started to interfere with the E-road network themselves.

This paper traces the decision-making process leading to the 1950 Declaration and follows the development of the network until its major revision in 1975. The design and

construction of the network can be considered part and parcel of the process of European integration, one of the most remarkable political phenomena in the modern world. Recently it has been argued that large-scale infrastructure networks and the ways in which they have been shaped both in design and in reality formed an important antecedent of the processes of economic and political integration that have been taking place in Europe after the Second World War. Infrastructure integration has largely remained invisible, and therefore constitutes a kind of ‘hidden integration’.¹ It is remarkable that, despite the fact that European historiography in general acknowledges that the role of infrastructure is crucial for European integration in terms of market harmonisation, political cooperation and the formation of a European culture and identity, it has hardly if at all been the object of historical scrutiny.² Zooming in on technological projects such as the E-road network can lay bare the tensions that were part of their conception, the different interests that were played out by the countries involved, and the material realities in which this ultimately resulted.

Harmonizing technical standards for roads and putting up signs that brand them as part of a larger European whole also has implications for the European ‘roadscape’. Edensor has argued that all elements pertaining to the system of automobility, including such mundane objects as traffic signs, can be linked to national identity.³ Such landscapes are unconsciously perceived as one travels through them. The main mechanism behind such recognition is negative: if signs or other elements of the road system suddenly are different, as is often the case as soon as one crosses a border, the driver becomes aware that he is moving from one automobile space into another. Edensor has demonstrated his point for national settings, namely the United Kingdom and India. The object of this paper, the European road network, will allow a similar analysis at the European level. Due to the work done by international organisations, the European roadscape has shown an ever shrinking degree of difference. By creating European standards and implementing

¹ Thomas J. Misa & Johan Schot (2005), “Inventing Europe: Technology and the Hidden Integration of Europe”, in: *History and Technology* 21:1, pp.1-19.

² Erik van der Vleuten & Arne Kaijser (2005), ‘Networking Europe’, in: *History and Technology* 21:1, pp.21-48. For a rare exception dealing with European road building, see Gijs Mom (2005), “Roads without Rails: European Highway-Network building and the Desire for Long-Range Motorized Mobility”, in: *Technology and Culture* 46: 4, pp.745-772.

³ Tim Edensor (2004), “Automobility and National Identity: Representation, Geography and Driving Practice”, in: *Theory, Culture & Society* 21: 4/5, pp.101-120.

them, the level of difference perceived by road users across the continent has lowered significantly. Also the E-roads are marked along the route with a specially designed plate. Such elements of the road system can become parts of what one might call ‘banal europeanism’.⁴ This notion draws a parallel with Billig’s concept of ‘banal nationalism’, which underlines how national identity “is primarily constituted out of the proliferating signifiers of the nation and the everyday habits and routines which instil a sense of being in national place.”⁵

This essay proceeds as follows. The next paragraph will describe the origins of the E-network, sketching the post-war organizational setting in which the 1950 Declaration would emerge. The subsequent paragraph addresses the characteristics of the network to clarify what an E-road is. The section after that treats the (non-)realization of the network, its use and its revision in 1975. The final paragraph ventures on a comparison with other continental networks and current initiatives.

2. THE ORIGINS OF THE E-ROAD NETWORK

Transport issues ranked high on the political agenda in the period after WW II. When after the war the United Nations system was created, replacing the interwar League of Nations, one of the first regional organisations it founded was the Economic Commission for Europe, an intergovernmental organisation aiming to facilitate the reconstruction of Europe, raise the level of economic activity and strengthen their mutual economic relations.⁶ It is important to note that the resolution founding the Commission asked specific attention for the European transport situation and, thereupon, the ECE assumed the tasks of the European Central Inland Transport Organization, one of various ‘emergency’ organizations founded during the war to prepare for the necessary transport reconstruction after hostilities had been put to an end.

Soon after it began its work, the ECE established an Inland Transport Committee (ITC) that started its work in October 1947 to deal with the tasks that had been assigned to ECE with regard to transport matters. Inland transport in this case included transport by

⁴ Misa & Schot, op.cit., p.10.

⁵ Edensor, op.cit., p.101.

⁶ Evan Luard (1966), *The Evolution of International Organizations*, New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, p.254. ‘Resolution of the Economic and Social Council Creating the Economic Commission for Europe, March 28, 1947’, in: *International Organization* 1: 3, pp.575-577.

railroad, road, inland waterway and pipeline, but explicitly excluded civil aviation and maritime shipping for which universal organisations were deemed more appropriate.⁷ The ITC sponsored more meetings than any other ECE body and in budgetary terms was by far the most important of the ECE committees.⁸ It is also noteworthy that the United States looked favourably upon the work of the ITC, despite its misgivings about the ECE as whole and its doubts concerning the usefulness of almost all of the ECE's technical committees.⁹

With the transport system in disarray, road transport was seen as a partial solution for Europe's transport difficulties as it was considered the most flexible of the inland transport means. Therefore the ITC installed two 'ad hoc' working groups for road transport at its first meeting, one dealing with short-term problems, the other with long-term problems.¹⁰ At its second session in February 1948, the ITC created a more permanent organizational framework to deal with European road transport by setting up a Sub-Committee for Road Transport "to consider and deal with matters essentially concerning road transport".¹¹ The establishment of a railway equivalent followed suit, but it would take until 1957 before inland waterways would get their sub-committee.¹² The Sub-Committee held its first session on March 17, 1948, electing the Dutch representative Vonk as its chair. Most of the work of the sub-committee took place in working parties, in which groups of specialists prepared policy on specific road related issues. A Working Party on Highways was among the first to be set up by the Sub-Committee. Its terms of reference included the determination of routes to be equipped for international traffic flows, and the specification of characteristics of such routes in

⁷ Resolution 9, 'Classification of Inland Transport', E/CN.2/65, 26-3-1949, p.19, all 'E' and 'W' documents refer to official United Nations documentation and have been consulted in the library of the United Nations Office in Geneva (UNOG).

⁸ United Nations (1957), *In the Service of Europe: Ten Years of International Cooperation in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe*, New York, p.25. In 1954 the ITC had the highest budget estimate among the ECE's technical committees. The ITC's expected budget of \$ 230.300 was more than 70% higher than the estimate for the Coal Committee, the second highest, see Appendix A, 'Approximate Budgetary Costs of Major Fields of Activity of the ECE - 1954', E/ECE/182, 20-1-1954, pp.32-33.

⁹ Phillips to Cohan, 31-10-1951, folder 'ECE-ITC February 1951-December 1951', box 23, Lot 54D388, Records of the Component Offices of the Bureau of European Affairs, 1944-1962 (Bureau of European Affairs), Record Group 59, National Archives of the United States at College Park (RG 59).

¹⁰ 'Report on the First Session', E/ECE/TRANS/31, 19-10-1947, p.6.

¹¹ Resolution 13, 'Establishment of a Sub-Committee on Road Transport', adopted 5-2-1948, E/ECE/93, annex I.

¹² Resolution 31, 'Establishment of a Sub-Committee on Rail Transport, adopted 29-10-1948, E/ECE/93, annex II; 'Report of the ITC to the ECE', E/ECE/265-F, 12-3-1957, p.4.

conjunction with the Permanent International Association of Road Congresses (PIARC, 1908).¹³ The ITC expressed the wish that the composition of the working party should be a mix of economic experts and technical specialists trained in road-building, and that it should keep its scope open for countries from the Middle East and North Africa.¹⁴

The first session of the Working Party on Highways took place in Geneva in early April 1948 and was chaired by the Danish representative Bang. The working party attached a tentative map of the main international traffic arteries it envisioned to its report. To a large extent, the Europe embedded in the network sketch formed a fair representation of the countries participating in the first meeting. The preliminary network connected the Benelux, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, and Switzerland. Luxembourg was the only country not represented at the meeting that formed part of the network. The network reached out to the rest of Europe by including ‘desirable roads’ from Berlin to Warsaw, from Bavaria to Prague, Bratislava, Budapest and ending in Beograd. Vienna was to be connected too, and a German-Italian connection would make use of the Brenner.¹⁵

At the same time, important work was being done to ease the operation of Europe’s road network. Indicative for the scope of road carriers’ troubles in operating the existing road network was the obligation in some cases to transfer goods from one truck to another at the border in order to get them to their final destination. A solution for such troubles was found in the ‘freedom of the road’ agreements that liberated commercial road traffic between European countries on a large scale. The process leading up to these arrangements was started up in the fall of 1947 by American official Cecil Calvert working for the Office of Defense Transportation.¹⁶ The European countries cooperating in the agreements freed road transport to a much larger extent than before the war.¹⁷ The member countries of the Organization for European Economic Cooperation (established 1947) signed the agreements and were joined by Czechoslovakia and Hungary. The first

¹³ PIARC was an adequate pick for such a task. The organisation dedicated itself to the exchange and diffusion of technical knowledge with regard to road-building.

¹⁴ ‘Terms of Reference’, E/ECE/TRANS/WP7/1, 22-3-1948.

¹⁵ ‘Report of the Working Party on Highways’, E/ECE/TRANS/WP7/3, 9-4-1948, particularly the annexed map.

¹⁶ Clarke to Calvert, 24-5-1949, and n.a., n.d. [August 1949], folder ‘freedom of the road’, box 10, entry 3238A, RG 84.

¹⁷ Clarke to Whitnack, 30-8-1949, box 10, entry 3238A, RG 84.

agreement arranged the freedom of operation for transit traffic for a period of six months starting December 6, 1947 and would be prolonged several times.¹⁸ Eventually a more permanent solution was to be found in adjusting existing road conventions from the Interbellum to the present circumstances or in regulating international highway transport along the lines of the Berne Conventions for international railway transport.¹⁹ Such an arrangement was eventually reached in the *Convention on Road Traffic*, of September 19, 1949.²⁰

So we see that network operation was an important aspect of the deliberations taking place in Geneva besides the discussion on network planning. Large projects for a European motorway network had been proposed during the Interbellum as well, but failed at the time.²¹ Now the ECE made similar proposals with fresh zeal. Its effort would result in a declaration that specified Europe's trunk roads. In certain respects it went beyond its predecessors, on other issues it chose to be less ambitious, but perhaps more pragmatic and realistic. Thus, in terms of technical specifications it formed a huge step forward, but with regard to its financial underpinnings, it did not embark upon any form of centralised finance but rather left the initiative with the participating countries. What the network exactly entailed is the subject of the next paragraph.

3. DEFINING THE E-ROAD NETWORK

On September 16, 1950 the Declaration on the Construction of Main International Traffic Arteries was signed in Geneva. The original five states that were party to the agreements were Belgium, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the United

¹⁸ 'Relations of ECE to ERP', n.d., p.9, folder 'Economic Commission for Europe', box 9, Lot 54D389, RG 59; ECA, 2nd Report, 30-9-1948, p.17; OEEC (1949), *Report to the Economic Cooperation Administration on the First Annual Programme, July 1st, 1948 – June 30th, 1949*, p.39.

¹⁹ USD/56, 4-11-1947, p.14, folder 'Inland Transport', box 2, Lot 123, ERP Collection, National Archives of the United States at College Park.

²⁰ The implementation of the document would prove more problematic though. It is also important to note that almost as soon as the Convention had been signed, the ECE started to work on problems emanating from the operation of the new international legal framework.

²¹ Continental networks were discussed at two European motorway conferences in Geneva (1931) and Milan (1932). See Lando Bortolotti (1996), "I Congressi Autostradali Internazionali del 1931 e 1932 e le Prime Proposte di un Sistema Autostradale Europeo", in: *Storia Urbana* 75, pp.5-26; Ingrid Heckmann-Strohark (1999), "Der Traum von einer Europäischen Gemeinschaft: Die Internationalen Autobahnkongresse 1931 und 1932", in: Martin Heller & Andreas Volk (eds.), *Die Schweizer Autobahn*, Zürich: Museum für Gestaltung, pp.32-45. For an analysis of the networks, see Frank Schipper, "The Drive for Peace? Road Building and the European Project during the Interbellum", paper presented at the SHOT Conference in Minneapolis, 3-6 November 2005, TIE working document no.12, <http://www.tie-project.nl/>.

Kingdom. They were later joined by Austria (1951), Greece and Sweden (1952), Norway (1953), Portugal and Turkey (1954), Germany and Italy (1957), Poland, Spain and Yugoslavia (1960), Bulgaria and Hungary (1962), Finland and Romania (1965), Denmark (1966), Ireland (1968), and Czechoslovakia (1973).

The Declaration was a straightforward document. The usual lofty phrases of preambles to important international agreements were kept to a minimum. The 1950 Declaration only mentioned that the signatory states were consciousness of the need to develop international road traffic in Europe and that they considered it “essential, in order to establish closer relations between European countries, to lay down a co-ordinated plan for the construction or reconstruction of roads suitable for international traffic.” The very short text of the Declaration as such was followed by three much larger annexes to it, which formed the actual substance of the Declaration.

The first of these annexes specified the routes of the E-roads, each receiving a unique number.²² Numbers E1 thru E30 were reserved for main traffic arteries; roads receiving a higher number were considered branch and feeder roads to the main arteries. The original Declaration specified 22 main routes and 62 branch routes.²³ The routes were constantly amended ever since the Declaration was signed. Typically, the route would shift to a nearby itinerary once a better road had been constructed there. This mechanism gave the network the character of a meandering river landscape.

The third annex laid down the characteristics of the sign used to indicate the E-roads. These were crucial for the recognition of the roads by travellers. The signs consisted of a green rectangular plate with a white inscription of an ‘E’ followed by the corresponding number of the road. However, there were no ways in which putting up the signs could be exacted from signatory states, so many governments did not put them up. By 1957, only the Netherlands and Portugal had fulfilled their promise to mark the main international traffic, and the United Kingdom used a slightly modified sign on some, but not all, of its E-roads. To excuse themselves for not having fulfilled their obligations other countries pointed to budgetary difficulties, the fact that the roads in questions had not yet been

²² Although routes received a unique number in principle, they joined route with other routes on several occasions. This could lead to the assignment of double numbers along certain stretches of road.

²³ E/ECE/TRANS/WP17/5, 26-7-1950, pp.2-9.

brought up to the necessary standard, or that neighbouring countries had not yet adhered to the Declaration.²⁴

The second annex was the largest and arguably the most important of the three, specifying the ‘conditions to which the main international traffic arteries shall conform’.²⁵ These conditions were split up in characteristics of the E-roads themselves (chapter A) and the ancillary services that should be provided along these roads (chapter B). E-roads came in three different categories. The second category could be roughly equated with the motorways as we know them today, but this was not the case for the first category. The third category was provisional one (see table 1). Along the roads, there should be separate cycle tracks and footpaths where densities of such traffic required them. The roads were to avoid built-up areas and in the long term all level crossings and intersections should be suppressed.

Table 1. Road categories 1950 Declaration

Category	Carriageways	Lanes	Width ²⁶	Density
I	1	2	7 meter (6 m)	< 600 vehicles/hour
II	2	4	2 x 7 meter	> 600 vehicles/hour
III	1	3	10,50 meter (9 m)	not specified

Source: IRF (1952), *Main International Traffic Arteries*, Brochure ‘Europe no. 1’.

The ancillary services also formed an important aspect of the E-roads. Four such services were specified. First, border crossing facilities should be adequate for the expected traffic density. It was recommended to establish frontier posts at the same spots on both sides of the border and to harmonize opening times. Second, parking lots along the road should be provided, especially along stretches with few access points. Provision posts, garages and places to eat and rest should also become part of the network, particularly in underdeveloped regions. Third, first aid posts should be established in accordance with the regulation of the International Federation of Red Cross Societies. Fourth, emergency telephones should be provided at regular intervals along E-roads.

²⁴ ‘Application de l’Annexe III de la Declaration – Note du Secretariat’, W/TRANS/SC.1/165, 4-6-1957.

²⁵ It underwent a significant revision in 1957.

²⁶ The numbers between brackets represent the widths allowed in exceptional cases, for example in mountainous terrain.

4. *MAKING THE E-ROAD NETWORK A REALITY*

The maps of the E-road network accompanying the Declaration made clear that some countries were more connected than others. An overview of the lengths of the network in 1955 is given in table 2. It shows that many of the Eastern European countries, particularly in the Balkans, were not connected at all, because they had not submitted their corresponding stretches for the network. Countries like Bulgaria, Hungary, and Romania would remain white spots on the E-map for over a decade.

Table 2. Absolute and Relative Lengths of the E-Road Network (1955)

Country	E-roads (km)	E-roads/km ²	Inhabitant/E-roads	Automobiles/E-roads/
Austria	1877	0,022	4000	68
Belgium	1075	0,035	8000	510
Denmark	805	0,019	5217	305
Finland	2220	0,007	1910	55
France	6675	0,012	6500	500
Germany	5968	0,025	8300	330
Greece	2425	0,018	3130	14
Italy	6671	0,022	7100	138
Luxembourg	90	0,035	3300	246
Netherlands	1150	0,034	9200	270
Norway	2140	0,007	1500	93
Portugal	1108	0,012	7150	113
Spain	4271	0,008	6555	56
Sweden	3805	0,008	1890	171
Switzerland	1125	0,027	4350	257
Turkey	4835	0,006	4320	13
United Kingdom	1545	0,006	32800	2430
Yugoslavia	1700	0,007	9300	16
Total/Average	49485	0,011	6500	260

Source: IRF (1955), *Main International Traffic Arteries*, Brochure 'Europe no. 2'.

The density of the network varied greatly from one country to another. The United Kingdom, the most motorized countries of Europe in terms of car ownership, vied with Turkey for being the country with the least E-roads per square kilometre (6 m/km²). This contrasted with the density in important transit countries such as the Benelux, the Alpine countries and Germany (22-35 m/km²). The UK figures looked even bleaker when the ratio per inhabitant or vehicle was calculated. Where individual nations' network was small in comparison with other countries, this was because the governments in question had submitted just few roads. However, Geneva procedures were not always clear for the outside world. In a biting article Henry Gasquet, president of the Touring Club de France (TCF), criticized the large gaps in the E-network in (western) France and claimed the ECE had turned his country into "un territoire vierge comme l'était encore, sur les cartes

de mon enfance, le Sahara”. In his equally bitter response, the director of the ECE’s Transport Division Charguéraud-Hartmann (a Frenchman himself – and long-time member of the TCF) tried to clear his organisation of such accusations, pointing out its dependence on the input of its member countries.²⁷

As time passed by, the gaps of the network were gradually filled up in a process of constant revision that resulted in a considerable densification of the network. At some points in time, landslide additions were made to the network. The networks in the France and the United Kingdom grew tremendously after a landmark extension was decided in the ECMT. In the same vein Ireland, an ECMT member since 1963, yielded and joined the E-network, after having insisted for more than fifteen years that it was kind of absurd to have E-roads on an island not physically connected to Europe’s mainland.²⁸ Densification of the network was accompanied by an expansion towards European countries not previously connected. A clear example is the expansion of the network in the Balkans, in which the IRF played an important role.²⁹ In 1957 it organised a conference in Salonika in which participants from Greece, Yugoslavia, Turkey, Italy and the United States were present. The conference aim was to develop a ‘firm’ construction program, explore the possibilities of mutual assistance and establish a coordinating committee to keep track of the process.³⁰ The conference paid special attention to the E5 in the participating countries and on a more general level how the Balkans might fit into the E-network.³¹ Ensuing meetings took place in Istanbul (1958), Belgrade (1959), Brindisi (1961), and in the Bulgarian seaside resort Varna (1965), crossing the Iron

²⁷ Henry Gasquet, “Un défi à la Géographie”, extract from “La Revue du Touring-Club de France” no. 589, September-October 1949; Charguéraud-Hartmann to Gasquet, 1-11-1949, GIX.12.7.2.9.6069, ECE Archives, UNOG (hereafter: GIX.12.7.2.9.6069).

²⁸ Road transport problems, Resolution 22 and 23 concerning the Revision of the International Trunk Roads Network, in: ECMT – Council of Ministers (1967), *Resolutions*, vol.XVII, pp.55-62.

²⁹ The original initiative had grown out of an ECE debate on the development of Southern Europe started in 1954, which had resulted in the project for a circular highway through Greece, Italy and Yugoslavia, with an extension to Syria through Istanbul and Ankara, see ‘Summary of questions considered and decisions taken at the first meeting of the Expert Group’, ECE/SE/2, 30-7-1954 and subsequent ECE/SE documents. ‘Report of the working party on transport questions on its first session’, ECE/SE/TR/1, 30-11-1955.

³⁰ UNOG, GIX/13/1/29, 18657, jacket 2, ‘Final Report Salonika Highway Conference for International Roads for South-East Europe’, 15-17 November 1957; n.a. (1958), “The Salonika Conference November 15th to 27th 1957”, in; *Road International* 28 (spring), pp.33-34.

³¹ IRF, *Main European Arteries (E Roads) Traffic Census Maps 1965* (Geneva, 1965), p.3. The E5 was a transversal route from London to Istanbul.

Curtain for the first time. It was here that further E-roads for South Eastern Europe would be defined.³²

Such episodes highlight the role played by non-governmental organisations such as the IRF that saw the 1950 Declaration as a vehicle to further their aims. Through its consultative status at the United Nations, the IRF had direct access to the policy process in Geneva. The IRF continuously stressed the need to live up to the 1950 Declaration. It viewed the fact that the Declaration did not contain any financial specifications as a fundamental flaw and it was also worried about the absence of a concrete time schedule for the work.³³ The IRF understood well that several countries needed outside help to realize their sections of the network. Therefore, the IRF paid particular attention to spelling out the international financial methods that would allow a flow from the richer countries to the poorer ones. It submitted a memorandum to the ECE on the establishment of a European Road Investment Fund, along the lines of the road investment funds that had been created in various European countries, in July 1952.³⁴ The IRF also took care to keep the broader public informed about the developments with regard to the E-road network, issuing several 'Europe brochures'.³⁵

To monitor actual use, the ECE organised road censuses on the E-roads every five years, starting in 1955. These were organised on the same day across Europe at different locations along the network. This resulted in a collection of maps showing the traffic densities in bright green and red colours. As mass motorization took off, the use of the E-roads increased dramatically. In 1955, the average daily density of vehicles amounted to less than 2000 on more than half of the E-roads in Austria (60%), Norway (95%), Portugal (90%), Spain (81%) and Yugoslavia (100%). By 1965 this was only the case in Norway (59%), Portugal (66%) and Yugoslavia (53%). In West European countries, densities were significantly higher. Nevertheless, the increase in density was equally

³² *Routes du Monde* 12, 1965, pp.2-3.

³³ IRF, *Main International Traffic Arteries* (1952), Brochure 'Europe no. 1', p.7.

³⁴ Clarke to Myrdal, 9-7-1952, GIX.12.7.3.8.9223.

³⁵ IRF, *Main International Traffic Arteries* (1958), Brochure 'Europe no. 3'; IRF, *Main International Traffic Arteries* (1960), Brochure 'Europe no. 4'.

astounding. The average of 10.000 vehicles a day was reached in 1965 on 47% of the E-roads in Belgium, 42% in Italy, 48% in the Netherlands and 49% in Western Germany.³⁶

The Declaration underwent a major revision in 1975 when it transformed into the *European Agreement on Main International Traffic Arteries*. One of the main changes was the renumbering of the entire network according to a new logic. The old system allowed for only thirty main routes; once they were used only branch roads could be added to the network.³⁷ The new system gave the E-network a grid structure in which ten trunk routes were established from north to south (two numbers, all ending in 5) and 10 from east to west (two numbers, all ending in 0).³⁸ Branch roads started with the same digits as the main roads of which they formed a branch. It was thought that the general structure of the system would hence become more comprehensible to its users.

The renumbering did produce certain victims. The story of the ‘E3 - Fédération Route d’Europe 3’ illustrates the point. This ‘federation’ was founded in 1957 and represented towns and municipalities along the E3 running from Lisbon to Stockholm and included members from Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, and France that met at the annual ‘general meetings’.³⁹ In November 1974 the federation sent a letter to the Secretariat of the ECE requesting that the organisation would be allowed the exclusive use of the ‘E3’ in its name. In his response, director Halbertsma of the Transport Division informed the unfortunate representatives of the federation that the number E3 was about to be assigned to a secondary branch road of the network, entirely on French territory.⁴⁰

Another outcome of the renumbering was that it punished the obedient countries that had put up the E-road signals as they were supposed to. Among the countries there were many that had not yet installed the signs or not made the E-routes visible in all of its stretches. The renumbering could hardly be considered an incentive for them to start

³⁶ The respective figures for 1960 were 20%, 11%, 29% and 25%, see table ‘Percentage of total length of E-roads classified by average daily motor traffic densities’, ECE Transport Division (1968), *Annual Bulletin of Transport Statistics for Europe*, vol.19, p.xxvii.

³⁷ Heinrich Hasskamp & Richard Vreden (1976), “Europastraßen – Hauptstraßen des internationalen Verkehrs”, in: *Strasse und Autobahn 27*: 11, pp.419-430.

³⁸ Hasskamp, VIII World Meeting

³⁹ Map ‘Europastraße 3: Pyrénées-Stockholm’; Christiansen to Möser, 21-4-1966, GIX.12.7.3.6.9002, jacket 5.

⁴⁰ Persin & De Decker to President ECE, 14-11-1974; Halbertsma to De Decker 27-11-1974, GIX.12.7.3.10.50522, jacket 1.

working. Better wait another ten years to see if more changes were to come than waste money on signs that would become worthless with the next revision.

5. *EPILOGUE*

Currently the E-network is but one among many different networks that are continental in scope. In fact the Panamerican Highway had been on the agenda ever since Pan American Road Congresses started in 1925 as part of the work of the Organisation of American States.⁴¹ A decade after the E-network had been laid down in the 1950 Declaration, the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East proposed an Asian Highway network in 1960. For obvious reasons, there was a great deal of activity with regard to how to connect this network with its European counterpart.⁴²

As for the E-network itself, it continues to change shape and expand. An ECE press release of 12 October 2001 proudly stated that as from 4 December the E-roads will reach the borders of China. The step was hailed as an “important milestone in [UNECE’s] endeavour to integrate the transport networks of its Caucasus and Central Asian member countries into European transport networks.”⁴³ This fits into a broader pattern of ever more ambitious motorway network plans that were launched after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The general feeling was that it was now finally possible to achieve the long hoped for coherence and more even distribution of the network across Europe, now including its Eastern half – and beyond. A king-size book called *Auf Allen Straßen nach Europa*, translated on the inside as ‘All Roads Lead to Europe’, catches the spirit of the time very well. This multilingual (10!) book formed ‘a joint activity by Daimler-Benz and Mercedes-Benz concerning the single European market’ and was strategically published in 1992, the year in which the European Union came into being when the Maastricht Treaty went into force. The book focuses the public’s attention on the vital importance of roads for Europe. In his ‘message of greeting’, Vice-President of the European

⁴¹ Eduardo Dibos, “The Pan-American Highway System and the Integration of Latin America”, in: ‘Documentation’, VIIth IRF World Meeting, 1973, Munich, Germany, pp.1-2.

⁴² M. Noury, “The Asian Highway”, in: ‘Documentation’, VIIth IRF World Meeting, 1973, Munich, Germany, pp.3-4; Tha Dok & Kiyoshi Sato, “Asian Highway”, in: ‘Documentation Summary’, VIIIth IRF World Meeting, 16-21 October 1977, Tokyo, Japan, p. 113. See the ‘Proposed Asian Highway Route Map’, see http://www.unece.org/trans/main/eatl/img/asia_highway_route_map.pdf to get a flavour of the current status of the network.

⁴³ Press Release “ ‘E’ Road Network Extended to Central Asia and Caucasus”, 12-10-2001, www.unece.org/press/pr2001/01trans07e.htm. The state of the E-network in Central Asia and the Caucasus is represented in a map at http://www.unece.org/trans/main/eatl/img/eatl_e-roads.pdf.

Commission Martin Bangemann already brings this to the fore by stating that “Roads are in physical terms essential links for a Europe that is growing ever closer together. (...) But roads are also mental lines linking a known starting point and a rather less certain future.”⁴⁴ In the following article “The New Europe is the Europe of Transport”⁴⁵ Prof.Dr. Willi Diez makes very clear that road arteries should be the backbone of Europe, inextricably linking the provision of adequate road transport services to the process of market integration. The opening chapter proceeds with a cacophonous collage of photographs of bridges and tunnels representing crucial connecting nodes of the European network under the title “A Clear Road across Europe”.⁴⁶ The second chapter entitled “Linked by Treaties” opens with the AGR-Agreement (1975) that reformulated the 1950 E-road network.⁴⁷ By placing these European achievements in the field of road transport upfront in a book of which the rest is mainly dedicated to European political developments, the E-network is portrayed as the harbinger of European integration.

Organisations such as the IRF seek to capitalize on the post-1989 situation as well. In 1990 the IRF launched the ‘Advanced Integrated Motorway System in Europe’ (AIMSE) project, followed five years later by EUROVIA. In these initiatives, road transport is portrayed as the ‘key to Europe’. Both proposals failed to obtain the results the IRF had hoped for, but what is important here is that the roots of such projects with regard to road transport are consistently traced back to the 1950 Declaration.⁴⁸ Such examples show that, although the expectations concerning the network when it was launched in 1950 might only have been fulfilled in part, the 1950 Declaration has a legacy that is still with us today.

⁴⁴ n.a. (1992), *Auf allen Strassen nach Europa*, Bonn: Helmuth Reuther, p.5.

⁴⁵ “Das Neue Europa ist das Europa des Transports”.

⁴⁶ This is an inadequate translation of the German original, “Freie Fahrt durch Europa”.

⁴⁷ *Auf allen Strassen nach Europa*, p.35.

⁴⁸ “AIMSE: The European Motorway Project for the Europe of Tomorrow”; “Eurovia”, pp.6, 9 (copies seen at the IRF Geneva Office).