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Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics
(Eighteenth session, 15-16 September 2005) ..

EURO ASIAN TRANSPORT LINKS

Report of the Informal meeting on Euro-Asian transport links
(15 April 2005, Geneva)

I. ATTENDANCE

1. Representatives of Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Germany, Poland, Russian Federation, Turkey, and Ukraine, as well as of UNECE TEM and TER Project offices attended the meeting. The representatives of UNESCAP and the European Commission were not able to attend. Mr. W. Zarnoch (Poland) chaired the meeting. The list of participants is attached as an annex to this report.

II. MANDATE

2. Following the support given by the Inland Transport Committee at its sixty-fifth session (ECE/TRANS/152, para. 33) and the request made by the Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics at its seventeenth session (TRANS/WP.5/36, para. 14), the secretariat convened an informal meeting aimed at studying ways in which the monitoring and coordination of the ongoing work on the development of Euro-Asian transport links in various international bodies could be most efficiently ensured, and to provide recommendations for cooperation by the involved countries, international organizations and institutions.

III. REVIEW OF RELEVANT DEVELOPMENTS OF EURO-ASIAN TRANSPORT LINKS

3. Representatives of participating national delegations briefed the meeting about the most recent activities and programmes related to further development of Euro-Asian transport links. A representative of the UNECE secretariat informed the meeting about the current state of affairs of the joint UNECE-UNESCAP Project on Developing EURO-ASIAN Transport Linkages. After two meetings of the UNDA Expert Group, the project reached a phase where individual road and rail links along corridors have been identified and prioritized for possible financing. The project is moving towards its objectives as scheduled, and the two regional commissions intend to make every possible effort to ensure continuation of the project after 2006, when this phase is expected to be completed.

4. Participants were unanimous in emphasizing the priority which they attach to the further development of Euro-Asian transport links through the territory of their respective countries. In addition, they referred to important activities taking place in major international corridors through their respective countries.

5. In the Russian Federation and Ukraine railways are viewed as particularly important in carrying large volumes of freight expected in the near future. The large capacity of railways and relatively well-developed tracks are considered as important assets in view of the expected growth of transport between Europe and Asia. In both countries, considerable efforts are being made to improve the national network and the quality of services offered to transport markets.

6. In Azerbaijan, as well as in other countries, smooth infrastructure links to neighbouring countries are considered as essential for achieving a higher level of integration along the transport corridor. Being already an important link on the Southern corridor, Turkey is also joining countries already involved in the development of the North-South Euro-Asian transport corridor. A number of projects are currently under way in Turkey aimed at completing the missing links on the main axes used for international traffic and the removal of bottlenecks, such as the East Black Sea coastal road, Istanbul Strait tube crossing project, rehabilitation of Ankara-Istanbul railway, etc.

7. In Poland, in addition to the continuous development of sections of the main road and rail transport arteries running East-West across the territory of the country, a project aimed at using the existing wide gauge rail line towards Ukraine and the potentially significant shunting capacity at Slavkov rail nod are being promoted and developed to enhance the transport capacity of Poland and to offer it to the international transport market as an interface station between Western Europe and Asia. Germany, for its part, is actively supporting the development of Pan-European Corridors II and III, inter alia, by having set up permanent secretariats for both corridors, thus contributing to the development of two major links to Euro-Asian Transport corridors. In almost all countries, national transport plans are being developed or have already been adopted, as in Bulgaria, with a particular emphasis on the need for further integration of national transport infrastructures into the Pan-European and Euro-Asian transport networks.

8. Considering the number of multilateral, regional, bilateral as well as national initiatives and programmes aimed at the development of Euro-Asian transport links, carried out by a large number of actors at both international and national level, the meeting reiterated the need for closer coordination and monitoring of future activities related to the development of Euro-Asian transport links.

9. Noting the work within the UNECE Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics on the development of Euro-Asian transport links so far, the ongoing UNDA project on the development of Euro-Asian transport links jointly carried out by UNECE and UNESCAP, the UNECE TER and TEM Master plan, as well as the ongoing work of the European Commission High Level Group (HLG) on developing transport axes between the enlarged European Union and neighbouring countries, the informal meeting ***recommends to the Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics:***

- to reiterate its support to the Euro-Asian transport linkages project, jointly implemented by UNECE and UNESCAP (2003-2006), and ask the two secretariats to prepare a joint proposal for the continuation of the project in the new phase beyond 2006, and appeal to international financial institutions and donors to consider co-funding its implementation;
 - to organize a workshop “***Euro-Asian transport links – Feedback from users***”, during its next session in September 2005, in order to improve the information flow from the users of transport infrastructure and services along the Euro-Asian transport corridors and Governments responsible for their future development;
 - to focus its activities on those related to the development of Euro-Asian transport links within its Programme of Work;
 - in order to ensure efficient coordination and monitoring of activities related to Euro-Asian transport links, to propose that the Expert Group of the UNDA Project, in close relationship with the Working Party, act as a permanent mechanism;
 - to ask the UNECE TEM and TER Projects to share their accumulated experiences in working on the development of transport infrastructures with other countries in the Euro-Asian region, and to consider contributing to the development of Euro-Asian transport links in agreement with their Master Plans.
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