

Distr.: Restricted
30 October 2012

English only

Working Party on Rail Transport

Sixty-sixth session

Geneva, 8–9 November 2012

Item 7 of the provisional agenda

Euro-Asian rail transport

Euro-Asian Inland Transport Links

Overview of activities

Note by the secretariat*

I. Background

1. Globalization of the economies and trade has led to significant increases in trade and transport between Asia and Europe. Following the slowdown of international trade in 2008 and 2009 as a result of the economic crisis, the trade between Europe and Asia is expected to resume growth. While most of the traffic has used – increasingly congested - maritime routes, further development of efficient and integrated inland transport routes would provide credible and competitive additional transport options. Once established, these routes could become an effective tool for the economic development and integration of the Euro-Asian region, including facilitating greater participation in the globalization process by Central Asia's landlocked countries.

2. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) extended its road and rail infrastructure network agreements in 2000 and 2002 respectively in order to include the Caucasus and Central Asian links. However, these agreements do not foresee

* The Inland Transport Committee (ITC) at its seventieth session (19–21 February 2008) agreed to establish a Group of Experts on Euro-Asian Transport Links, adopted its terms of reference and asked that the results of the Group be reported to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics and to the ITC (ECE/TRANS/200, para. 30, and its Annex III, para. 8). During ITC's seventy-second session on 23–25 February 2010, the Committee approved the extension of the mandate of the EATL Group of Experts by two years until February 2012. This decision was endorsed at the Meeting of the Executive Committee on 31 March 2010. The following report is a partial fulfilment of the reporting requirement requested by the ITC.

priorities or time limits, let alone financial means. The links are to be developed by the governments concerned, which often lack sufficient funds to cover their large needs.

3. In order to promote the development of Euro-Asian transport links, UNECE and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) developed a common strategic vision for the development of Euro-Asian links. At its fourteenth session in 2001, the Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics (WP.5) adopted the Common ECE/ESCAP Strategic Vision for Euro-Asian Transport Links. This document, endorsed by the Inland Transport Committee (ITC) in 2002, took into account the findings of the Second International Euro-Asian Conference on Transport (St. Petersburg, 2001) and was a first milestone in the work of the two United Nations regional commissions on Euro-Asian transport links.

II. Euro-Asian Inland Transport links Project – Phase I (2003–2007)

4. The greatest progress has been made since 2003 when, with funds from a United Nations Development Account Project, the UNECE and UNESCAP secretariats together with designated national focal points from eighteen countries in the Euro-Asian region promoted cooperation among the countries most directly concerned in the framework of the Euro-Asian Transport Linkages Project (EATL). The following countries were invited to participate: Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, China, Georgia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Turkey, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. In 2004, Greece expressed the wish to be associated with activities of the project. At the Ministerial Meeting on Euro-Asian Transport Links in Geneva on 19 February 2008, Mongolia joined the project by signing the joint declaration.

5. In four Expert Group Meetings that took place in Almaty (March 2004, Kazakhstan), Odessa (November 2004, Ukraine), Istanbul (June 2005, Turkey) and Thessaloniki (November 2006, Greece) government representatives from the participating countries identified the main Euro-Asian rail, road and inland waterway routes to be considered for priority development, and the main transshipment points along these routes.

6. Country experts provided a huge amount of data for the creation of a Geographic Information System (GIS) database and related maps that were used by the project. This included data on technical characteristics and performances of the main rail, road and inland water transport infrastructure, borders crossing points, ferryboat links, intermodal terminals and ports along the Euro-Asian routes. This work has been made available for participating countries and constitutes a basic tool for future efforts aimed at developing efficient, safe and secure Euro-Asian transport links.

7. The government representatives also agreed on a common methodology, developed by the external consultant, similar to that used in the Trans-European Motorways (TEM) and Trans-European Railway (TER) Master Plan, for the evaluation and prioritization of projects along the selected routes. On the basis of the agreed methodology and national proposals submitted by 15 countries, 230 transport investment projects, of an estimated total cost of over 43 billion United States dollars, were evaluated and prioritised. About one-half of the projects had secured financing and were likely to be implemented in the short term period for the purpose of the related analysis (by year 2010).

8. EATL Phase I identified 92 road projects (82.1 per cent) in Category I (high importance), with an estimated value of US\$ 10,275 billion, representing 80.7 per cent of the total investment cost for road projects.

9. Non-physical obstacles, which constitute a major barrier to Euro-Asian transport, have also been addressed in the context of this project. Capacity-building national workshops on facilitation of international transport and trade were organized in the framework of the EATL project in six participating countries: Azerbaijan (May 2006), Belarus (May 2007), Georgia (May 2006), Kyrgyzstan (December 2006), Republic of Moldova (November 2007) and Ukraine (December 2007). Workshop participants included government officials and business sector representatives from the beneficiary countries.

10. The published in-house study, elaborated jointly by UNECE and UNESCAP, describes the routes and projects that have been identified and considers the status and problems of international transport along the Euro-Asian land bridge. It shows that a successful development of the EATL network depends on intergovernmental cooperation that is necessary to address technical and operational issues, as well as non-physical obstacles to efficient transit and border clearance. The study also presents specific recommendations on infrastructure development, facilitation and policy. The English and Russian language versions of the study are available free of charge at the UNECE website: www.unece.org/trans/main/eatl/in_house_study.pdf.

11. Government representatives have identified priority areas for future work, including: monitoring of implementation of the identified priority projects; removing non-physical obstacles to transit transport; improving the performance of border-crossing facilities; promoting harmonization of transport legislation; and promoting best practices and sharing of know-how.

12. The project outputs, as described above, also provided a solid basis for continued international cooperation towards this end. ITC and WP.5, as well as the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) Project Working Group on Transport and Border Crossing and other stakeholders have repeatedly stressed the project's relevance for UNECE member countries. The Work Plan on UNECE Reform, inter alia, invited the ITC to submit proposals to the Executive Committee on ways and means to strengthen Euro-Asian transport links (E/ECE/1434/Rev.1).

13. During the seventieth session of the ITC, held in Geneva 19–21 February 2008, Ministers of Transport and high level officials from countries in the Euro-Asian region, signed a Joint Statement on Future Development of the EATL Project, by which they confirmed their support for continued cooperation, endorsed the identified Euro-Asian routes and their priority developments, supported establishing an adequate mechanism to ensure continued monitoring of the follow-up of the project. They also invited Governments, international organizations and potential donors to consider providing the required financial assistance to ensure implementation of the EATL Project Phase II (2008–2011): www.unece.org/trans/MinisterialITC70/index.html.

II. Euro-Asian Inland Transport links Project – Phase II (2008–2012)

14. In 2006, the ITC had asked the secretariat to present, together with UNESCAP, a joint proposal that would ensure the continuation of the project in a new Phase II.

15. During the panel discussion on “Secure transport development: a key to regional cooperation”, held on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary session of the UNECE Commission in 2007, the usefulness of the inter-country cooperation promoted by UNECE jointly with UNESCAP under the EATL Project was stressed. The panel agreed that this work needs to be strengthened and practical steps ought to be taken to facilitate further developing the priority transport links and projects that had been identified under the EATL Project.

16. In early 2008, UNECE began establishing an institutional structure to make further EATL work possible. At its seventy-first session, 19–21 February 2008, the Inland Transport Committee agreed to establish a Group of Experts on Euro-Asian Transport Links and adopted its terms of reference. The primary objective of the Expert Group is to ensure monitoring and coordination of the activities related to developing efficient, safe and secure Euro-Asian inland transport links. Its duration was set for two years with a possibility of extension. UNECE invited governments to nominate National Focal Points, who would actively contribute to the work of the EATL Group of Experts and the EATL Phase II. Related international organizations and international financial institutions (IFIs) were also invited to take an active role in the work.

17. Seven Expert Group (EG) meetings have been organized under EATL Phase II. UNECE hosted the three of them (the first, second and fourth) in Geneva, in September 2008, 2009 and 2010, respectively. The third meeting of the group was held in Istanbul (November 2009, Turkey), back-to-back with an interregional workshop on developing EATL, hosted by the Ministry of Transport and Communications of Turkey and the Organization of Black Sea Economic Cooperation. A subregional workshop was also organized under the EATL project in Tehran, in May 2009, together with the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). The fifth EG meeting took place in Tashkent (November 2010). The sixth EG meeting was coorganized with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Almaty (July 2011, Kazakhstan), while the Ministry of Transport of the Russian Federation kindly hosted the seventh EG meeting in Astrakhan (October 2011, Russian Federation).

18. During these meetings the national focal points from 27 participating countries set the basis for developing EATL Phase II. Government experts agreed on the specific tasks and expected accomplishments of the project: the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis to the Euro-Asian inland transport routes; on the basic data that needs to be collected and processed; and on the basic methodological aspects of the work. They also agreed on the studies to be elaborated with the support of external consultants and country inputs on the transport flows and statistics, the comparison of inland transport options with those of existing maritime routes and on the analysis of non-physical obstacles to international transport along the EATL routes. Questionnaires have been developed, sent out to over 1,000 operators in the EATL region and replies were collected and analysed. The EG finalised its report for Phase II of the EATL project. The publication of the report is expected before the end of 2012.

19. The EG identified in its Phase II report:

- 421 projects proposed – total cost US\$ 274 billion;
- 311 projects along EATL routes with US\$ 215 billion cost; and
- 110 projects of national importance.

20. The Phase II analysis also referred to the Category I (high importance) road projects that had been identified in Phase I. It was found that the following were completed in each country:

Armenia: 4

Azerbaijan: 3

Belarus: 3

Bulgaria: 12

China: 3

Georgia: 4

Iran (Islamic Republic of): 26

Kazakhstan: 14

Kyrgyzstan: 6

Turkey: 5

Uzbekistan: 3

A total of 83 (90 per cent) road projects were completed.

21. EATL Phase II identified 85 road projects (57 per cent) that belong to Category I, with an estimated value of US\$ 28.8 billion, representing 25 per cent of the total investment cost for road projects.

22. In addition, the UNECE collected and processed a large volume of GIS data. The GIS application was tested and finalised. It is freely available at: <http://apps.unece.org/eatl>.

23. Analytical work on non-physical obstacles to transport along the EATL routes, based on questionnaires and expert analysis identified problems, which include: long waiting times at border crossing points (sometimes a whole day), while few work 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. There are also long delays for veterinary, phyto-sanitary, passport, transit, visa and other controls.

24. The SWOT study provided useful analysis by identifying the strong and weak points of the EATL inland transport. The analysis has confirmed the need to enhance coordination and cooperation among all EATL countries; the need to coordinate development of priority transport infrastructure, as well as to intensify efforts to facilitate transport and transit.

25. A comparison study of existing Euro-Asian maritime routes with selected rail routes provided interesting results. In five out of the nine scenarios considered, rail transport performs better than maritime for both the cost and time dimensions. In all nine scenarios, rail transport performs better than maritime concerning the travelling time. Therefore, successful and competitive rail services along the Euro-Asian transport links is not a myth or a distant future option. The study showed that competitive Euro-Asian rail transport, and its combination with that of maritime and road transport is feasible.

26. The EATL Phase II project achieved the following key results:

- Identified major road, rail and inland water routes as extensions of existing EATL Phase I routes considered for priority development, including new ones in the territory of the newly Phase II participating countries (Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mongolia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia).
- Identified a number of key container depots, intermodal terminals and ports along the selected routes.
- Assessed the status of implementing projects identified under EATL Phase I.
- Developed a new infrastructure investment plan by prioritizing 311 investment projects of total cost of approximately US\$ 215 billion.
- Updated and expanded the comprehensive GIS database from EATL Phase I with new GIS maps prepared for the EATL region and each participating country involved and made it available on the Internet.
- Reviewed the international transport networks and initiatives linking Asia and Europe.
- Reviewed Euro-Asian transport flows, statistics and trends.

- Elaborated a SWOT analysis specifying the strong and weak points of the EATL land transport links, the potential for their further development, as well as the related threats.
- Elaborated a comparison study of Euro-Asian maritime routes with selected rail routes, showing that in most cases — under certain conditions — rail transport performs better than maritime in terms of both cost and time.
- Identified non-physical obstacles to transport along the Euro-Asian Transport routes, with one thousand questionnaires sent to EATL road, rail and combined transport operators, supply chains managers, forwarders and important shippers seeking inputs on existing problems and potential solutions along the EATL routes used.
- Compared existing Euro-Asian maritime routes with selected rail routes identified in the EATL project.
- Maintained the coordinating mechanism in the form of the Group of Experts appointed by participating Governments.
- Provided recommendations on three strategic areas of action, that is, infrastructure, facilitation and policies.
- Drafted country reports for each participating country detailing current conditions on transport infrastructure, as well as national transport plans.

27. In parallel with the EATL project, UNECE Governments and the industry are taking steps and developing initiatives toward further facilitating international transport. Following the introduction of Annex 8 on facilitation of road border crossings that entered into force in 2008, the Administrative Committee for the International Convention on the Harmonization of Frontier Control of Goods¹ adopted the amendment proposal on introducing a new Annex 9 on rail border crossing to the Harmonization Convention. Following the legal procedure, Annex 9 entered into force on 30 November 2011.

28. Moreover, during the Tehran, Istanbul (Turkey) and Turkmenbashi (Turkmenistan) events, experts from participating governments and international organizations discussed the most recent developments on transport infrastructure and facilitation in the UNECE and the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) regions and on specific projects. In addition, they reviewed related national experiences along the Euro-Asian Links and dealt with other issues of implementing various tasks under the projects. Holding these events in partnership with UNECE, BSEC and OSCE, offered the opportunity to explore further interaction and synergy with the work being developed under their auspices.

29. The National Focal Points of the EATL countries present at the third session of the EATL Expert Group and Inter-Regional Workshop, requested the secretariat to address official invitations to the Governments of India, Japan and the Republic of Korea to take part in the EATL Project and noted that collaboration and synergy between the UNECE TEM and TER Projects and the EATL work need to be further explored. Those countries are aware of the EATL activities, and are invited to the appropriate meetings.

30. The EATL Phase II has been funded by the Government of the Russian Federation in the period 2009–2012. Without this funding, it would have been impossible to achieve any progress in following up the results and recommendations of Phase I. Expectations are that this generous funding would continue in the future as the mandate of the EG was

¹ www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trans/conventn/harmonie.pdf,
live.unece.org/trans/conventn/legalinst.html#rts

extended for the period 2012–2013 by the WP.5 at its twenty-fourth session on 6–7 September 2011 and approved by the ITC in February 2012.

31. The second EATL Ministerial Meeting will take place on 26 February 2013 in Geneva. This Meeting would consider and approve work done during the EATL Phase II and confirm a strong political commitment to and impetus for activities in Phase III.

32. The secretariat is in talks with the governments of Armenia and Tajikistan to organize the EG sessions in these countries in the future, subject to approval from the respective governments and available resources.

IV. Conclusions

33. The inter-country cooperation under the EATL Project promoted by the UNECE, encourages cooperation among 27 countries along the Euro-Asian land bridge for the coordinated development of Euro-Asian inland transport links. The project has so far produced country-demanded, tangible results and proposals for the development and operation of safe, secure and efficient Euro-Asian transport solutions addressing both physical and non-physical obstacles to transport. Results include an investment strategy for developing 311 identified priority transport infrastructure projects along the main Euro-Asian routes of a total cost of US\$ 215 billion, together with analysis of non-physical obstacles to transport, elaboration of focused studies, development of a GIS data base and related applications, as well as policy recommendations. The Group is implementing a focused work plan, including studies and analyses, promoting transport infrastructure and facilitation initiatives and actions, organizing meetings and capacity-building events.

34. Notwithstanding the value of the results achieved, there are also many challenges ahead. The work done so far has made it clear that the real development potential of EATL inland transport connections lies in the following dimensions:

- the capacity to become a part of the main supply chains including a combination of various transport modes that complement each other;
- in focusing on facilitation, efficiency, reliability and cost/time-reducing transportation measures;
- in facilitating reforms that need to be undertaken in the EATL transition economies; and
- in assisting landlocked EATL developing countries to enter strongly in the EATL routes, since a weak part or a missing link in one country can render a whole EATL route economically unviable for international transport.

35. It is, therefore, evident that developing Euro Asian inland transport links would be a long-term undertaking, requiring a great deal of effort and perseverance, and enhanced coordination and cooperation among all countries along the EATL.

36. Issues that ask for attention, analysis and development in the future EATL Phase III include the coverage of the following issues and areas:

- Update and/or complete data related to EATL Phase II proposed projects.
- Updating data concerning EATL projects funding securitisation.
- Involvement of new countries in the study.
- Identification of new extensions on proposed EATL routes, as well as new infrastructure projects.

- Identification of service provision along proposed EATL routes and intermodal transit nodes.
- Building of an EATL observatory.
- Create synergies with/ and integrate results of related programmes.
- Review of border crossing issues and obstacles and transport facilitation and related technical and institutional actions.

37. Information on the EATL activities is available at:
www.unece.org/trans/main/eatl.html?expandable=99

Annex I

EATL Countries

<i>All countries involved in EATL Phase II</i>		<i>Phase I (2002–2007)</i>	<i>Phase II (2008–2012)</i>
1.	Afghanistan	1.	Afghanistan
2.	Armenia	2.	Armenia
3.	Azerbaijan	3.	Azerbaijan
4.	Belarus	4.	Belarus
5.	Bulgaria	5.	Bulgaria
6.	China	6.	China
7.	Finland	7.	Georgia
8.	Georgia	8.	Iran (Islamic Republic of)
9.	Germany	9.	Kazakhstan
10.	Greece	10.	Kyrgyzstan
11.	Iran (Islamic Republic of)	11.	Republic of Moldova
12.	Kazakhstan	12.	Romania
13.	Kyrgyzstan	13.	Russian Federation
14.	Latvia	14.	Tajikistan
15.	Lithuania	15.	Turkey
16.	Luxembourg	16.	Turkmenistan
17.	Mongolia	17.	Ukraine
18.	Pakistan	18.	Uzbekistan
19.	Republic of Moldova		
20.	Romania		
21.	Russian Federation		
22.	Tajikistan		
23.	The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia		
24.	Turkey		
25.	Turkmenistan		
26.	Ukraine		
27.	Uzbekistan		

Annex II

EATL meetings 2003–2011

<i>Year</i>	<i>Meeting and venue</i>	<i>No. of participants</i>
2004	1st Expert Group Meeting on Developing Euro-Asian Transport Linkages (Almaty Kazakhstan, 2004)	70 (16 countries)
	2nd Expert Group Meeting on Developing Euro-Asian Transport Linkages (Odessa, Ukraine, 3–5 November 2004)	32 (18 countries)
2005	3rd Expert Group Meeting on Developing Euro-Asian Transport Linkages (Istanbul, Turkey, 27–29 June 2005)	37 (18 countries)
	Rabat, Morocco, 8–10 December 2005	42 (15 countries)
	Amman, 30 May–1 June 2005	36 (9 countries)
2006	4th Expert Group Meeting on Developing Euro-Asian Transport Linkages (Thessaloniki, Greece, 21–24 November 2006)	35 (11 countries)
	National Workshop (Baku, Azerbaijan, 11–12 May 2006)	22 (1)
	National Workshop (Tbilisi, Georgia, 15–16 May 2006)	44 (1)
	National Workshop (Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 12–13 December 2006)	32 (1)
2007	Capacity Building through Cooperation in Developing Land and Land -Sea Interregional Transport Linkages (Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, 23–25 October 2007)	65
	UNECE National Workshop on the Facilitation of Interregional Transport along the Euro-Asian Transport Links (Chisinau, Moldova, 6–7 November 2007)	50 (1)
	Enhancing National Capacity for the Facilitation of Interregional Transport along the Euro-Asian Transport Links (Kyiv, 17–18 December 2007)	64 (1)
	Barcelona, 4–5 October 2007	22 (11 countries)
	Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, 23–25 October 2007	65 (18 countries)
	National Workshop (Minsk, 30–31 May 2007)	500 (1)
	Grand Tibarose Hotel, Cairo, Egypt, 26–28 June 2007	60 (13 countries)
2008	Ministerial Meeting (Geneva, 19 February 2008)	200 (22 countries)
	Group of Experts on Euro-Asian Transport Links (WP.5/GE.2), 1st session (Geneva, 8 September 2008)	48 (22 countries)
2009	First regional workshop (Tehran, 27–29 April 2009)	67 (10 countries)
	Group of Experts on Euro-Asian Transport Links (WP.5/GE.2), 2nd session (Geneva, 7 September 2009)	38 (19 countries)
	Group of Experts on Euro-Asian Transport Links (WP.5/GE.2), 3rd session (Istanbul, 11–13 November 2009)	67 (19 countries)

Informal document SC.2 No. 2 (2012)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Meeting and venue</i>	<i>No. of participants</i>
2010	Group of Experts on Euro-Asian Transport Links (WP.5/GE.2), 4th session (Geneva, 6 September 2010)	49 (13 countries)
	Group of Experts on Euro-Asian Transport Links (WP.5/GE.2), 5th session (Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 1–3 November 2010)	58 (8 countries)
	2nd Inter-Regional Workshop (Turkmenbashy, Turkmenistan, 7–8 December 2010)	47 (12 countries)
2011	Group of Experts on Euro-Asian Transport Links (WP.5/GE.2), 6th session (Almaty, Kazakhstan, 5–7 July 2011)	50 (11 countries)
	Group of Experts on Euro-Asian Transport Links (WP.5/GE.2), 7th session (Astrakhan, Russian Federation, 24–25 October 2011)	31 (9 countries)

Annex III

EATL project meetings statistics

<i>Number</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2005</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2007</i>	<i>2008</i>	<i>2009</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>2011</i>	<i>Total</i>
Meetings	2	3	4	7	2	3	3	2	26
Participants	102	115	133	826	248	172	154	81	1831
Countries ^a	34	42	14	~50	44	48	33	20	285

a The number of the countries gives the total of countries which participated in each meeting.

Annex IV



UNECE Euro-Asian Links Project Phase II Road Routes



Euro-Asian Transport Links (EATL) Phase II Inland Water Transport and Inland Ports

