
Project Working Group on Transport and Border Crossing (PWG-TBC)

12th session
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Dushanbe, Tajikistan

**BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRESS OF THE UNECE-UNESCAP
EURO-ASIAN TRANSPORT LINKAGES PROJECT**

(Item 4 c(ii) of the Agenda)

Note by UNECE

1. One of the key objectives of the project is to assist Member States of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) to develop efficient, safe, sustainable and secure Euro-Asian land and land-cum-sea transport links and foster cooperation in the field of transport to facilitate interregional trade and tourism between Europe and Asia. Globalization and liberalization of national economies has led to a sharp increase in trade and transport between Asia and Europe in recent years. Most of the traffic has so far been following maritime routes. However, the development of efficient Euro-Asian inland transport routes would provide credible alternatives, as well as the opportunity for participation in the globalization process with improved market access for the concerned landlocked countries and areas that lie along the routes and. These routes would also be a major strategic tool for the development and integration of countries in the Euro-Asian region. Economic development of the landlocked countries along the Euro-Asian transport routes has been constrained by inadequate transport infrastructure, cumbersome and time-consuming border procedures and transport legislation that differ from one country to another.

2. To address these obstacles, the UNECE and UNESCAP invited the Governments of 18 countries in the Euro-Asian region to participate in the project 'Capacity Building through Cooperation in Developing Inter-Regional Land and Land-cum-Sea Transport Linkages,' implemented jointly by all the UN regional commissions and funded by the UN Development Account over the period 2002-2006. In the Euro-Asian Region the Project has aimed to strengthen national capacities for developing Europe-Asia transport links and promote cooperation in the field of transport to facilitate interregional trade and tourism. The countries participating in the project include Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, China, Georgia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkey, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

3. So far, the project has achieved tangible results. These include the identification of the main Euro-Asian road, rail, inland water transport routes and transshipment points; analysis of the main physical and non-physical obstacles along the selected routes (ongoing); evaluation and prioritization of infrastructure projects on the basis of an agreed methodology; collection and processing of a large volume of technical and operational data using Geographic Information System (GIS); creation of a GIS database and relevant GIS maps; organization of a number advisory workshops and interregional meetings dealing with transport infrastructure and facilitation issues; and the elaboration of an in-house study. These achievements are considered as a solid basis for continued cooperation for the development of Euro-Asian transport linkages among the countries involved. There is also the prospect of extending the geographic scope of the project and involving more countries from Europe and Asia. The financing by the UN Development Fund has been extended until the end of 2007 and the project would come to its close at that time. It is however clear that much work is yet to be done and it is necessary to maintain the momentum created by the project activities and continue the cooperation between countries bordering Europe and Asia over a long time period.

4. At its 69th session, held in Geneva 6-8 February 2007, the UNECE Inland Transport Committee, expressed its support for the continuation of the project in a new Phase II (2007-2010) and invited Governments, international organizations and potential donors to consider providing the financial assistance requested by the UNECE-UNESCAP project secretariat. At its 11th session, held in Almaty on 29-30 March 2006, the SPECA Working Group of Transport and Border Crossing Facilitation expressed similar support for the continuation of the project.

6. The Government of Greece hosted kindly the 4th EGM in Thessaloniki (21-24 November 2006). The Meeting was attended by national focal points and experts from 12 Euro-Asian countries as well as representatives of the EU, UNECE, UNESCAP, IRU and the business sector. The participants endorsed the outcomes of the first stage of the project, including the specification of mutually agreed Euro-Asian routes, transshipment facilities and border-crossing points. National Focal Points of the participating countries reviewed the work done, discussed measures to facilitate transport and made recommendations on the best use of the results and experience from the implementation of the project as well as the priority areas for the future work. The main findings, key data and policy recommendations will be incorporated in the ECE-ESCAP in-house study that should be published in the first half of 2007.

7. Other project-related activities focussed on the identification of non-physical bottlenecks and facilitating the smooth movement of goods through border crossings along selected routes. The UNECE and UNESCAP provided the technical assistance necessary to establish or strengthen national facilitation bodies, particularly National Transport and Trade Facilitation Committees (NTTFC) in Azerbaijan, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan. National workshops and advisory service missions were undertaken during 2006 in these countries. On the whole, the capacities of more than 110 national officers and representatives from the private sector in the countries involved in the project were strengthened through their active participation in these national workshops on facilitating international transport along the Euro-Asian transport links.

8. As the time period for the utilization of the project funds provided by the UN Development Account has been extended to the end of 2007, this would permit the organization of further national transport facilitation workshops. It is proposed that national workshops under the project be organized in the following countries, subject to their agreement: Armenia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan (ECE-ESCAP), Belarus, Moldova (ECE), Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan (ESCAP).

9. In view of the promising results and the request of participating countries for the continuation of the project in a new phase, UNECE and UNESCAP have asked the OSCE to finance the second phase of the project, the implementation of which would ensure amongst other activities the establishment of a coordination and monitoring mechanism for the development of the Euro-Asian transport links. The amount requested is US\$ 610,000. The second phase of the project would be carried over the period 2008-2010. The activities proposed include:

- (a) Setting up the appropriate mechanisms for ensuring coordination and monitoring of the development of the Euro-Asian transport links as well as active involvement and cooperation of the countries and other bodies concerned;
- (b) Further assessment and prioritization of transport infrastructure projects along the main Euro-Asian transport links;
- (c) Further development and regular updating of the Geographic Information System (GIS) database established during the initial project phase, aiming to improve the coordination and monitoring of the development of the Euro-Asian transport links;
- (d) Promotion of further harmonization of transport legislation and administrative procedures for the rapid development of viable freight and passenger services along the main Euro-Asian transport routes;
- (e) Strengthening the capacities of national officials dealing with border crossing formalities and procedures;
- (f) Improving the performance of border crossing operations along the Euro-Asian transport links;
- (g) Preparing recommendations for further actions based on the lessons learned;
- (h) Disseminating widely relevant information.

10. OSCE has not committed any funds to date to finance the second phase of the Euro-Asian project. Unless the financing can be found soon, the project activities will have to be terminated at the end of 2007.

Issues for consideration

The Project Working Group may wish to consider the following recommendations:

- (a) Welcome the progress of the UNECE-UNESCAP joint project on developing Euro-Asian transport links.
- (b) Request the UNECE-UNESCAP secretariats to:
 - continue their efforts to secure extra-budgetary funds for the proposed extension (Phase II) of this important project.

- utilize the most appropriate framework to ensure the efficient coordination and monitoring of activities related to the Euro-Asian Transport Linkages project on the basis of the Expert Group Meetings established under the project.
- (c) Request the Ministry of Transport and Communications of Kazakhstan (as the lead SPECA country in the field of transport), on behalf of the SPECA PWG-TBC, to address an official letter to the European Commission EuropeAid, confirming the importance of the project to the SPECA countries and supporting UNECE's request to consider possible funding for new phase of the project.
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