



CONCEPT NOTE

Consultations on the next steps in the operationalization of Euro-Asian transport corridors

26 November 2020 - 10h00-13h30

Zoom WebPlatform (English/ Russian)

I. BACKGROUND

Over the past decade, Governments and the private sector in the Euro-Asian region have continuously worked on addressing the remaining physical and non-physical inter-operability obstacles to international transport. In doing so, Euro-Asian countries have benefited significantly from accession to and ratification of regional and international conventions and agreements administered by ECE that form the basis of regulatory governance for safe, efficient, socially inclusive and environmentally sound mobility and interregional/regional connectivity by inland transport, including road, rail, inland waterway and intermodal transport. This in turn has produced good results with railway container volumes increased by almost 30 per cent year over year to 324,700 TEU in 2018, the number of container block trains between Europe and Asia witnessed a massive increase as well and their transit time was reduced by 50 per cent and more. In order to keep this momentum and untap its full potential the Euro-Asian inland transport sector requires more and better managed, economically viable and multi-modal transport corridors.

For almost two decades the UNECE has been providing support for the development and operationalisation of inland transport connections between Europe and Asia through the implementation of its transport infrastructure flagship initiative, the Euro-Asian Transport Links (EATL) project, Phase I (2002–2007), Phase II (2008–2012) and Phase III (2013–2017).

From Phase II onwards, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has been a loyal partner in this endeavour. Phase III gathered 38 countries from Europe and Asia, including not only many EU member States but also landlocked developing countries in Central Asia and the South Caucasus as well as countries in Asia such as Afghanistan, China, Mongolia and Pakistan.

The number of member States participating in the project has been increasing over the years. Participating countries in Phase III included: Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, China, Croatia, Cyprus, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Mongolia, Pakistan, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Spain, Tajikistan, the Republic of North Macedonia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan.

The EATL Phase III report, officially launched at the 81st session of the UNECE Inland Transport Committee (February 2019), suggests that while the Euro-Asian corridors are operational, they would benefit from further operationalization efforts to make them truly competitive for the intercontinental transport of high-value and time sensitive cargo. At the same time the report also noted that several remaining obstacles would need to be tackled effectively and collectively involving all relevant public and private sector stakeholders, including infrastructural gaps as well as administrative/ regulatory challenges in order to make the corridors meet the requirements of modern supply chains. The report emphasises that this is only possible through collective corridor-based action, with participation by all countries concerned, ultimately, the performance of a transport corridor is only as strong as its weakest link.

II. TARGET AUDIENCE

These virtual consultations will gather Government officials from the 38 EATL countries engaged in transport corridor management, including representatives of Ministries of transport, trade, customs and border management authorities as well as infrastructure managers and operators. Private sector practitioners determining and managing freight flows and independent corridor management experts, researchers and academia will be invited too. Participation is open to experts from across the entire OSCE-UNECE region and beyond.

III. OBJECTIVE OF THE CONSULTATIONS

The consultations are being held as part of a series of events organized jointly by the UNECE Sustainable Transport Division and the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA)/ OSCE Secretariat. They are in full accordance with the OCEEA's and UNECE's joint efforts aimed at promoting connectivity by assisting their respective memberships with the development of secure and facilitated Euro-Asian transport and trade operations.

In particular, the consultations aim to:

- Provide a platform for inter-governmental dialogue on remaining challenges for more effective Euro-Asian inland transport connectivity.
- Take stock of the existing inter-governmental/ public-private sector stakeholder coordination mechanisms in the region and explore whether there is scope to improve/ expand/ strengthen those.
- Explore whether at regional/ sub-regional levels Governments in the region are ready to strengthen corridor-based action and identify practical means to do so incl. through

the setting up of appropriate, corridor-wide agreed interoperability priorities and operational targets, developing corridor work plans, creating conducive conditions for the attraction of additional cargo flows and specific commodity types etc.