



United Nations

# UNECE Weekly

Economic Commission for Europe

Issue N° 214 – 19-23 March 2007

## Poor rail infrastructure constrains the development of intermodal transport

International transport of containers and lorries by railways increased by 15% in many UNECE countries in 2006, thus contributing to reducing the impact of transportation on the environment and helping to relieve the often-saturated road networks.

However, during the meeting of the UNECE Working Party on Intermodal Transport and

Rail and terminal infrastructures, rolling stock and service quality therefore need to be upgraded rapidly by Governments, rail and intermodal transport operators in line with the standards agreed upon in the AGTC Agreement\* and the benchmarks developed by the Working Party in its model action plans and public-private partnership agreements.



Work will continue on a “peer review” requested by the Government of Turkey; the Working Party believes a peer review could be a useful tool to assist UNECE member countries in effective transport policymaking, the adoption of best practices and compliance with international standards.

The review work will be carried out within the framework of the European Conference of Ministers of Transport (ECMT)

with the results of the first peer review for Turkey available in summer 2007.

Logistics, held last week, experts warned that increasing international intermodal transport will lead to serious rail capacity problems on important European North-South, as well as on East-West railway lines. As a result, rail service quality already has and will continue to decline, with delays remaining frequent (only 53% of intermodal transport trains arrived on time in 2006 - i.e. with a delay of less than three hours).

\*AGTC: European Agreement on Important International Combined Transport Lines and Related Installations

For more information contact José Capel Ferrer or Martin Magold ([WP.24@unece.org](mailto:WP.24@unece.org)).

## Training on census questionnaires

UNECE Training Workshop on Census Questionnaires in SPECA member countries

UNECE is organizing a series of workshops in the framework of the Development Account Project aimed at improving the capacity of National Statistical Institutes of SPECA\* member countries by training country experts to successfully conduct the next population and housing census of the 2010 round.



The third such workshop was held in Dushanbe on 12-16 March in cooperation with the State Committee on Statistics of Tajikistan. Participants, who included Census Directors and other census staff, were introduced to the best practices on Census Questionnaire Design, based on the new Conference of European Statisticians (CES) Recommendations for the 2010 Censuses. Special emphasis was given to census questions on migration, and the preparation of the census work plan and budget were also covered.

For more information contact Angela Me ([angela.me@unece.org](mailto:angela.me@unece.org)) or Paolo Valente ([paolo.valente@unece.org](mailto:paolo.valente@unece.org)).

## Latvia joins UNECE combined transport Agreement

On 1 March 2007 Latvia acceded to the European Agreement on Important International Combined Transport Lines and Related Installations (AGTC), bringing the total number of Contracting Parties to that agreement to 30. The Agreement will enter into force for Latvia on 30 May 2007.

The AGTC Agreement provides a legal framework for the coordinated development of international combined road/rail transport infrastructure and services at the Pan-European level, with a view to facilitating international transport in the region.

With growing international trade, international transport of goods, and in particular road transport, is increasing rapidly, increasing congestion along main international road corridors and impacting on the environment. By combining different modes of transport, using rail for the main haul and road for collection and distribution only, such impacts can be reduced and the burden on the European road network alleviated.



(continued)

The agreement, which was concluded in 1991, has undergone several amendments that have updated and consolidated it over the years. At present, work is under way to extend the AGTC network to the Baltic region, Central Asia and the Caucasus. The UNECE Working Party on Intermodal Transport and Logistics, which administers the AGTC, recently launched a web tool providing online access to information on the implementation of the AGTC Agreement in its 30 Contracting States: <http://unece.org.ch/wp24/agtc.aspx>

For more information contact José Capel Ferrer or Martin Magold ([WP.24@unece.org](mailto:WP.24@unece.org)).

## Off the press

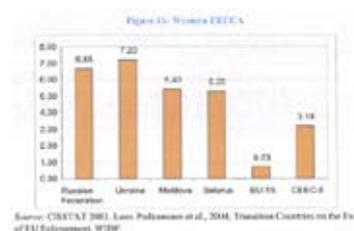


The access of eight Central and East European transition countries and two Mediterranean countries to the European Union in 2004 was the most significant enlargement in scope and diversity in the history of the EU. The EU enlargement is one of many changes that have taken place and continue to develop in the European trading environment, in the form of regional initiatives that aim at promoting common responses to shared challenges.

The papers in this volume address some of the main problems coming from the new European trading environment and offer insight into the policy options and business strategies that can help sustainable competitiveness in a changing

Europe. They offer a variety of views – from governmental bodies, the business community, trade associations, international organizations, the academic community and non-governmental organizations involved in trade issues and enterprise development.

Available from the UN Publications and Sales Section, Palais des Nations, Geneva ([unpubli@unog.ch](mailto:unpubli@unog.ch)).



## Coming up

19 March

Preparatory Meeting for the Ad Hoc Group of Experts on Cleaner Energy Production from Coal and Other Fossil Fuels

19-21 March

Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes

20-22 March

Working Party on Road Traffic Safety

20-22 March

Joint ECE/FAO Working Party on Forest Economics and Statistics

## Facts and figures

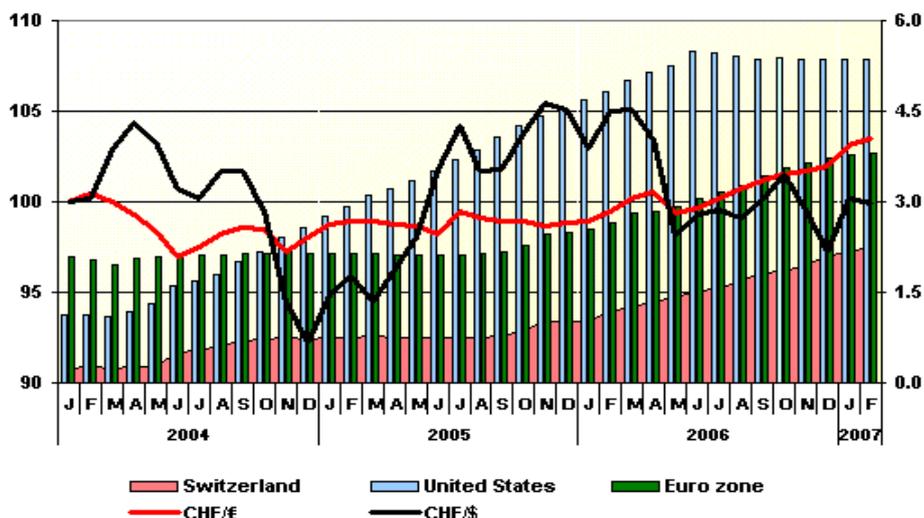
The last twelve months have been quite attention-grabbing for the Swiss franc: it appreciated markedly against the dollar, but continued to slide against the euro. On 14 February 2007 it broke the record and was selling at an eight-year low of 1.627 francs per euro.

Diverging growth expectations and monetary policies in the respective markets played an important role in these exchange rate movements. Swiss interest rates continued to be among the lowest in the world and the gap between the rates in the Euro area and Switzerland remained steady. This put pressure on the Swiss franc as investors tend to sell low-yielding Swiss franc positions or borrow at low interest rates in order to fund their investments in higher-yielding currencies in so-called carry trades. However, the end-February slide of emerging stock markets eased the Swiss franc's position, as demand for that currency, seen by many as particularly safe, picked up.

## Is the Swiss franc's slide against the euro over?

Swiss franc exchange rate dynamics and short-term interest rates in major markets

(left scale: exchange rates, January 2004=100, right scale: interest rates, per cent per annum)



Source: UNECE Statistical database, ECB and Swiss National Bank.

Note: Short-term interest rates are represented by three-months rates on the domestic money market. For exchange rate the upward trend indicates franc's depreciation.

Information Service  
UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)  
CH - 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

Tel: +41(0)22 917 44 44  
Fax: +41(0)22 917 05 05

E-mail: [info.ece@unece.org](mailto:info.ece@unece.org)  
Website: <http://www.unece.org>