

## **ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE**

Ministerial Meeting on Euro-Asian Transport Links

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Palais Des Nations, Geneva

**Opening address by  
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*Excellencies, Mr. Executive Secretary  
Distinguished Participants,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

At the outset I would like to say a few words about our work to emphasize its importance in today's world.

Centuries ago, a trade route across the continents of Asia and Europe was opened for merchants and pilgrims to travel from China to the Mediterranean Sea. In the ancient world this route known as the Silk Road was the first Euro-Asian transport link. It remains famous even now due to the opportunities it provided for economic and cultural exchanges between the Western world and the orient and the prosperity it brought to the countries along the route.

Today, standing at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, member countries are working closely together with the UNECE and UNESCAP to revitalize and expand the Silk Road to reach out to wider communities in what is becoming an increasingly globalized world.

This Ministerial Meeting provides a unique opportunity for us to discuss the progress that has already been made in developing more efficient, safer and more secure Euro-Asian transport links. We can also take stock of the work undertaken within the United Nations

Development Account project on capacity building in developing interregional land and land-cum-sea transport linkages.

During the past five years the regional commissions achieved both jointly and independently a number of milestones.

The member countries of UNESCAP have already started benefiting from their closer cooperation in the transport sector. The Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network came into force in July 2005 and the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Trans-Asian Railway Network is expected to come into force this year. Together, these two networks provide the main building blocks for the realization of an international integrated intermodal transport and logistics system as envisaged by Asian Transport Ministers at their meeting at Busan, Republic of Korea in November 2006.

Under the Euro-Asian Transport Links project, UNECE and UNESCAP have focused on assisting participating countries in identifying specific Euro-Asian transport links covering road, rail, and inland waterways and in prioritizing related infrastructure investment projects. In parallel, we have assisted member countries in identifying bottlenecks and implementing efficiency measures that facilitate the movement of goods and people along these transport links. Importantly, the project has also provided the opportunity for policy makers and planners from the two regions to meet on a more regular basis and thereby enrich understanding and cooperation across the continents.

Even with this tangible progress, much work remains to be done particularly if the ancient trade routes are to create 21<sup>st</sup> Century opportunities for the landlocked countries and their transit neighbours.

Already, the joint UNECE-UNESCAP study on Euro-Asian transport links underscored the importance of ongoing coordination and monitoring of the further development of road, rail and water transport routes adopted within the project. Such a mechanism is important and can benefit from the experience already gained through existing cooperation mechanisms such as the Special Programme for Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) to which both UNECE and UNESCAP provide technical support.

Additionally, UNECE and UNESCAP have together developed a proposal for a follow-up to the Development Account project. The proposal is designed to address some of the remaining challenges related to infrastructure, facilitation and logistics in an ongoing process of development.

While further investment in capacity is certainly a requirement, new development programmes will need to be inclusive and take into account economic, environmental and social priorities if the new Silk Road is to be truly sustainable. In this regard, I very much look forward to hearing more from each delegation about your ideas on improving the Euro-Asia transport linkages so that the United Nations regional commissions can try to better meet your specific needs.

I strongly believe that the modern intermodal Silk Road that together we are going to pave will significantly deepen the economic integration of the two continents. It will also provide more opportunities for common prosperity, not only for Asia and Europe, but for the world as a whole.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you for your kind attention.