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Economic Co-operation Organization

First Regional Workshop of Euro-Asian Transport Links Phase II: Facilitation of Euro-Asian Transport in the ECO Region

Tehran, Iran, 27-29 April 2009

Summary and conclusions

The “First Regional Workshop of Euro-Asian Transport Links Phase II” was organized jointly by the UNECE and ECO on 27-29 April 2009. It took place at and was generously hosted by the ECO Secretariat in Tehran. Representatives from Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Iran, Mongolia, Pakistan, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine and Uzbekistan participated while international organizations and private sector were represented the OSCE, IRF, FIATA, CIT and IRU.

The workshop was opened by His Excellency, Ambassador, Mr. Hassan Taherian, Deputy Secretary General of ECO and by Mr. Michalis Adamantiadis, Chief, Transport Facilitation and Economics of UNECE.

The workshop aimed at assisting countries of the ECO region - as well as all other countries participating in the EATL initiative - in developing more effective transport and transit systems which would facilitate international movement of goods. In addition, the workshop’s objective was to promote accession to and/or more effective implementation of UNECE conventions and ECO agreements in the area of inland transport facilitation. In general, the workshop was to foster co-operation among major stakeholders engaged in transport, transit and border-crossing operations.

The three-day workshop allowed participants to get better acquainted with the major UNECE and ECO legal instruments and initiatives related to transport and trade facilitation; to exchange views with UNECE and ECO experts on the main issues of transport and trade facilitation at national and interregional levels; and to discuss various options how to create and/or strengthen effective international co-ordination to facilitate international transport and trade in the Euro-Asian region. The workshop also provided a platform for major stakeholders to share their views concerning various issues relating to transport and transit in the ECO region. It was noted that special attention should be paid to ensuring better donor and country co-operation to avoid duplication of efforts.

The Workshop was divided into two distinct parts: the first part was dedicated to issues related to developing the Euro-Asian Transport Links and the second part to the TIR system. During the first part, speakers made presentations about the progress of the Phase II of the Euro-Asian Transport Linkages project, including a review of key achievements to-date and immediate plans for the future; about the existing initiatives and the current constraints to developing the EATL routes; and about the key UNECE legal instruments used for facilitation of international transport. Safety, border crossing infrastructure and ECO initiatives to ease transit for landlocked countries and rail-specific issues were also discussed. In particular, the development of Istanbul-Tehran-Almaty rail route, various techniques to establish block train operations, the benefits of working towards a common CIM-SMGS consignment note for international rail transport and the key challenges in the railways sector in Central Asia were presented and discussed.

Country representatives shared national experiences with respect to transport facilitation in the ECO region. Delegations from Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Uzbekistan made presentations and discussed the status of implementation of EATL in their countries. Among others, the workshop participants learned about the plans for Baku seaport, the Afghanistan railway strategy, the Turkish railway projects, the completion of Kerman-Zahedan missing link in Iran and railway plans in Uzbekistan. The Kyrgyz Republic transport infrastructure needs and the railway projects of Mongolia were also discussed. The country presentations were useful in demonstrating the ongoing efforts to improve transport made at the national levels.

Private sector delegates presented information about border crossing infrastructure design models and, in particular, Turkish public-private partnership experience in modernizing the land border crossing infrastructure, provided results of the IRU New Eurasian Land Transport Initiative (NELTI) to promote Euro-Asian transport and discussed freight forwarding issues in the ECO region. It was noted that solving freight forwarding problems offer large economic payoffs. However, implementing solutions often requires government support. Establishment of the ECO Logistics Provider Associations' Federation (ECO-LPAF) may be an effective initiative in this regard.

Conclusions:

- An efficient and sustainable transport system is vital for international trade and economic development. Inadequate transport infrastructure, un-coordinated and time-consuming border procedures are major obstacles for international transport and trade along the Euro-Asian transport links. The workshop participants took note of the large number of UNECE and ECO initiatives aimed at improving transport, transit and trade operations. The challenges are many and they are interlinked, but can be addressed by effective cooperation and coordination among international organizations and good neighborly co-operation in the ECO region.
- Solutions to many transport problems require, *inter alia*, coordinated action of governments aimed at developing adequate, coherent and integrated international transport networks and an internationally harmonized framework that enables the development of efficient, uninterrupted, safe and sustainable transport services. The workshop participants took note that block trains and demonstration initiatives such as road caravans are useful and often effective ways to solving common problems in an internationally coordinated way.

- The UNECE legal instruments in the field of transport provide a common legal and technical platform for UNECE Member States as well as for other countries along the Euro-Asian transport links. They can be used to establish or work towards interregional transport networks, simplified border procedures, rules for safe road traffic, safety and environmental regulations for the construction of vehicles, and for the carriage of dangerous goods and perishable foodstuffs.
- The accession to and effective implementation of UNECE legal instruments in the field of transport could reduce the costs of transport operations in the Euro-Asian region as well as between this region and other regions in the world. Countries participated in the workshop were invited to consider acceding to UNECE agreements and conventions and/or to make every effort to fully implement them. In addition, implementation of other initiatives such as ECO trade and transport facilitation agreement and a consolidated CIM-SMGS consignment note would assist in improving transport operations.
- Considering the link between the existence of modern border facilities, the efficient performance of the EATL linkages and major objectives of the ECO TTFA, the participants with interest took note of a project proposal concerning the coordinated promotion of public-private partnership projects to modernize land border crossing infrastructure in the ECO region.
- The workshop participants also took note of high rates of mortality, injury and economic damages caused by the road accidents in the ECO region. In 2009, road traffic safety will be highlighted as a major global concern by the UN regional economic commissions. The participants expressed hope that enhancing road safety will become an important element on the national policy agendas and in work plans of international organizations.
- Participants expressed gratitude to the Economic Co-operation Organization for hosting the Workshop in Tehran; to all speakers for their valuable contributions; and to the UNECE Transport Division for its initiative to organize this event.

B. THE JOINT ECO/IRU/UNECE REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON TIR CONVENTION (ECO SECRETARIAT, TEHRAN, 29 APRIL, 2009)

The Joint ECO/IRU/UNECE **Regional Workshop on the TIR Convention** was held at the ECO Secretariat in Tehran on 29th April 2009. The participants and resource persons were the same as "The Joint ECO/UNECE Regional Workshop on Euro-Asian Transport Links Phase II (27-28 April 2009, ECO Secretariat-Tehran)". The Workshop began with short introductions by the Representatives of ECO, UNECE and IRU.

The First Session was an "**overview of the TIR System and its benefits for the region**". As the first Speaker, Mr. Konstantin Glukhenkiy, UNECE, discussed the importance of the TIR Convention for the development of transport and trade in the region, with a focus on the Pillars of the TIR Convention. Mr. Haydar Ozkan, General delegate of IRU to the Region, delivered a comprehensive presentation on the "Application of the TIR system in the ECO countries".

The Second Session provided a platform for the participants to discuss "**Public-private partnership as the key to success of the TIR Convention**". The representative of UNECE expanded on the "Roles and responsibilities of the public actors under the TIR Convention". The representative of IRU addressed the "Roles and responsibilities of the private actors under the TIR Convention including: i) Management of the distribution of TIR Carnets, ii) Control of the use of TIR Carnets and risk management by Safe TIR; iii) Organization and functioning of the guarantee chain

The Third Session examined the "**TIR Convention: recent and current challenges**". The representative of UNECE briefed the participants on the "TIR Convention: the latest amendments and the future developments". The representative of IRU analyzed the "challenges and opportunities for the TIR system: views of transport industry".

The last Session was dedicated to exchanging "**National experiences with the TIR procedure in the ECO region**". After an "**Overview of the implementation of the TIR procedure in the region**" by Mr. Mohammad Mirzaei Kahagh, Director Transport and Communications, ECO, the delegations of the ECO Member States presented their country reports.

In all the sessions, extensive group discussions were conducted among the resource persons, national delegations and the representatives of the participating international organizations. The workshop came up with some key recommendations summarized below. Copies of the presentations delivered at this workshop are attached as Annex V (TIR WORKSHOP).

Conclusions and Recommendations:

1. The Meeting was impressed that in 2008 more than 43 % of the total TIR Carnets were used for transit transport involving the ECO Countries. This makes it extremely important for the ECO, UNECE and IRU to formulate and conduct special programmes to address the needs of the ECO Countries with regard to implementation of the TIR Convention.

2. In order to identify and solve possible difficulties in ensuring harmonized and smooth implementation of the TIR Convention, a TIR Contact Group comprising of the Ambassadors of ECO Member Countries should be established in Geneva (Switzerland) to promote the interests of the ECO Member States in the framework of UNECE/TIR bodies. ECO countries and the ECO Secretariat through this Contact Group should actively participate in the meetings of UN and TIR bodies to voice their positions.
3. Aiming at enhancing the international cooperation amongst the Customs authorities of the ECO Member States, a regional training program will be developed and conducted on the operation of Customs procedures and TIR system in the region.
4. For the purpose to harmonize the customs documents and procedures, it is highly recommended to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to expedite its accession to TIR Convention. This accession will certainly improve the transit conditions in the region. It was also emphasized that special needs of Afghanistan should be addressed so that Afghanistan could start applying TIR in its territory.
5. The ECO countries would coordinate their position to ensure the sustainability of the TIR System in the region and to enhance the effectiveness of Customs procedures. In this regard, at national level the ECO countries may implement the risk management tools, including Real Time SafeTIR and TIR Electronic Pre-declaration (IRU TIR-EPD), in particular along the NELTI routes.
6. With regard to the multimodal transport as the most efficient mode of transport in terms of the supply chain security, the ECO countries may promote the multimodal TIR procedures that would cover not only road but also the rail and maritime transport. This would certainly contribute to the best practice of administration controls.
7. ECO countries would enhance cooperation to ensure harmonized border control procedures. This would require a strong political will, commitment and consistency at national level to reach the goal. In particular, the ECO Member States are encouraged to utilize the Single Window Approach in order to bring the transparency into the border crossing procedures and to report to the IRU Border Waiting Time Observatory which is a monitoring tool for authorities and operators to gain efficiency.
8. The Public-Private Partnership may be enhanced in the region to enforce the TIR Convention.