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Item 5 (a) (ii) of the provisional agenda

Strategic questions of a modal and thematic nature:

Project related activities – Euro-Asian Transport Links (EATL) Project

Euro-Asian Transport Links

Note by the secretariat

Summary

Following the Second EATL Ministerial Meeting (2013) that marked the launch of the EATL Phase III, the EATL project is now in its most critical phase. Operationalization of Euro-Asian transport links is the core activity of Phase III and will require not only specific knowledge and additional skills, but also full and committed political, as well as financial, support from participating Governments.

The Committee may wish to:

- **support** EATL activities aimed at operationalization of Euro-Asian transport links;
- **encourage** Governments and other stakeholders to more actively **participate** in the activities of the EATL Group of Experts;
- **invite** Governments and other donors **to contribute** to the EATL activities on a concrete project basis, based on the adopted work plan.

1. In 2014, the Euro-Asian Transport Links (EATL) project continued to fulfil its role as the platform for cooperation between countries involved in the project. At the same time, continuation of the project ensured the coordinated development of Euro-Asian land transport links as well as transition into the concrete operationalization of the routes identified in the previous phases. Phase II of the project was completed by the end of 2012. This phase revised EATL priority transport infrastructure projects and updated the international Investment Plan for new projects that would entail a consistent and realistic

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short-, medium- and long-term investment strategy for road and rail EATL routes. Furthermore, Phase II provided an extensive inventory of specific road, rail, inland waterway, maritime port, inland terminal and other infrastructure projects for the 27 participating countries, their estimated budget and an implementation timetable.

2. The Second EATL Ministerial Meeting which took place on 26 February 2013 marked the launch of the EATL Phase III (2013–2015). In a Joint Statement, the participating Ministers supported continuing the project into the next phase. Thirty-two governments signed the Joint Statement on Future Development of Euro-Asian Transport Links which, *inter alia*, reiterated their willingness to work together towards the implementation of activities that:

(a) aim to develop and enhance favourable financial conditions to ensure sustainable and long-term financing of priority transport infrastructure projects in order to integrate them into medium- and long-term investment programmes adopted at the national level;

(b) foster and sustain coordination and collaboration with other participating member States, international organizations and international financial institutions as well as other stakeholders from the public and private sector to ensure that additional financial resources for the completion of identified priority projects are made available;

(c) remove, in an orderly and systematic manner, the remaining non-physical barriers along the Euro-Asian transport routes crossing their countries;

(d) support the establishment of an adequate mechanism to ensure continued monitoring and the follow-up activities of the project, and the most appropriate modalities to use the existing structures and available resources of the UNECE; and

(e) support further implementation and continuation of the EATL project in the new Phase III with clearly defined targets and measurable objectives and ensure the necessary resources for its timely implementation.

3. The EATL participating countries increased from 27 (Phase II) to 38 countries (Phase III). This increase demonstrates both the growing interest in and relevance of the work that has been carried out so far in the first two phases.

4. The primary objective of Phase III is to operationalize the nine road and nine rail EATL routes that have been identified. The Group of Experts and the secretariat initiated the process that is expected to convert the results of Phase II into reality during Phase III, as far as available resources permit. To this end, the EATL Group of Experts held three sessions in 2014 in Geneva (4–5 February 2014, 27–27 May 2014 and 30–31 October 2014).

5. The main objectives of the meetings were: to identify the specific structure of cargo that could be transported overland between two continents; to facilitate the coordination of integrated time schedules and tariffs on the Euro-Asian transport links; to identify of needs and requirements of producers, shippers, traders and freight forwarders in transport and trade on the EATL routes; and to consider further application of the Geographical Information System (GIS) on EATL routes.

6. The EATL Group of Experts also identified potential cargo for overland (rail) transport between Asia and Europe. This included a group of 'light weight' but higher value products such as cars, automobile components, computers, electronic equipment and parts (television sets, image and sound recording and reproducing equipment), optical and medical equipment, clothes, shoes, sports-related items, as well as food.

7. The Government of the Russian Federation provided financial resources, primarily, to support participation of the national EATL focal points from CIS countries at the EATL sessions. This is considered an essential factor for advancing the work of the Group of Experts. Relatively low participation at the earlier sessions of the EATL Group of Experts slowed the progress of the Group's work. However, activities accelerated in October 2014 and tangible results are expected at the beginning of 2015. Nonetheless, a lack of financial resources hampers the development of the EATL GIS application. The Group of Experts is exploring possibilities both with Governments and the private sector to solve this problem.
 8. The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) continued its support of the EATL project. OSCE will sponsor the preparation of a study on recent developments in transport and trade between Europe and Asia. This contribution is expected in early 2015. The terms of reference have been agreed upon with the UNECE.
 9. Latvia will take the presidency of the European Union during the first half of 2015. The Government of Latvia intends to increase the profile of transport, especially the EATL dimension during this term, and organize a high level meeting of transport ministers in Riga on 29 and 30 April 2015.
 10. Phase III of the EATL project is critical since the core activity will require specific knowledge and additional skills which may only be available in the private sector. Accomplishing the agreed objectives of Phase III in a timely manner may require additional financial support from Governments, the private sector and international financial institutions. Full and committed political support from participating Governments is also needed to attain the full benefits of the EATL project.
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