

**Opening Speech by Mr. Muammer Türker,  
Deputy-Undersecretary, Ministry of Transport of the Republic of Turkey, at the  
Third Expert Group Meeting on Developing Euro-Asian Transport Linkages  
(İstanbul, 27-29 June 2005)**

Distinguished participants,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour and pleasure for us all to host the Third Expert Group Meeting jointly organized by UNECE and UNESCAP here in our fascinating city, İstanbul, and welcome all of you on behalf of the Turkish Ministry of Transport. As we think of İstanbul's key location in Europe and Asia transport linkages, I believe it is a meaningful choice to hold this meeting in this city. By this occasion, I would like to thank Mr. Capel Ferrer for the support he has given for this meeting to be held in İstanbul and his valuable contributions towards it.

It is not only İstanbul being located at the crossroads of three continents and different cultures, but also Turkey on the whole constitutes the intersection for international transport arrangements. As a country being the member of these two important UN bodies, Turkey strongly supports further steps to be taken in the framework of this joint UNECE-UNESCAP project for the Euro-Asian transport linkages.

Distinguished participants

I am of the opinion that the main impetus of the initiation of this kind of work among the countries of the region with the lead of UNECE and UNESCAP is the considerable political, economic and social changes occurred over the last two decades in the world, particularly in Eurasia. The process of globalisation and liberalization of national economies has greatly increased the importance of the interregional transport. Following these changes, many countries have embraced free and open economic policies so as to integrate with the new world order. For sure, transport sectors have been affected from these developments, and countries have made significant efforts to develop more efficient transport linkages.

In this context, the importance of granting support and giving priority to the efforts of the countries to develop sustainable and effective transport networks is highly considerable, given the growing transport demands in west-east direction. In this regard, our main concern should be to establish and maintain integrated and interoperable transport networks among the Eurasian countries. There is no doubt that this process will serve national interests of countries as well as the development of regional and international transport networks. Consequently, fast, reliable and safe Euro-Asian transport connections would play a vital role for the further integration of national transport systems into regional networks, and economic and social development of the region as a whole.

It should also be noted here that close cooperation among the governments, international organizations and stakeholders in the transport sector is necessary to achieve our aims. As

known, there has already been a consensus in the international community on the necessity for close cooperation and coordination to overcome the transport problems faced with.

Distinguished participants,

Another issue that deserves attention is the vitality of the implementation of the plans. It is undoubtedly true that without a functioning implementation, debates, discussions and produced resolutions become void and useless. In this vein, we believe that clear and precise commitment and determination of the governments concerned in pursuing appropriate and favourable policies lay the foundation for the success of our efforts.

At this point, I would like to mention about Turkey's ongoing huge projects in order to improve the existing Euro-Asian links.

One of the most prominent of them is the Marmaray project. This project will provide an uninterrupted, high capacity railway connection between Europe and Asia through a tube crossing across the İstanbul Strait. It is also one of the most important projects in the world of this kind at present. Total cost of the whole project is approximately two and a half billion USD. I would like to emphasize that this is a highly environment-friendly project. All parts of the project are planned to be completed and to start operation in 2010.

Marmaray will be incorporated with another major project, namely high-speed railway project between Ankara and İstanbul, which will significantly decrease travel duration.

Another major project is the improvement of the existing railway line from İstanbul to Bulgarian border. This project includes some rehabilitation works and the construction of a new shorter line. Total length will be two hundred and fifty-three (253) km. After the completion of this project, the capacity of the rail line from İstanbul to Europe will increase importantly and serve with a double track and electrified infrastructure.

In addition, construction works of dual carriageway on the İstanbul-Thessalonica corridor and Black Sea coastal road are underway.

Distinguished participants,

Finally, I would like to recall that main trans-national axes from Europe to Asia are being defined within the framework of the Wider Europe for Transport process where many of our respective countries are represented. It is important that the works of these two platforms go in parallel and provides feedback to each other.

To conclude, I wish that this meeting would be successful in bringing new perspectives and in providing insight into Euro-Asian transport linkages concept; an initiative that takes into account the benefit of our countries and regions. Here is so much to explore. Enjoy your stay in İstanbul.