

UNITED NATIONS



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UNECE – UNESCAP

*UN Development Account Capacity Building Project on
Interregional Transport Linkages*

**UNECE National Workshop on the Facilitation of Interregional Transport
Along the Euro-Asian Transport Links**

(Minsk, Belarus, 30-31 May 2007)

CONCLUSIONS

Organized and sponsored by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and kindly hosted by the Ministry of Transport of Belarus in the framework of the Belarusian Transport Week and Congress, a **national Workshop on the facilitation of interregional transport along the Euro-Asian transport links** was held on 30 and 31 May 2007 in Minsk, Belarus.

Mr. Verkhovets, First Deputy Minister of Transport, Belarus, opened the Belarusian Transport Congress and the UNECE Workshop, which was attended by Vice-Minister of Transport of Lithuania, Deputy Minister of Economy, Belarus, and 500 officials and experts from public and private sectors, including representatives of the Ministries of Transport, Foreign Affairs, Industry, Economy and the Interior, Customs, State Border Guard, Transport Inspection Agency, Patrol Police, Transport Associations and Companies as well as representatives of the EC, IRU, and Businesses.

The aim of this Workshop was to assist Belarus to develop favourable transit environment in its territory for facilitating international transport and trade along the Euro-Asian transport links, support ongoing national efforts to accede to and implement relevant UNECE agreements and conventions as well as to foster cooperation amongst major national stakeholders involved in transit and border crossing operations.

The intensive two-day Workshop has allowed the participants to get a deeper insight into the major UNECE legal instruments and initiatives on transport and trade facilitation, exchange views with the UNECE experts on the main issues of transport and trade facilitation at national, sub-regional and interregional levels and strengthening national coordination mechanisms for the facilitation of international transport and trade along the Euro-Asian transport links.

The UNECE experts gave presentations on the progress of the joint UNECE-UNESCAP Euro-Asian Transport Linkages project; on the UNECE as well as WTO legal instruments and initiatives on transport and trade facilitation and harmonization of legal regimes; on the Trans-European Motorway (TEM) and Trans-European Railway (TER) Projects; and on existing experiences from the establishment of national coordination mechanisms in countries along the Euro-Asian transport links.

Experts from the Belarusian Ministries of Transport and Economy, State Customs Committee of

Belarus, European Commission, International Road Transport Union (IRU), Confederation of Organisations in Road Transport Enforcement (CORTE), Belarusian Association of International Road Carriers (BAMAP), Associations of Freight Forwarders, Logistics and Management systems, the Belarusian State University of Transport, the Belarusian Academy of Sciences, and a German ATP-Testing and Certification agency (TÜV SÜD) reviewed the status of accession to and implementation of major UNECE transport agreements and conventions and reported on the national and international experiences on the progress of transport facilitation and remaining challenges.

Participants emphasized that inland transport has grown into the major carrier of foreign trade, whereby Belarus plays a significant role thanks to its geographic position as an important transit country along the Euro-Asian transport links (EATL). The road transport sector, predominantly served by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), renders national associations such as IRU-member BAMAP in Belarus, increasingly important. These associations promote the interests of the road transport industry, provide useful services to their SME-member operators and strive for public-private co-operations with all stakeholders supporting progress within the sector and the national economy as a whole.

Representatives of the Belarusian road transport sector raised a number of issues and problems pertaining to international carriage of goods by road the solution of which is crucial for the smooth continuation and development of the international transport by road in Belarus as well as other countries along the Euro-Asian transport links.

Participants at the Workshop reached a number of conclusions, which can be summarised as follows:

1. Transport is the most basic, and one of strategic factors for economic development and job creation. An efficient transport system is vital for international trade and tourism, which have a major and increasing impact on growth and competitiveness of businesses and economies.
2. Inadequate transport infrastructures, bottlenecks and missing links, as well as transport legislation that varies from one country to another, different and arbitrary taxes and charges, and cumbersome and time-consuming border procedures are among the major obstacles for the development of international transport and trade along the Euro-Asian transport links.
3. Solutions to these problems require, *inter alia*, coordinated action of concerned Governments in the framework of international organizations aimed at developing adequate, coherent and integrated international transport networks and an internationally harmonized regulatory framework that enables the development of efficient, uninterrupted, safe and sustainable transport services.
4. 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, to establish interregional transport networks, simplified border procedures, rules for safe road traffic, safety and environmental regulations for the construction of vehicles, and regulations for the safe carriage of dangerous goods and perishable foodstuffs. In addition, these legal instruments are major tools for enhancing the efficiency of international transport operations, facilitating international trade and further developing and integrating national transport systems within Europe and Asia.
5. The accession to and efficient implementation of the major UNECE legal instruments in the field of transport could reduce considerably costs of transport operations among countries in the Euro-Asian region as well as between this region and other regions in the world.

6. Noting that Belarus is already Contracting Party to a good number of the main UNECE transport infrastructure and facilitation agreements, it was invited to consider adhering to those major UNECE agreements and conventions to which it has not yet acceded, and ensure full implementation.
7. Considering that the UNECE sponsored TEM and TER Projects provide an intergovernmental forum for closer cooperation amongst Central, Eastern, Southeastern European and Caucasus countries for the coordinated development of coherent road, rail and combined transport infrastructures, sharing best practices and expertise, developing investment strategies (Master Plan) as well as monitoring and improving border crossing operations, and that these Projects provide substantial contribution to international transport along the pan-European and Euro-Asian routes, Belarusian authorities were requested to consider joining these Projects and participating in their activities.
8. Non-physical obstacles to international transport along EATL are a major concern to transport operators. These include long waiting times at borders; difficulties in obtaining visas for professional drivers; non-harmonized implementation of international conventions; changes in national law with short or without any notice; trip quotas and permits; and unjustified fiscal charges that often amount to transit taxes. It is imperative that Governments do their utmost to lift non-tariff barriers to international trade and transport since any penalty on road transport means an even greater penalty for the economy as a whole.
9. An improved implementation of harmonized UNECE legislation on border crossing procedures, in particular, and closer cooperation among competent authorities and stakeholders within Belarusian territory and between them and their counterparts in other countries in the region through the exchange of information on best practices, regular meetings, other trust-building measures and problem-solving initiatives could lead to a significant reduction of the existing obstacles and delays on borders.
10. In the process of creating a single window for export and import clearance in Belarus, the authorities should consider using established international standards and codes for trade data exchange such as those contained in the UN Trade Data Elements Directory and the World Customs Organization Data Model.
11. The implementation from 11.04.07 of the new EC Regulation 561 on Driving Times and Rest Regimes on digital tachograph for all vehicles operating within the EU, i.e. both EU registered and non-EU vehicles, which is linked with the amendments to the European agreement concerning the work of crews of vehicles engaged in international road transport (AETR), raises serious concerns. Belarusian authorities and transport industry representatives regard the amendments to the AETR pertaining to the application of Regulation 561 to non-EU operators unacceptable and propose their re-examination.
12. Noting that the implementation of the amendments to the AETR on digital tachograph will pose a number of challenges to road transport operators, Belarusian authorities were invited to take all appropriate measures aimed at preparing the road transport industry to implement the technical requirements before the new rules enter into force in 2010.
13. Participants acknowledged the concerns repeatedly expressed by professional drivers and their associations on the difficulties posed to EECCA road transport operators by the restrictive visa practices applied by EU Member States as a result of the implementation of the Schengen agreement that considerably reduce their ability to operate efficiently in the EU market, and requested that competent authorities in these countries take necessary measures to facilitate visa issue procedures for professional drivers.
14. Participants expressed support for the proposal submitted to the UNECE Working Party on

Customs Matters Affecting Transport (WP.30), by some Contracting Parties to the TIR Convention, requesting it at its June 2007 session to consider increasing the guarantee cover under the TIR Carnet up to Euro 60,000.

15. Participants requested customs authorities of the Contracting Parties to the TIR Convention, to respect the rules stipulated in Article 5 of the TIR Convention according to which examinations at customs offices *en route* be applicable in exceptional cases only.
16. Belarusian road transport industry representatives proposed that the electronic toll systems operating in different EU member states be harmonized in order to reduce the associated cost of installation and maintenance of the necessary devices used by road carriers.
17. Belarusian road transport industry representatives expressed their desire that a simplified permits-free system be introduced for transport operations between seaports and landlocked countries.
18. Belarusian road transport industry representatives requested that rules for the carriage of dangerous goods on the Belarusian territory conform to the requirements stipulated by the European Agreement concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road (ADR).
19. Participants noted the German experience in the implementation of the Agreement on the international carriage of perishable foodstuffs and on special equipment to be used for such carriage (ATP).
20. Participants agreed on the need for a national legislation promoting the use of vehicles for international road transport that comply with EU standards and safety requirements.
21. Participants agreed on the necessity of establishing an effective national coordination mechanism for the facilitation of international transport and trade, and requested the Ministry of Transport, based on the experience of BelPRO and similar experiences in other countries in the Euro-Asian region, to take the lead in this regard.
22. Participants also agreed to foster cooperation amongst major national stakeholders involved in transit and border crossing operations, with a view to establish a national action plan for the facilitation of international transport and trade, and implement it.
23. Belarusian authorities and road transport industry representatives also agreed to become more actively involved in UNECE transport activities.

Participants expressed their gratitude to the Ministry of Transport of Belarus for hosting the Workshop in Minsk, to the Belarusian Association of International Road Carriers (BAMAP) for its kind assistance in implementing it, to all speakers for their valuable contributions to its success, and to the UNECE Transport Division for its initiative to organize and sponsor this event.
