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agenda item 7)

EURO-ASIAN TRANSPORT LINKS

Report of the Informal Meeting held in Geneva on 16 May 2000

Note by the secretariat

1. ATTENDANCE

The meeting was convened by the ECE Secretariat following the request made by the Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics (TRANS/WP.5/24, para.58). It was attended by delegates from the Commission of the European Communities (CEC), Germany, the Russian Federation, International Union of Railways (UIC), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the TER Project Central Office. Mr. Viatcheslav ARSENOV (delegate from the Russian Federation and Vice-chairman of WP.5, chaired the meeting.

2. INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE PARTICIPANTS

The delegate from ESCAP briefed on the progress made in the context of the ALTID project, including the identification of a rail network in the region and the identification of 4 major corridors: TAR-N, TAR, S, TAR in Indochina and the corridor between Central Asia and Europe. The project is now trying to put these corridors in operation.

The delegate from the CEC reported on the CEC-sponsored TRACECA project. Under this project, feasibility studies and some infrastructure investments (mainly in ports) have been made. As the Russian Federation has joined the project and other countries in the region (Turkey, Romania and Bulgaria) have applied for membership, it is expected that TRACECA will absorb promptly the activities thus far undertaken under the Black Sea PETrA.

The delegate from UIC informed about the corridors developed by UIC, focused on container transport between East/South East Asia and Europe. Working Groups have been set up for each corridor, with the objective to put in service some well-focused services, offered by international private companies rather than by railways (although railways would hold a share in these companies). He stated that the project was facing many difficulties: the legal framework to establish the private companies in charge of the service is lacking; UNCTAD multimodal Agreements are not applied by many of the countries concerned. UIC was now completing its feasibility study on this services (in close contact with potential customers) and will send it to the participants at the informal meeting when available.

The ECE secretariat briefed on the developments of SPECA, a joint programme of ECE and ESCAP for Economic Development in Central Asia, particularly in the field of transport infrastructure development and transport facilitation. It also informed on the extension of the European Agreements on transport networks (AGR and AGC) to the Caucasus region and Central Asia.

The Russian Federation presented the conclusions of a research paper recently issued by the Russian Ministry of Transport. According to this paper, there would be high potential for the development of inland transport between Asia and Western Europe, partly connected to the booming of E-commerce.

3. IDENTIFICATION OF EURO-ASIAN TRANSPORT LINKS

The group agreed that the Euro-Asian links should primarily connect the major regions in Asia with the system of Pan-European Transport Corridors. The need was also stressed for co-operation among the different organizations, particularly in the area where the Asian and European regions overlap (Russian Federation, Central Asia and the Caucasus). According to the information provided by the participants, it seemed that the development of Euro-Asian links should primarily focus on transport facilitation (adequate legal framework to allow smooth operation of transport activities, particularly border-crossing, civil liability, etc), which needs close co-operation with the Governments involved. Although the Euro-Asian link concept would probably find more favorable conditions for haulage of containers by rail, road transport should be also considered, as there seemed to be increasing truck flows between Europe and the Caucasus and Central Asia; furthermore, the road network would be essential to feed these Euro-Asia rail links.

The following links were identified for consideration:

1. Linking PETrC 2, 3 and 9 to China, the Korean Peninsula and Japan through the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan/Mongolia.
2. Linking PETrC 4 with South Asia through Turkey and Iran.
3. Linking PETrC 4 with China through Iran and Central Asia.
4. Linking PETrC 4, 7, 8, 9 with Central Asia through the TRACECA route.
5. Linking PETrC 9 with the Persian Gulf through the Russian Federation and Central Asia.

4. GUIDELINES FOR FUTURE WORK

The informal group agreed on the following guidelines:

- The Euro-Asian transport link concept has been backed at the highest political level both, in the Helsinki Declaration and at the last Council of Ministers of the European Conference of Ministers of Transport (ECMT).
- It would be convenient to further precise the concept through a “strategic vision” that could be submitted to the Governments at the appropriate level (e.g. the Inland Transport Committee, the ESCAP/CTTDP and later to the ECMT). A draft could be jointly developed by the ECE and ESCAP secretariats.
- A programme of work should focus on political rather than technical questions. Any database development should take full account of the information already gathered by other institutions and organizations (CEC, UIC, organisation for Co-operation between Railways (OSZhD). On the basis on the experience already gained, some indicators could be identified in order to monitor transport developments, and any data-collection effort (questionnaires to Governments) should be limited to the actual needs of those indicators.
- Technical questions (e.g. traffic forecasting) could be addressed by networking experts in the region.
- Focus co-operation on the “overlapping region” (countries members of both, ECE and ESCAP).
- It is necessary to identify and keep tracing short-term (improvement of regulatory framework) and medium/long-term (improvement of transport infrastructure) activities in progress by the different organizations, in order to identify and fill existing gaps.
- Precise possible routes identifying major nodes (e.g. major traffic generating/attracting nodes; ports; major intermodal nodes...), together with the Governments.
- The international organizations should regularly exchange information on the results of their respective actions.

5. SCHEDULE

June- September 2000	List of short-term activities in progress Identification of existing gaps Draft questionnaire to the Governments Draft strategic paper to be discussed at WP.5 session
September- December 2000	Questionnaire sent to the Governments and data collected Interim report including route definition to be presented at ITC session
January-June 2001	Establishing a network of experts for forecast Traffic forecast report. Interim report: Identification of needs for action in each corridor
September-December 2001	Consideration of non-transport impacts Draft final report to ITC
May 2002	Final report to be presented at the Ministerial level in both regions.
