www.unece.org/index.php?id=32337

On the occasion of the 75th Jubilee session of the Inland Transport Committee (ITC) of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), a high-level Ministerial meeting was held on 26 February 2013. More than fifty Ministers, Deputy Ministers and other high-level officials from across Europe and Asia gathered in Geneva to endorse the final report of Phase II of the Euro-Asian Transport Links (EATL) project. The report identifies overland transport routes that could save both time and costs of delivery of freight and trade between two continents. In addition, the Ministers and other heads of delegations from thirty two countries signed a Declaration future cooperation on the EATL project.

The EATL Phase II report identified 9 rail and 9 road routes between Europe and Asia as well as 17 water transport links, and several inland and maritime ports. Road and rail routes are new versions of the "old silk road", but they are extended far beyond this traditional lifeline of ancient times. EATL road and rail routes will stretch eastward from Central and Eastern Europe all the way to Russian ports on East Sea, Chinese ports on Eastern China Sea, and southward toward Iran and Pakistan and their ports in the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean. The routes will criss-cross the land mass between Europe and Asia thus connecting regions and countries that have so far suffered from lack of access to seaports and good transport connections to their neighbours.

The project resulted in a multi-country transport investment plan, which is the outcome of the review and prioritization of 311 priority projects The total cost of these projects is over US $200 billion. Out of them, 188 projects have been identified as high priority requiring special attention. Their estimated costs are US $78 billion.

In addition, The EATL project had other tangible results, all included in the study that was launched during the Ministerial meeting. Among them, you can find the Geographic Information System (GIS) data base which is an innovative feature in the project that governments may wish to use and further develop in their national planning processes. Furthermore, the comparison of maritime and land transport – described in details in the publication - has challenged conventional wisdom that maritime transport is per se more competitive than land transport. A door-to-door approach however, showed that railway transport between Europe and Asia can be a viable alternative both in terms of time and cost. Accordingly, maritime transport is cost-effective, but in most cases standard deliveries take up to 30 days port-to-port while hinterland connections may pose a challenge. Being twice as fast as maritime transport, railways could provide a viable alternative for Euro-Asian freight transport, and could also deliver door-to-door. In addition, costs could be reduced between 10 and 30 per cent compared to maritime transport.

Mr. Sven Alkalaj, Executive Secretary of the UNECE said: "Development of Euro-Asian transport links is a long-term process which requires, first and foremost, strong political will and commitment of the countries concerned, as well as careful use of scarce financial resources". He also added: "This makes it a complex exercise, requiring Governments to strike a balance with other national priorities and weigh them with international interests. They also need to ascertain the economic, social and environmental net benefits, coordinate programmes and timetables in close cooperation with neighbouring countries, as well as to balance private sector versus public participation, all while factoring-in security considerations".

Mr. Yang Zan, Director-General of the International Cooperation Department, Ministry of Transport of the People's Republic of China, said … that "the early realization of Euro-Asian Transport Linkage and transport facilitation will be beneficial to the economic and social development of Euro-Asian countries. However, we are also aware that there still exist in practice many difficulties to be tackled. The Chinese government greatly appreciates the measures taken by UNECE in this respect"…. and that "China is ready to work with all the interested parties to

make more contribution to the economic development and social progress in the region".

Mr. R. V. Sklyar, deputy Minister of Transport and Communications of Kazakhstan, said that, due to its geographical position at the crossroads of routes between Europe, China, Japan and South-East Asia, Russia, Turkey, Persian Gulf, and Black Sea, Kazakhstan attaches great importance to development of transport infrastructure and invests considerable amount of financial resources in 5 major transport corridors, which are part of EATL links, passing through his country.

Another part of the report brings out analysis of non-physical obstacles to international transport between Europe and Asia. A comprehensive set of recommendations concludes this analysis highlighting remedies for concrete obstacles at border crossings, along transport route corridors as well as logistics obstacles. As an integral part of the project, a Geographic Information System (GIS) data-base was set up and GIS maps developed showing the planned projects.

The Phase II of the EATL project which has recently been completed covered 27 countries[1], with more countries expected to join the project in the next phase. By signing the Declaration, Ministers reiterated their support to Phase III of the project, which would focus on specific trade and transport facilitation measures to make EATL links not only more efficient and attractive to investors, but also contribute to faster economic growth, increased employment and better regional connectivity. Mr. Sergey Aristov, Secretary of State - Deputy Minister of Transport of the Russian Federation, outlined the focus of the Phase III of the project, by underlying market oriented analysis, investigation of trade flows attracted to EATL routes and issues related to application of modern technologies and innovations.

For further information on Ministerial meeting visit:
http://www.unece.org/trans/events/2013/itc75_2013/ministerial_meeting.html

You can download the full EATL report at:

You may also contact:

Mrs Eva Molnar

Director

UNECE, Transport Division
Palais des Nations
CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland
Tel: + 41 22 917 2401
Fax: + 41 22 917 0039
E-mail: eva.molnar@unece.org

****

[1] The EATL participating countries are: Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, China, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mongolia, Pakistan, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. Most recently, Poland and Republic of Serbia also joined the project.