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Strategic questions of a horizontal policy nature:

Policy dialogue and technical assistance

to countries with economies in transition

Main directions of policy dialogue and technical assistance in transport cooperation of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia*

Note by the secretariat

Summary

Policy dialogue and technical assistance activities in the area of transport focus on strengthening the capacity of member States. Special attention is given to landlocked countries and countries with economies in transition and to the implementation of relevant United Nations legal instruments, norms and standards in transport. This paper presents the state-of-the-art in transport cooperation within the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) and the plans for future actions.

The Inland Transport Committee **is invited** to:

- discuss this paper; and
- give guidance to the secretariat on further improving the technical assistance activities of transport cooperation in SPECA.

* In accordance with the Programme of work of the Inland Transport Committee for 2016-2017, (ECE/TRANS/2016/28 (C (i) and (ii)) and subsequent to Tashkent Declaration (26 March 1998).

I. Background

1. The complexity of modern transport systems, the goals and targets defined in the 'Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' document¹ and the necessity to address all relevant inland transport system components have led to the grouping of the activities of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Sustainable Transport Division as: (a) regulatory work, (b) policy dialogue, (c) analytical work and (d) technical assistance and capacity-building activities.

2. The primary focus of policy dialogue, technical assistance and capacity-building (TA) activities is to improve the capacities of member States to accede to and efficiently implement the United Nations inland transport legal instruments and promote sustainable mobility and transport, including its economic, social and environmental components. In some countries these activities are more policy oriented, and in the most of the member States TA activities assist in strengthening human and institutional capacities to put in place or enhance legal frameworks for sustainable transport system development. TA benefits many member States, and special attention is given to the countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

3. This paper discusses TA activities implemented within the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECAs) transport cooperation. SPECAs transport TA covers the whole spectrum of activities from transport infrastructure development to border crossing facilitation and intermodality and involves the secretariat professional staff and the Regional Advisor. By operating in this way, it has been possible for ECE to cover a broad spectrum of transport topics.

II. The United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia transport and border crossing facilitation cooperation

4. The United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECAs) was launched in 1998 to strengthen intraregional cooperation in Central Asia and its integration into the global economy. The member States of SPECAs are the signatory parties of the Tashkent Declaration on SPECAs: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Furthermore, ECE and ESCAP jointly provide overall support to the activities under the SPECAs programme.

5. Since all SPECAs countries are landlocked, efficient international and regional transport plays a key role in addressing the economic development challenges of the region. Recognizing the need to support regional transport system development, the Project Working Group on Transport and Border Crossing (PWG-TBC) was established in 1998 and the first session took place the same year in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The Sustainable Transport Division and ESCAP gave substantial and administrative support to the PWG-TBC from its first session, as alternating secretariat.

6. At the beginning, the PWG-TBC focus was on promotion of development of transport networks in the region as well as implementing projects and programmes to support the development of efficient transport in Central Asia landlocked countries.

7. Particular PWG-TBC tasks were to:

¹ Available from www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E

- develop an action-oriented framework for implementable and workable priority projects to facilitate the intraregional and international movement of vehicles, goods and people;
- establish a collaborative mechanism to ensure coordination and monitoring among all interested parties in the Central Asian subregion for all ongoing and planned transport and border crossing activities of relevance to the SPECA countries;
- establish a special database and review past, current and proposed transport actions and border crossing activities of relevance to the SPECA countries;
- develop a programme of work and schedule of implementation including resource mobilization;
- support the training of personnel for transport and border crossing facilitation; and
- coordinate and foster the exchange of information among SPECA countries and other relevant parties.

8. Massive change in transport patterns between Europe and Asia in the last two decades required more efficient transport infrastructure and operations in Central Asia. In order to accommodate growing demand from SPECA countries, the programme of PWG-TBC was shifted towards topics related to sustainable development of transport systems and promotion of regional cooperation, with special emphasis on connectivity and more efficient international transport. Furthermore, important topics such as border crossing facilitation, collection and dissemination of transport statistics, development of rail transport and intermodality, and actions to improve road safety were emphasized as regional priorities.

9. The PWG-TBC meeting conclusions, reflecting the state-of-the-art of regional transport system, regularly included recommendations to SPECA countries:

- to make an additional progress related to accession to and implementation of United Nations transport legal instruments;
- to harmonize transport infrastructure development plans relying on established frameworks (Euro-Asian Transport Linkages; AGR, AGN, AGC and AGTC, Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway network, Intergovernmental Agreement on the Trans-Asian Railway network, the Intergovernmental Agreement on Dry Ports);
- to further facilitate international road and rail transport;
- to take actions to respond to the United Nations Decade of Action for Road Safety, 2011-2020; and
- to take actions to improve robustness and reliability of transport statistics as a tool to support governments or decision makers to make informed transport decisions.

10. In the last few years, SPECA countries have benefited from several ECE TA activities organized to support activities carried out under the SPECA PWG-TBC umbrella:

- To solve the problems encountered in collecting transport statistics in some SPECA member countries, several workshops were held in 2010 (Almaty, Kazakhstan) and 2011 (Almaty, Kazakhstan and Baku, Azerbaijan) under the PWG-TBC umbrella. The workshops aimed to familiarize transport statistics experts with ECE tools for gathering and dissemination of transport statistics, and to get reliable transport statistics from SPECA countries.
- The capacity-building workshop on United Nations legal instruments on inland transport (accession procedures and benefits of the conventions) was organized

back-to-back with the Inland Transport Committee annual meeting (Geneva, February 2015). Presentations and discussions during the workshop reaffirmed the need to access and implement United Nations legal instruments in order to create more efficient, safer and environmentally friendly transport systems.

- During the SPECA Road Safety Capacity-building Workshop (Almaty, September 2015), which was held back-to-back to the twentieth SPECA PWG-TBC, SPECA countries presented their current road safety situation, shared experiences on developing road safety legal and regulatory architecture, as well as on developing their national strategy, and setting up a road safety management system. Collection and analysis of road safety data for monitoring and evaluation was considered to be one of the key challenges.
- The SPECA Workshop on Road Transport and Road Safety Statistics (Ashgabat, 8-9 September 2016) sought to strengthen the capacities of SPECA and East-European countries in collecting reliable and comprehensive road transport and road safety statistics. A technical assistance workshop, under the SPECA PWG-TBC umbrella, was held back-to-back with the twenty-first PWG-TBC session. Representatives of five SPECA member countries — Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan — and Belarus, the Russian Federation, Serbia and Turkey met with ECE, ESCAP and Euro-Asian Economic Commission representatives (a total of 35 participants) to discuss the methodology for collecting road transport and road safety statistics, as well as how best to make this information available to decision makers, the road transport community and the general public.
- ECE organized a Regional Seminar on the application of the TIR Convention in Dushanbe (May 2015) with the participation of officials from Afghanistan, Azerbaijan and Tajikistan, among others. Afghanistan had resumed its TIR operations only in 2013. The seminar demonstrated the increased use of TIR in Central Asia, as well as the readiness of many countries in the region to proceed with computerization of customs procedures and establishment of single window concepts. The main message that emerged from the seminar is that several countries in the region are now mature in their policy goals and strategic plans to achieve deeper integration and modernization of their trade and transport processes, especially border crossing procedures.

11. It is worthwhile to mention the United Nations Development Account project ‘Strengthening the capacities of developing countries and countries with economies in transition to facilitate legitimate border crossing, regional cooperation and integration’ which supported activities on border crossing facilitation in Central Asia. The Project lead by ECE and implemented in cooperation with ESCAP, aimed at increasing Customs-to-Customs electronic exchange of transit related data between, inter alia, Kyrgyzstan and its neighbouring countries to further improve risk management procedures at border crossing and, ultimately, further facilitate legitimate transport. The project was finalized in 2016 and more information is available at www.unece.org/trans/themes/unda_customs-to-customs.html

III. The way forward

12. The Governing Council of SPECA at its tenth session in November 2015 decided to change the name of the PWG-TBC into the ‘Thematic Working Group on Sustainable Transport, Transit and Connectivity’ (TWG-STTC), and develop new objectives in line with ‘Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’ and the commitment of the SPECA countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The

SPECA framework was identified as an important platform for supporting the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals through TA activities, joint development and implementation of regional transport projects and sharing of best practices in project financing.

13. Based on the SPECA Governing Council decision, a leitmotif of the twenty-first TWG-STTC meeting were Sustainable Development Goals related to transport and ways to assist SPECA member countries in implementing and monitoring Sustainable Development Goals. Several Sustainable Development Goals on which transport sector has a direct influence were identified:

- Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages (Road safety);
- Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all (Energy efficiency);
- Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation (Sustainable infrastructure);
- Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable (Sustainable transport for all); and
- Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns (Termination of fuel subsidies).

14. Taking into account identified Sustainable Development Goals and the importance of regional transport cooperation to achieve Sustainable Development Goals, SPECA member countries agreed to include Sustainable Development Goal-related activities in the SPECA Programme of Work 2017-2018. The TWG-STTC Sustainable Development Goal-related activities should:

- Support the efforts of the participating countries to implement 2030 development agenda by enhancing the sustainability of transport;
- Ensure more focus on those efforts which would result in strengthening regional cooperation aimed at achieving transport related Sustainable Development Goals;
- Serve as a forum for inland transport stakeholders to discuss strategic issues, exchange of experiences, lessons learned and good practice, as well as for national and sub-regional efforts in transport sector related to increasing sustainability of transport and achieving Sustainable Development Goals; and
- Develop and implement transport projects, when possible, in line with relevant Sustainable Development Goals and targets to contribute to 2030 development agenda.

15. Furthermore, the TWG has decided to explore the possibilities of preparing an analytical paper on how regional transport cooperation within the SPECA framework could contribute to SPECA countries in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

16. TWG-STTC found existing TWG activities (transport connectivity and infrastructure development, removal of bottlenecks (both physical and non-physical), transport statistics, rail transport and intermodality, progress related to accession to and implementation of United Nations transport conventions, etc.) extremely important and complementary to Sustainable Development Goals achievement and agreed to keep them in the SPECA Programme of Work 2017-2018.

17. From the beginning, TA activities within SPECA TWG-STTC are an important complement to the Sustainable Transport Division's regulatory and analytical work in Central Asia. Through TWG activities, SPECA member States and ECE addressed the need

for higher investments in transport infrastructure, better connectivity, enhanced cross-border cooperation, wider and more efficient implementation of United Nations transport legal instruments and more attention to road safety. Constant involvement of the secretariat professional staff and the Regional Advisor in best practices sharing (substantial work in preparation of TWG documents and presentation at seminars, workshops and conferences), advisory services and organization of TA activities, in the future, will be one of the most important matters in the assistance to the countries to achieve Sustainable Development Goals and enhance regional transport cooperation.
