

NITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

UNECE – UNESCAP

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

4th Expert Group Meeting on Developing Euro-Asian Transport Linkages

(21 – 24 November, 2006 Thessaloniki, Greece)

Document 2. Summary of Progress to date

(For discussion under Agenda Item 1

Introduction

A major step forward towards the development of Euro-Asian transport links has been the approval by the UN General Assembly of a joint Project of the five UN regional commissions on the development of interregional transport linkages, funded by the UN Development Account ¹, and the subsequent decision of the UNECE and UNESCAP secretariats to focus and join their efforts on the development of the Euro-Asian transport links. The two regional commissions have been allocated about US\$ 400 000, to be spent over the period 2003-2006, for this purpose.

The countries most directly concerned were invited to participate in the Project and to nominate Focal Points. They included: all Eastern European UNECE member countries that were not EU members, namely Belarus, Bulgaria, Romania, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Turkey and Ukraine; all Caucasus and Central Asian UNECE and UNESCAP countries, namely Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan; and three other interested UNESCAP member countries, namely Afghanistan, Islamic Republic of Iran and the People's Republic of China. Altogether 18 countries were invited. The International Financial Institutions were also invited to participate in the Project and designate Focal Points, which they did.

The Expert Group Meetings on Developing Euro-Asian Transport Links

A **1st Expert Group Meeting**, held in March 2004 in Almaty (Kazakhstan), in which 16 designated National Focal Points, the World Bank, the EBRD, EU-Traceca and non-governmental organizations participated, agreed on the main elements of a strategy for the development of Euro-Asian Transport Links. Such strategy included focusing on main routes along the four major Euro-Asian Corridors that had been agreed upon at international level and that represent an extension of the Pan-European Transport Corridors further to the East. Other elements of the strategy were consideration of intermodal aspects,

1 UN Development Account Project on Capacity-building in developing interregional land and land-cum-sea transport linkages, implemented by the five UN Regional Commissions.

including transshipment points, along those routes and addressing border-crossing problems. The meeting also agreed on the data to be provided and the format of the country reports to be prepared by the National Focal Points.

At the **2nd Expert Group Meeting** under the Project, held in Odessa in November 2004, the Focal Points of 16 participating countries identified, on the basis of agreed criteria, 8 main Euro-Asian rail routes and 10 main Euro-Asian road routes to be considered for priority development. The selected routes include Northern East-West routes linking the western borders of Belarus and Ukraine, through the Russian Federation, with the port of Vladivostok in the Pacific Ocean, with branches through Kazakhstan and China up to the Shanghai port. They also include the TRACECA routes, linking Romania and Bulgaria, through the Black Sea, Turkey, Caucasus countries and the Caspian Sea, with Central Asian countries and China. Other main routes are North-South routes linking the Barents and Baltic Sea regions, through the territory of the Russian Federation, with the Caucasus countries and Iran. Finally, other selected main routes are Southern East-West routes linking Bulgaria, through Turkey and Iran, with Afghanistan and China, with branches to Southern Iran towards Pakistan and India.

The meeting also agreed on a set of criteria for the prioritization of projects and requested that the projects already proposed by participating countries be prioritized in 2005 in accordance with those criteria. It should be noted at this point that the criteria adopted for the prioritization of both the Euro-Asian routes and the projects along them may not be as strict as those that may be used in the context of the EU High Level Group. Therefore, it should not be surprising that the UNECE-UNESCAP Project provides a larger number of priority routes and of priority projects. It is, nevertheless, important that the priority routes and projects identified at the High Level Group are well within those identified in the UNECE-UNESCAP Project. To this end, cooperation and coordination between the High Level Group and the UNECE-UNESCAP Project is considered important.

Furthermore, the meeting requested National Focal Points to provide additional data concerning priority routes and priority projects in order to finalize the relevant Geographic Information System (GIS) database and related maps. It also agreed on future tasks, such as the assessment of the technical conditions of the adopted routes, the identification and analysis of the main physical and non-physical obstacles along these routes through a time/cost analysis, including border crossing, and the identification of main existing and potential transshipment points along the routes.

The **3rd Expert Group Meeting** on Developing Euro-Asian Transport Linkages that was jointly organized by UNECE and UNESCAP was held in Istanbul, Turkey, 27-29 June 2005. The Meeting was attended by National Focal Points and Experts from 18 countries in the Euro-Asian region. Representatives from the UNESCWA, EC DG TREN, ECMT, IGC TRACECA, IsDB, IRU, BSEC-URTA, and Europlatforms as well as the private sector, also attended the Meeting. The National Focal Points from the participating countries finalized the itineraries of the main road, rail and inland water transport routes connecting Europe and Asia to be considered for priority development and identified the main transshipment points along these routes. Furthermore, the Meeting agreed to provide missing and additional data with a view to the completion of a Geographic Information System (GIS) database. It also agreed on a methodology for the evaluation and prioritization of projects along the selected routes.

Finally, the Meeting welcomed the proposal of the UNECE WP.5 Informal Meeting, held on 15 April 2005, that the Expert Group Meeting on Euro-Asian Transport Linkages Project acts as a permanent mechanism for ensuring efficient coordination and monitoring of activities related to Euro-Asian transport links, asked the UNECE-UNESCAP secretariats to prepare a joint proposal for the continuation of the project beyond 2006 and appealed to the international financial institutions and donors to consider co-funding its implementation.

The Project activities in 2006 include, finalization of projects prioritization; measures to address the physical and non-physical obstacles to Euro-Asian transport, including to reduce times and costs at borders through the implementation of the relevant multilateral agreements; strengthening national transport facilitation bodies and formulation of appropriate national action plans; and completion of a UNECE-UNESCAP in-house study on developing Euro-Asian Transport Linkages to be presented at a final Expert Group Meeting, to be convened by end of 2006.

Two national workshops on the facilitation of international transport along the Euro-Asian transport links were jointly organized under the Project by UNECE and UNESCAP and kindly hosted by the Governments of Azerbaijan and Georgia, in May 2006 in Baku and Tbilisi, respectively. The aim of these workshops was to assist Azerbaijan and Georgia in developing favourable transit environment 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.

Each workshop was attended by over 40 representatives from public and private sector from those countries, including from the Ministries of Transport, Foreign Affairs, Finance, and Interior, Customs, Ports, Transport Associations and Companies, as well as from Chambers of Commerce, Businesses, aid and research institutions. Similar workshops are foreseen in Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova, Iran, and Ukraine.

In order to enable the organization of these workshops and the smooth completion of the remaining activities of the Project, UNECE and ESCAP, together with the other UN regional, are trying to ensure the UN Head Quarters approval for the prolongation of the project till June 2007.

Future work

At the **4th Expert Group Meeting**, organized in Thessaloniki, Greece, 21-24 November 2006, National Focal Points and Experts from participating countries and international organizations will discuss the results of the work done, share best practices and lessons learned and decide on further actions and recommendations on the ways to proceed in future.

Thanks to the willingness of the countries concerned to cooperate and also to the funds made available by the UN Development Account, the UNECE-UNESCAP Project on

Developing Euro-Asian Transport Links has achieved tangible results. However, the Project, and with it the funds it provides, will soon end, while the tasks to be performed in order to put in place efficient, competitive Euro-Asian land transport links are numerous, complex and require the long term cooperation of the countries concerned.

It is, therefore, extremely important, after the conclusion of the current phase of the Project, to ensure the necessary funding for the continuation of the Project activities, including the meetings of the Expert Group created under the project, for the period 2007-2010.

At its 68th session held in Geneva in February 2006, the UNECE ITC following the recommendation of its Working Group on Transport Trends and Economics (WP.5), requested the UNECE secretariat to prepare jointly with UNESCAP a proposal for the continuation of the project in a new phase beyond 2006, to make every effort in order to raise funds from potential donors for its implementation, and to apply the most appropriate framework in order to ensure that the Expert Group established under the UNECE-UNESCAP joint project on Euro-Asian transport links, becomes functional as a permanent mechanism ensuring continued monitoring of relevant activities.

At its 11th session, held in Almaty, in March 2006, the SPECA Working Group of Transport and Border Crossing Facilitation expressed similar requests. A number of international fora have recognized the importance of the continuation of the UNECE-UNESCAP work on developing Euro-Asian transport links, including the ECMT Council of Ministers held in Moscow in May 2005, and the First Meeting of the EU-Black Sea-Caspian Basin Expert Working Group on Transport Infrastructure, held in Kiev in December 2005.

In view of the above, the UNECE and UNESCAP prepared a proposal for the continuation of this project in a new Phase II to be implemented over the period 2007-2010. The UNECE secretariat submitted this proposal to the 14th OSCE Economic Forum, held on 22-24 of May 2006 in Prague, for possible funding.