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United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

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Towards the development of Euro-Asian land transport routes

Trade and transport between Asia and Europe have been sharply increasing in recent years. So far, such trade has been following maritime routes, since maritime transport was found more reliable and competitive than land routes. However, Governments of the countries in the Euro-Asian region have started to consider possible Euro-Asian land routes that might become credible alternatives to maritime routes.

At a recent meeting held in Odessa, Government representatives from 16 countries in the Euro-Asian region agreed on the main road and rail transport routes connecting Europe and Asia to be considered for priority development.

The participating countries were all Eastern European countries currently not members of the European Union: Belarus, Bulgaria, Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Turkey and Ukraine, and all neighbouring Caucasus and Asian countries: Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, China, Georgia, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

“I wish to underline the active involvement in this work of all the Governments concerned, including those of countries that play a major role in Euro-Asian Land Transport Links, such as Russian Federation, Kazakhstan and China”, said Mr. José Capel Ferrer, Director of the UNECE Transport Division. “The active participation of China is very important, as China is a major current and potential source and destination of traffic to and from Europe”.

The selected main Euro-Asian land transport 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 included the TRACECA routes, linking Romania and Bulgaria, through the Black Sea, Turkey, the Caucasus countries and the Caspian Sea, with Central Asian countries, and extended to China. Other main routes were 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 and India.

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The meeting also agreed on approaches to developing the routes, including: assessment of the technical conditions of the adopted routes; identification and analysis of the main physical and non-physical obstacles along these routes through a time/cost analysis; identification of main transshipment points along the routes; completion of a Geographic Information System (GIS) database; and identification of priority projects along the selected routes.

Removing border crossing obstacles and hindrances through implementing the relevant international agreements and conventions and formulating national action plans, are also in the focus of the countries involved.

The meeting was organized jointly by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), as a part of a wider Project on Capacity-building in developing interregional land and land-cum-sea transport linkages. This Project, implemented by the five UN Regional Commissions, is funded through the UN Development Account.

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