

**UNECE****United Nations Economic Commission for Europe**

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The Euro-Asian transport links in focus

Globalization and liberalization of national economies is leading to a sharp increase in trade and transport between Asia and Europe. Most of the traffic has so far been following maritime routes. However, Governments and international organizations have started to look at Euro-Asian land transport links as possible alternatives to the existing sea routes.

The identification of the most appropriate Euro-Asian inland transport routes and the conditions for their development was the main focus of the first Expert Group Meeting on Developing Euro-Asian Transport Linkages, which was held on 9-11 March 2004 in Almaty (Kazakhstan).

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), the meeting brought together representatives from 16 countries in the Euro-Asian region, namely Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, China, Georgia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Romania, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkey, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

Representatives of other UN Agencies, the European Commission, the World Bank, EBRD, Asian Development Bank and Islamic Development Bank, as well as of a large number of other international governmental and non-governmental organizations also attended the meeting.

The meeting agreed on the main elements of a strategy for the development of Euro-Asian Transport Links, including focusing on major routes along the four main Euro-Asian Corridors that had been agreed upon at international level and that represent an extension of the Pan-European Transport Corridors further East. Those Euro-Asian Corridors are the following:

- Transsiberian: Europe - Russian Federation - Japan, with three branches to: Kazakhstan – China; Korean Peninsula; and Mongolia – China;
- TRACECA: Eastern Europe – across Black Sea – Caucasus – across Caspian Sea – Central Asia
- Southern route: Southeastern Europe – Turkey –Islamic Republic of Iran, with two branches to: Central Asia – China; and South Asia – Southeast Asia/Southern China
- North - South: North Europe – Russian Federation, with three branches to: Caucasus – Persian Gulf; Central Asia – Persian Gulf; across Caspian Sea – Islamic Republic of Iran – Persian Gulf.

Other elements of the strategy adopted were that major routes along these corridors should encompass intermodal aspects, including transshipment points, and that border crossing problems should be addressed.

The activities to carry out this strategy will be developed in three phases over the years 2004, 2005 and 2006. The first phase, to be carried out in 2004, would consist of the identification of major routes of Euro-Asian importance, the collection of related infrastructure and traffic data, consolidation and analysis of this data, and presentation of a preliminary assessment of priority Euro-Asian transport routes and priority projects along these routes as well as financial needs, at the second Expert Group Meeting to be held in the autumn 2004.

Other activities aimed at removing border crossing obstacles and hindrances, implementation of major international transport agreements and conventions and formulation and implementation of national action plans will follow.

This joint UNECE-UNESCAP initiative is part of a wider UN Development Account Project on Capacity-building in developing interregional land and land-cum-sea transport linkages, implemented by the five UN Regional Commissions. This project is aimed at assisting member States of the five UN Regional Commissions in strengthening their national capacities for developing interregional transport linkages and at promoting interregional cooperation to facilitate interregional trade and tourism.

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