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Working Party on Intermodal Transport and Logistics

Fifty-third session
Geneva, 4–5 October 2010

Report of the Working Party on Intermodal Transport and Logistics on its fifty-third session

Contents

I. Attendance

1. The Working Party on Intermodal Transport and Logistics held its fifty-third session on 4 and 5 October 2010 in Geneva.

2. The session of the Working Party was attended by the following countries: Austria; Belgium; France; Germany; Japan; Netherlands; Slovakia; Spain; Turkey and Ukraine. A representative of the European Union (DG MOVE) was present.

3. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the Intergovernmental Organization for International Carriage by Rail (OTIF) were represented. The following non-governmental organizations were represented: Groupement européen du transport combiné (GETC); International Bureau of Containers (BIC); International Union of Combined Road/Rail Transport Companies (UIRR); German Promotion Center for Intermodal Transport (SGKV).

4. In accordance with the decision taken at its fifty-second session (ECE/TRANS/WP.24/125, para. 42), the session was chaired by Mr. M. Viardot (France).

II. Adoption of the agenda (agenda item 1)[1]

5. The Working Party adopted the provisional agenda prepared by the secretariat (ECE/TRANS/WP.24/126).

III. New developments and best practices in intermodal transport and logistics (agenda item 2)

Documentation: Informal document No. 1 (2010)

6. The Working Party had an exchange views on recent developments and trends in intermodal transport and logistics in UNECE member countries.

7. In 2009, the financial and economic crisis has led to a considerable decrease in freight transport. Particularly, international transport of containers declined very considerably: world container traffic (in TEU) fell by 26 per cent. Similarly, while combined road-rail transport had shown annual average increases of around 6 per cent between 1998 and 2008, UIRR companies reported in 2009 a decrease in traffic in the order of 17 per cent. The total number of consignments shipped in 2009 fell to 2.50 million or 4.99 million TEU equivalents.[2]

8. The decline in international (3.2 million TEU) and national combined transport (1.8 million TEU) was very similar: –16 and –18 per cent respectively. However, unaccompanied combined transport fell by 19 per cent, whereas accompanied combined transport only recorded a decline of 3 per cent. This difference in performance in 2009 was due to an important increase in national accompanied traffic (+14 per cent), mainly in

[1] All informal documents and presentations made at the session are available on the following website: www.unece.org/trans/wp24/wp24-presentations/24presentations.html.

[2] One consignment is equivalent to two twenty-foot equivalent units (TEU).

Austria where over 176.000 consignments or 252.000 TEU (+16 per cent) were transported nationally in 2009.

9. While the reduction in combined transport demand led to a decrease in the number of weekly combined transport trains, UIRR companies nevertheless increased in 2009 the number of transport relations. This increase was focused mainly on the European North-South corridors linking maritime ports of Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands with Italy and South-East Europe until Turkey and along East-West corridors between Portugal, Spain, France, Germany, Poland and the Russian Federation.

10. In 2009, combined road-rail transport operations also declined dramatically in Slovakia and the Ukraine (–30 per cent) and led to the closure of a number of only recently introduced services. Similarly, a reduction in the order of 33 per cent for container transport was reported on the Trans-Siberian railway. In 2009 the number of containers handled in the far-Eastern ports of Vostochny and Vladivostok dropped by 60 and 15 per cent respectively, mainly due to the decline in shipment of automobile parts for assembly plants in the Russian Federation. Transit traffic of containers virtually came to a standstill on the Trans-Siberian railway in 2009.

11. Preliminary figures for 2010 point to a double digit recovery for UIRR companies in the order of 12–17 per cent, driven by strong increases in international trade and maritime container traffic, particularly between Asia and Europe (the World Trade Organization (WTO) projected for 2010 an increase in international trade in the order of 14 per cent).

12. Similarly, between March and July 2010, container handling volumes increased by more than 60 per cent at the far-Eastern gateways ports to the Trans-Siberian railway, partly due to a sharp increase in charges for maritime container transport between Asia and Europe making rail transport from Far East to the Russian Federation again competitive.

13. Between January and August 2010, more than 600.000 TEU were transported on the Trans-Siberian railway (+25 per cent) of which 61 per cent was domestic traffic, 21 per cent imports and 15 per cent exports. Transit traffic accounted for little more than 3 per cent (19,200 TEU) since, as shown in Informal document No. 1 (2010), the “watershed” (i.e. where container transport charges from Far-East Asia to Europe are equal between rail and maritime transport), is located in the area of Moscow. Rail transport charges for containers from Far-East Asia to European destinations west of Moscow are at present still higher than those for maritime transport.

14. The representatives of Austria, Belgium, France, Netherlands, Slovakia, Turkey and Ukraine provided specific information on latest developments in combined transport in their countries.

IV. 2010 Theme: Opportunities and challenges for intermodal transport by inland waterways (agenda item 3)

Documentation: ECE/TRANS/WP.24/2010/1, ECE/TRANS/WP.24/2010/9

15. As decided by the Working Party at its last session (ECE/TRANS/WP.24/125, paras. 18–22 and 40–41), the 2010 theme for substantive discussions at the present session was: Opportunities and challenges for intermodal transport by inland waterways.

16. The 2010 theme was prepared and the discussions moderated by Mr. Boris Kluge, Director, German Promotion Center for Intermodal Transport (SGKV). Presentations were made by Mr. Heiko Rumfeld, Member of the Board of the Port of Duisburg (Germany), Mr. Oliver Haas, Manager of CTS Container Terminal, NESKA Group (Germany) and Mr. Nicolas Bour, Director, Seine-Nord-Europe-Canal, Navigable Waterways of France (VNF).

17. On the basis of these presentations and two background documents prepared by SGKV and an informal UNECE expert group, the Working Party considered the role of intermodal transport using inland waterways and discussed measures to further increase its attractiveness and competitiveness as well as its complementarities with road and rail transport as part of seamless door-to-door transport systems. Concerning further reviews of this subject by the Working Party, it was generally stated that activities of the Working Party on Inland Water Transport (SC.3) should not be duplicated.

A. Intermodal transport by inland waterways has great potential

18. It was noted that the European inland waterway network that met the basic requirements of the UNECE European Agreement on Main Inland Waterways of International Importance (AGN) had a length of 22,000 km and offered very considerable spare capacities that could be utilized without major investments in infrastructure and vessels. Moreover, two-third of this network (14.77 km) fulfils the minimum requirements for efficient international container transport as stipulated in the UNECE European Agreement on Important International Combined Transport Lines and Related Installations (AGTC) Protocol on Inland Waterways, i.e. inland waterway Class Vb or higher.

19. However, while in 2007 around 18 million TEUs were transported by road-rail intermodal transport, mainly on North-South European corridors, intermodal transport by inland waterways is mainly confined to port hinterland traffic to and from major European North Range sea ports. Most of such traffic relates to the Rhine and its tributaries where, in 2007, around 1.6 million TEU were moved.

20. Since 1995, container transport on the Rhine has nearly tripled, mainly driven by maritime port hinterland traffic of containers. The boom in container traffic on the Rhine shows that, given favourable inland water conditions and infrastructures, intermodal transport using inland waterways could be highly competitive..

21. While road and rail transport infrastructures, particularly along major European North-South corridors are increasingly congested, inland water transport still offers untapped capacities in the order of 20 to 100 per cent in many UNECE countries, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. However, adequate capacity on inland waterways is not sufficient to increase its market share and modal split vis-à-vis road and rail transport.

22. In order to capture growth markets, such as the transport of containers, the inland water transport industry needs to comply with the increasingly sophisticated needs and requirements of supply chain and distribution managers and must integrate better into seamless door-to-door transport chains. This includes also efficient transshipment operations and terminal hauls, as the benchmark in terms of cost and service quality is door-to-door road transport.

23. Given the limited space in most European container ports and the growing congestion around port areas and along European North-South road and rail corridors, inland waterways may be able to gain further market shares in port hinterland traffic, particularly along the rivers Rhine and Rhone as well as its major tributaries.

24. Out of some 330 inland navigation ports that can be considered to be of international importance, 150 are located along the Rhine, only 45 along the Danube. Only around 100 of these ports operate terminals for intermodal transport. This dense network of terminals close to major European economic centres along the Rhine and its canals could certainly contribute to a further increase in container traffic. But this requires better cooperation between maritime and inland water ports.

B. What needs to be done by European Governments?

25. European Governments play an important role in providing for and facilitating the provision of efficient inland water and port infrastructures as well as adequate maintenance to ensure reliability of services as a prerequisite for competitive operations. The construction of the Seine-Nord-Europe Canal, linking Paris and the Seine basin, with the European waterway networks in Belgium, Netherlands and Germany will remove one of the existing missing links. European Governments should better utilize the framework provided by the AGTC Protocol of UNECE as it lays down a sound coordinated plan for the development of intermodal transport on pan-European inland waterways and coastal routes.

26. Furthermore, a level playing field between maritime and inland navigation interests needs to be established at major European seaports. Similarly, a supportive framework and mechanisms to facilitate consolidation of cargo for port hinterland traffic to inland terminals and cargo hubs needs to be established to ensure more efficient operations of inland water vessels. European Governments should encourage and support private initiatives in this respect

27. Mechanisms to ensure the development and maintenance of standard pan-European rules and regulations for inland waterway transport would facilitate operations and streamline administrative procedures. European Governments should facilitate these processes by coordinating and streamlining regulatory processes as well as the institutional landscape in inland navigation (European Commission, UNECE, Danube-, Mosel-, Rhine- and Sava-River Commissions).

28 International river-sea transport is very difficult and costly due to the lack of internationally accepted rules and regulations and is only possible for sea-worthy maritime vessels. A link between sea and inland water transport would offer a seamless connection between land and sea legs and would avoid transshipment of containers in congested European sea ports. European Governments should take urgent action in this field.

29. Finally, the fragmented inland navigation and inland port industry must continue to streamline its operations and align its vessel fleet and port installations with modern safety and environmental requirements. In order to capture growth markets and market niches, such as for containers and ro-ro transport, for bulky and heavy goods or for waste and recycling materials, the industry also needs to comply with the increasingly sophisticated needs and requirements of global and regional supply chain and distribution managers. Such adaptation should be encouraged and supported by European Governments, fostering better port management by private industries as well as deregulation of inland water transport operations.

V. National policy measures to promote intermodal transport (agenda item 4)

Documentation: ECE/TRANS/WP.24/2010/7

30. In accordance with a decision of the UNECE Inland Transport Committee (ITC), the Working Party continues the work carried out by the former European Conference of Ministers of Transport (ECMT) in (a) monitoring and analysis of national measures to promote intermodal transport and (b) monitoring enforcement and review of the ECMT Consolidated Resolution on Combined Transport (ECE/TRANS/192, para. 90).

31. The Working Party took note of updated information from Belgium, Czech Republic, Germany, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Turkey contained in document

ECE/TRANS/WP.24/2010/7. Slovenia and Switzerland indicated that the information provided in 2008 as contained in documents ECE/TRANS/WP.24/2009/9, ECE/TRANS/WP.24/2009/8, ECE/TRANS/WP.24/2008/5 and addenda is still valid. Austria will send updated information subsequent to the meeting.

32. The Working Party requested the secretariat to continue monitoring and analysis of national policy measures with a view to providing a consistent, comparable and comprehensive picture of European Governmental support measures for intermodal transport at the pan-European level. The secretariat was invited to provide on-line access to this information.

VI. European Agreement on Important International Combined Transport Lines and Related Installations (agenda item 5)

A. Status of the AGTC Agreement and adopted amendment proposals

Documentation: ECE/TRANS/88/Rev.5

33. At present, the AGTC Agreement has 32 Contracting Parties.[3] Detailed information on the AGTC Agreement, including the up-to-date and consolidated text of the Agreement (ECE/TRANS/88/Rev.5), a map of the AGTC network, an inventory of standards stipulated in the Agreements as well as all relevant Depositary Notifications are available on the website of the Working Party at www.unece.org/trans/wp24/welcome.html.

34. Amendments prepared by the Working Party relating to paragraph 2 of Articles 14, 15 and 16 of the AGTC Agreement entered into force on 10 December 2009 as indicated in Depositary Notification C.N.544.2009.TREATIES–2 of 10 September 2009. At present, no other amendment proposals are pending.

B. Amendment proposals (updating and extension of the AGTC network)

35. The Working Party reviewed amendment proposals already considered at its fifty-second session as contained in document ECE/TRANS/WP.24/2009/1 relating to Armenia, Austria, Georgia, Hungary and Turkmenistan and in document ECE/TRANS/WP.24/2009/4 relating to Denmark, Germany and Sweden (ECE/TRANS/WP.24/125, paras. 29–31). It agreed with the proposal of Austria to withdraw the newly proposed railway line in Austria "C–E 63 Wien-Ebenfurt (-Sopron)" as well as the continuation of this line in Hungary "C–E 631 (Ebenfurt-) Sopron-Szombathely-Naggykanizsa".

36. The Working Party noted that the required consultations among concerned Contracting Parties for the remaining amendment proposals had not yet been concluded and decided to revert to them at its next session.

[3] Albania, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland, Turkey and Ukraine.

C. Amendment proposals (minimum infrastructure and performance standards)

Documentation: ECE/TRANS/WP.24/2010/2, ECE/TRANS/WP.24/2010/3

37. The Working Party recalled that, as indicated in document ECE/TRANS/WP.24/2009/2, several of the 15 countries that had responded to a secretariat survey on the relevance of the minimum infrastructure and performance standards and parameters in annexes III and IV to the AGTC Agreement, had felt that some of them might need to be reviewed and updated.

38. As requested, the secretariat has solicited the views of rail infrastructure managers and has reviewed mandatory and proposed technical interoperability standards applicable in the European Union (EU) and in other UNECE member countries, such as those contained in the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Trans-Asian Railway Network (TAR) developed under the auspices of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

39. The Working Party reviewed and compared the existing minimum infrastructure and performance standards and parameters of the AGTC Agreement with those applicable and proposed in the EU and in other UNECE member countries on the basis of two documents prepared by the secretariat, in cooperation with an informal ad hoc expert group:

(a) ECE/TRANS/WP.24/2010/2 containing a review of the technical characteristics of the AGC and AGTC rail networks as contained in annex II to the AGC Agreement and annex III to the AGTC Agreement;

(b) ECE/TRANS/WP.24/2010/3 containing a review of the operational targets and performance parameters for combined transport services (trains and installations) contained in annex IV to AGTC Agreement.

40. The Working Party noted that particularly the Technical Specifications for Interoperability (TSI) applicable in the European Union, both for conventional and high-speed rail systems, were generally in line with the present minimum AGC and AGTC technical characteristics, but contained at least 20 more technical parameters that were considered essential for trans-European rail systems as developed by the European Railway Agency under the so-called Interoperability Directive 2008/57/EC.

41. The Working Party recognized however that the objective and the mandatory requirements to be met by railway systems under the EU Interoperability Directive, including safety, reliability and availability, health, environmental protection and technical compatibility, went well beyond the objective and the minimum requirements for infrastructure and performance parameters enshrined in the pan-European AGC and AGTC Agreements. These additional parameters could thus not necessarily be considered as a bench mark for amendments to the AGC and AGTC Agreements.

42. The Working Party invited UNECE member countries and, in particular, Contracting Parties to the AGTC Agreement to transmit to the secretariat, possibly before 1 March 2011, written comments on the suitability of the infrastructure and performance standards and parameters in the AGC and AGTC Agreements. Also the Working Party on Rail Transport was invited to review the above documents and to provide guidance for a possible update of the AGC and AGTC Agreements so as to bring them in line with modern railway and intermodal transport requirements applicable at the pan-European level.

VII. Protocol on Combined Transport on Inland Waterways to the AGTC Agreement (agenda item 6)

43. The Working Party recalled that the objective of the Protocol is to make container and ro-ro transport on inland waterways and costal routes in Europe more efficient and attractive to customers. The Protocol establishes a legal framework that lays down a coordinated plan for the development of intermodal transport services on pan-European inland waterways and coastal routes in line with those in the AGN Agreement, based on specific internationally agreed parameters and standards.

44. The Protocol identifies some 14,700 km of E waterways and transshipment terminals that are important for regular and international intermodal transport in Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Switzerland and Ukraine. The Protocol stipulates technical and operational minimum requirements of inland waterways and terminals in ports that are required for competitive container and ro-ro transport services.

A. Status of the Protocol

Documentation: ECE/TRANS/122, ECE/TRANS/122/Corr.1, ECE/TRANS/122/Corr.2

45. The Working Party noted that, with the accession of Serbia on 31 July 2009, the Protocol to the AGTC Agreement had come into force on 29 October 2009.

46. The Protocol to the AGTC Agreement has been signed by 15 and ratified so far by 9 countries.[4] Its text is contained in document ECE/TRANS/122 and Corrs.1 and 2.[5] Detailed information on the Protocol, including the text of the Protocol and all relevant Depositary Notifications are available on the website of the Working Party.[6]

47. The Working Party recalled that the ITC had encouraged concerned Contracting Parties to the AGTC Agreement to accede to the Protocol as soon as possible.

B. Amendment proposals

Documentation: ECE/TRANS/WP.24/2010/6

48. The Working Party recalled that the ITC had requested the Working Party to consider and decide on amendment proposals to the Protocol that had already been submitted (ECE/TRANS/200, para. 93).

49. On the basis of a document prepared by the secretariat (ECE/TRANS/WP.24/2010/6) containing inter alia a consolidated list of amendment proposals submitted earlier by Austria, Bulgaria, France, Hungary and Romania (ECE/TRANS/WP.24/117, para. 58 and TRANS/WP.24/97, para. 23), the Working Party

[4] Bulgaria; Czech Republic; Denmark; Hungary; Luxembourg; Netherlands; Romania; Serbia; Switzerland.

[5] It should be noted that only the text kept in custody by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, in his capacity as depositary of the AGTC Agreement, constitutes the authoritative text of the Agreement.

[6] www.unece.org/trans/wp24/welcome.html.

reviewed these long-standing proposals as well as other amendment proposals prepared by the secretariat.

50. The amendment proposal by Austria to align Annex III, (a), (vi), of the Protocol with the relevant provision in the AGN Agreement as contained in document ECE/TRANS/WP.24/2010/6, para. 5 as well as in document ECE/TRANS/WP.24/2008/9, para. 15 was accepted as follows:

Annex III, (a), (vi), line 4

After the first sentence, insert the following footnote:

2) However, for upstream sections of natural rivers characterized by frequently fluctuating water levels due to strong direct dependence of weather conditions, it is recommended to refer to a period of at least 300 days on average per year.

51. Decisions on other amendment proposals could not be taken due to lack of information provided by Contracting Parties. The Working Party regretted that it had to postpone therefore adoption of these amendment proposals, in accordance with articles 13, 14 and 15 of the Protocol, to its next session.

VIII. Civil liability regimes in intermodal transport (agenda item 7)

52. The Working Party recalled the discussions at its previous sessions, summarized in ECE/TRANS/WP.24/2009/3 and ECE/TRANS/WP.24/123, paras. 36–43 as well as the detailed information provided at its fifty-second session by the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) about the origin, main innovations and concepts enshrined in the new Convention on Contracts for the International Carriage of Goods Wholly or Partly by Sea (Rotterdam Rules) (ECE/TRANS/WP.24/125, paras. 14–15).

53. The Working Party noted that the Rotterdam Rules had been adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 11 December 2008. In 2009, 21 countries had signed the convention. With the two more countries that signed in 2010, the number of signatories stood at present at 23. For the convention to enter into force, ratification by 20 countries is required.

54. A number of countries have already initiated ratification procedures, such as France and Spain, including extensive consultations at national level.

55. In line with the mandate of the Working Party to facilitate intermodal land transport and to provide a level playing field for intermodal transport at the pan-European level, the Working Party decided to invite an informal group of experts (volunteers) to prepare a note on the scope of application and the practical consequences of the Rotterdam Rules for pan-European land and intermodal transport operations. This note should be available for comments by the Working Party well before its next session in autumn 2011.

IX. IMO/ILO/UNECE Guidelines for packing of cargo in intermodal transport units (agenda item 8)

Documentation: ECE/TRANS/WP.24/2010/4

56. The Working Party recalled that in 1996 it had finalized, in cooperation with the IMO and the International Labour Office (ILO), international guidelines for the safe packing of cargo in freight containers and vehicles covering also the requirements of all land transport modes (TRANS/WP.24/R.83 and Add.1).[7] It had been suggested at that time that the guidelines should be regularly updated from time to time and supplemented by additional elements, such as provisions on fumigation (TRANS/WP.24/71, paras. 32–36). In 1997, ITC had approved these guidelines and had expressed the hope that the guidelines would help reduce personnel injury while handling containers and would minimize physical hazard to which cargoes were exposed in intermodal transport operations (ECE/TRANS/119, paras. 124–126).

57. At its fifty-first session in March 2009, the Working Party agreed to contribute to a review and update of the guidelines initiated by IMO. It requested the secretariat to coordinate with ILO and IMO in this respect and to report back on new developments and procedures envisaged (ECE/TRANS/WP.24/123, paras. 45–47).

58. The Working Party took note of the position of IMO that this and any future revisions of the guidelines should be undertaken under the coordination of IMO, and in lieu of establishing a joint group of experts, the secretariats of IMO, ILO and UNECE should work together.

59. Taking account of document ECE/TRANS/WP.24/2010/4, the Working Party approved the activities of the secretariat, including the proposed establishment of a group of experts or similar arrangements It also felt that a holistic approach in the revision and update of the guidelines should be followed, in close cooperation with concerned industry groups, taking account of the requirements of all modes of transport, port handling and transhipment operations that are part of modern door-to-door transport systems. The support of Japan for such activities was appreciated.

60. Subject to available resources, the secretariat was invited to participate in such undertakings and to keep the Working Party informed accordingly.

X. Weights and dimensions of loading units in intermodal transport: The modular concept (agenda item 9)

Documentation: ECE/TRANS/WP.24/2010/5

61. The Working Party recalled the considerations at its previous sessions on the impact of “mega-trucks” with a maximum length of 25.5 m and weights of up to 60 tonnes on the European road network and on intermodal transport (ECE/TRANS/WP.24/115, paras. 36–38, ECE/TRANS/WP.24/117, paras. 38–46; ECE/TRANS/WP.24/119, paras. 22–24 and ECE/TRANS/WP.24/121, paras 41–43). It also recalled secretariat document ECE/TRANS/WP.24/2008/8 issued in August 2008 that provided an overview of the policy discussions and trials with such long and heavy vehicles in several UNECE member countries.

62. As requested by the Working Party (ECE/TRANS/WP.24/121, para. 43), the secretariat prepared a new report on latest developments in this field, mainly within EU countries that refers also to the so-called modular concept as stipulated in European Directive 96/53/EC (ECE/TRANS/WP.24/2010/5).

[7] Available from www.unece.org/trans/wp24/welcome.html.

63. The Working Party had an exchange of views and information on latest developments in this field and took note of the concerns expressed by some delegations on possible negative consequences of such vehicles for road and terminal infrastructure as well as the competitiveness of intermodal transport over long distances. It noted that the European Commission was at present studying all aspects related to a possible modification of European Directive 96/53/EC allowing such vehicles in international transport with a view to making the European transport system more efficient.

64. The Working Party requested the secretariat to continue monitoring this matter and to report new developments.

XI. Activities of the European Commission in intermodal transport and logistics (agenda item 10)

65. The Working Party was informed in detail about recent activities and plans for future work of the European Commission (DG MOVE) relating to intermodal transport and logistics. Information was provided on current considerations and work in the fields of civil liability (at present there is no mandate from the European Council), the modular concept for road vehicles (see paragraph 63 above), green corridors, e-freight and logistics and preparations for a second White Paper on the future of transport to be published in early 2011.

XII. Activities of international organizations in intermodal transport and logistics (agenda item 11)

66. The representative of the UNESCAP reported on recent activities of his organization in intermodal transport in the Asia and Pacific region. The Working Party took note of ESCAP's activities on the Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway networks as well as the development of a network of dry ports of international importance using the AGTC Agreement as a reference model for work in this area.

XIII. Activities of the UNECE Inland Transport Committee and its subsidiary bodies (agenda item 12)

67. The Working Party was informed about progress made under the Euro-Asian transport links (EATL) project and about a study on hinterland connections of seaports that addressed policy issues relating to traffic congestions in ports and their hinterland connections. It also took note of newly initiated work towards unification of railway law that, through a three step approach, aimed to achieve a unified railway regime in the pan-European region, with a particular focus on Euro-Asian rail transport.

XIV. Theme for substantive discussion in 2011 (agenda item 13)

68. The Working Party confirmed that the topic "Role of terminals and logistics centres for intermodal transport" would be the theme for its next session in 2011. As in 2010, the issues to be addressed would be developed by an informal group of experts that would also prepare a background note as a basis for discussion. UNECE member countries and/or organizations willing to prepare and organize the discussions in the Working Party in 2011 were invited to contact the secretariat.

XV. Election of officers (agenda item 14)

69. The Working Party re-elected Mr. M. Viardot (France) as Chair and Mr. H. Maillard (Belgium) as Vice-Chair of the Working Party for its session in 2011.

XVI. Date and venue of next sessions (agenda item 15)

70. The Working Party, noting that the secretariat has tentatively scheduled the fifty-fourth session to be held on 2 and 3 November 2011 at the Palais des Nations (Geneva) felt that this date should be reviewed by the secretariat also in light of holding the next session possibly back-to-back with the Working Party on Rail Transport (SC.2) and/or the Working Party on Inland Water Transport (SC.3) to reap synergies and to address issues of common concern (terminals and logistic centres, etc.).

71. In addition to the informal group of experts on civil liability (see paragraph. 55) that will work in principle via e-mail, the informal group of experts on the WP.24 theme for substantive discussions is planned to hold two sessions in 2011, with the objective to follow-up on the considerations under the 2010 theme and to prepare the discussions for the 2011 theme of the Working Party.

(a) Follow-up to 2010 theme: "Intermodal transport by inland waterways"

Tentative date: April/May 2011

Tentative venue: Strasbourg.

(b) Preparation of the 2011 theme: "The role of terminals and logistics centres for intermodal transport"

Tentative date: June/July 2011

Tentative venue: Paris.

72. Experts willing to participate in these expert groups are requested to contact the secretariat.

XVII. Summary of decisions (agenda item 16)

73. As agreed and in line with the decision of the ITC (ECE/TRANS/156, para. 6), the secretariat, in cooperation with the Chair and in consultation with delegates, has prepared this report for transmission to the ITC at its next session (1–3 March 2011).