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UNECE – UNESCAP

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

**National Workshop on the Facilitation of Interregional Transport Along the
Euro-Asian Transport Links**

(Tbilisi, Georgia, 15-16 May 2006)

CONCLUSIONS

Jointly organised and sponsored by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), and kindly hosted by the Ministry of Economic Development of Georgia, a **national workshop on the facilitation of interregional transport along the Euro-Asian transport links** was held on 15 and 16 May 2006, in Tbilisi, Georgia.

Mr. David Tsiklauri, Deputy Minister of Economic Development, Georgia, opened the Workshop, which was attended by 45 experts from public and private sector, including representatives of the Ministries of Economic Development, Foreign Affairs, Finance, and the Interior, Customs, Maritime Administration, Patrol Police, Batumi and Poti Ports, Transport Associations and Companies, the American Chamber of Commerce, as well as other representatives of Businesses, aid and research institutions.

The aim of this workshop was to assist Georgia to develop favourable transit environment in its territory for facilitating international transport and trade along the Euro-Asian transport links, support ongoing national efforts to accede to and implement relevant UN agreement and conventions, as well as to foster cooperation amongst major national stakeholders involved in transit and border crossing operations.

This intensive two-days workshop has allowed the participants to get a deeper insight into the major UN legal instruments and initiatives on transport and trade facilitation, exchange views with the UN experts on the main issues of transport and trade facilitation at national, subregional and interregional levels and strengthening national coordination mechanisms for the facilitation of international transport and trade along the Euro-Asian transport links.

The UN experts gave presentations on the progress of the joint UNECE-UNESCAP Euro-Asian Transport linkages project; on the UN as well as on WTO legal instruments and initiatives on transport and trade facilitation and harmonization of legal regimes; and on existing experiences from the establishment of national coordination mechanisms in countries along the Euro-Asian transport links.

Experts from the Ministry of Economic Development of Georgia and other stakeholders from public and private sector reviewed the status of accession to and implementation of the UN agreements and conventions and reported on the national experiences on transport facilitation progress and challenges.

Participants at the workshop reached a number of conclusions, which can be summarised as follows:

1. Transport is a most basic, and one of strategic factors for economic development and job creation. An efficient transport system is vital for international trade and tourism, which have a major and increasing impact on growth and competitiveness of businesses and economies.
2. Inadequate transport infrastructures, bottlenecks and missing links, as well as transport legislation that varies from one country to another, different and arbitrary taxes and charges, and cumbersome and time-consuming border procedures, are among the major obstacles for the development of international transport along the Euro-Asian transport links.
3. The solution of these problems requires, inter alia, coordinated action of concerned Governments in the framework of international organizations aimed at developing adequate, coherent and integrated priority international transport networks and an internationally harmonized regulatory framework that enables the development of efficient and low cost, uninterrupted, safe and sustainable transport services.
4. The UN legal instruments in the field of transport provide a common legal and technical platform for Caucasus countries, as well as for other countries along the Euro-Asian transport links, to establish interregional transport networks, simplified border procedures, rules for safe road traffic, safety and environmental regulations for the construction of vehicles, and regulations for the safe carriage of dangerous goods and perishable foodstuffs. In addition, these legal instruments are major tools for enhancing the efficiency of international transport operations, facilitate international trade and further developing and integrating national transport systems within Europe and Asia.
5. Accession to and more consistent implementation of the major UN legal instruments in the field of transport could bring about measurable advantages in transport operations among countries in Euro-Asian region as well as between their region and other regions in the world.
6. Noting that Georgia is already Contracting Party to a good number of the main UN transport infrastructure and facilitation agreements was invited to consider adhering to those UN agreements and conventions to which it has not yet acceded, and ensure full implementation.
7. Implementation of harmonized UN legislation on border crossing procedures, in particular, and closer cooperation among competent authorities and stakeholder within Georgian territory and between them and their counterparts in other countries in the region through exchange of information on best practices, regular meetings, building trust and development of a problem solving approach, could lead to reduction of existing obstacles and delays on borders.
8. Participants agreed on the necessity of establishing a national coordination mechanism for the facilitation of international transport and trade, and requested the Ministry of Economic Development to take the lead in this regard. They also agreed to foster cooperation amongst major national stakeholders involved in transit and border crossing operations, with a view to establish a national action plan for the facilitation of international transport and trade, and implement it. Moreover, they agreed to become more actively involved in the UNECE and UNESCAP transport activities.

Participants expressed their gratitude to the Ministry of Economic Development of Georgia for hosting the workshop in Tbilisi, to all the speakers for their valuable contributions to the successful deliberation of the work, and to the UNECE and UNESCAP for their initiative to organize and sponsor this workshop.