



**UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE
TRANSPORT DIVISION**

**MR. MICHALIS ADAMANTIADIS, REGIONAL ADVISER, AT THE
NATIONAL WORKSHOP ON THE FACILITATION OF INTERNATIONAL
TRANSPORT ALONG THE EURO-ASIAN TRANSPORT LINKS
(Tbilisi, Georgia, 15-16 May 2006)**

Dear Minister, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour and a pleasure for me, on behalf of Mr. Capel Ferrer, Director of the UNECE Transport Division, my colleague Mario Apostolov, Regional Adviser on Trade, UNECE and on my own behalf, to welcome you to the national workshop on the Facilitation of International Transport along the Euro-Asian Transport Links, jointly organized with ECE and ESCAP.

I should like to express my gratitude to Minister Tsiklauri and to the Government of Georgia, for hosting this workshop in the beautiful as well as historical City of Tbilisi, which at the same is one of the most important nodal points for Euro-Asian transport in the region.

I should also like to thank Mr. Lasha Kmiadashvili and his team from the Ministry, for their kind support and efforts to organize this event in good conditions.

I should also like to thank you all, for your participation in this event that is among the first of its kind organized in the framework of the UN Development Account Project on Developing Euro-Asian transport links.

As every one in this room knows, transport is a most basic, a most strategic factor for economic development and job creation. An efficient international transport is vital for international trade, export and import, which have a major and increasing impact on growth and competitiveness of businesses and economies.

Globalization of trade and liberalization of the economies is resulting in a sharp increase in international transport, not only in Europe, but also between Europe and the rest part s of the world. The Caucasus countries are geographically well placed to draw substantial benefits from this process. For this to happen, Caucasus countries must adopt efficient, safe and sustainable transport solutions.

In their endeavour to facilitate transport, however, decision-makers in Governments, the EU and international organizations like the UNECE have to face difficult challenges. These include inadequate infrastructures, bottlenecks and missing links, and lack of funds to remove them. Central, East and South-East European countries as well as those in the Caucasus and Central Asia, in spite of progress made in recent years, still experience the consequences of decades of neglect and under-investment in the area of transport infrastructure.

But there are also non-physical obstacles, including legislation that differs from one country to another, different and arbitrary taxes and charges, and cumbersome and time-consuming border procedures.

In addition, a great variety of safety hazards and environmental impacts, including the still widespread use of old, unsafe and highly polluting vehicles, are also actual or potential barriers to transport. These challenges are especially difficult in Caucasus region.

The solution of these problems requires a lot of effort, and indeed the coordinated action of the Governments concerned in the framework of international organizations.

The UNECE has been a pioneering organization in promoting cooperation of all European Governments in the area of transport. Since its creation in 1947, the UNECE has facilitated transport in Europe and at the same time improved its safety and reduced its impacts on the environment.

The outcome of the quiet, unspectacular, but efficient and useful work is reflected in a set of international Agreements and Conventions, which are legally binding for the countries that become Parties to them. Constantly updated and broadly in line with the relevant EU legislation, these UNECE legal instruments provide a common legal and technical platform for both EU and non-EU countries for achieving an integrated, efficient, safe and sustainable pan-European transport system.

Thanks to EU funding, UNECE implemented a pilot project on the facilitation of participation of Central Asian and Caucasus countries in the meetings of the UNECE Inland Transport Committee and selected Subsidiary Bodies. These meetings, are permanent international intergovernmental fora, where UNECE member countries negotiate all the important international legal instruments in the field of transport that are considered to be indispensable for the establishment of a harmonized and integrated international transport system. From September 2004, up to February 2006, the participation of 56 experts to 11 UNECE meetings in Geneva was facilitated under this project. Among them, there were 10 experts from Georgia, who were given the opportunity to better understand the rationale of the UNECE Agreements and Conventions and their importance for the harmonization of transport legislation and integration of

their country transport systems with those of other UNECE member countries.

In addition to its regulatory work, the UNECE also promotes sub-regional cooperation in the field of transport. Good examples are the Trans-European Motorway (TEM) and Trans-European Railway (TER) Projects, which have played an important role in infrastructure development and in the dissemination of knowledge, expertise and know-how in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern European countries in the past decades. Georgia is a full and active member to the TEM and TER projects and has already benefited from their accumulated experience and activities.

TEM and TER have recently finalized their Master Plan, aimed at taking stock of bottlenecks, missing links and other priority infrastructure needs in the road, rail and combined transport networks, identifying their Backbone Networks, and at designing a realistic investment strategy to meet those needs.

Experts from the 21 Central, Eastern and South Eastern European countries involved, with the support of independent consultants, have collected and analyzed information and prepared proposals. Over 490 priority projects of a total value of 102 billion Euros have been evaluated and prioritized. Among them, a number of Georgian road and railway projects. This work provided a useful contribution to the EU High Level Group on the extensions of the Trans-European Transport axes to the neighbouring countries to the EU. The next step is the monitoring of the implementation of the TEM and TER Master Plan, including collection of additional data as appropriate; regular updates of the identified Backbone Networks and of the relevant data; elaboration of annual progress reports on the implementation of the identified priority projects;

the review of the strategy by 2008; and the presentation of projects to international financial institutions for possible implementation funding.

We are also promoting capacity building and cooperation of Governments in the development of Euro-Asian transport links. We are doing so in the framework of a UN Development Account Project and in cooperation with our sister UN regional commission UNESCAP. In three Expert Group Meetings, organized in Almaty, Odessa, and Istanbul, in the course of the last two years, Government representatives from 18 countries in the Euro-Asian region, including from your country, have agreed on the main road, rail and inland water transport routes connecting Europe and Asia to be considered for priority development, as well as on approaches to developing the routes. Analysis of the main physical and non-physical obstacles along the selected routes; identification of main trans-shipment points along the routes; completion of a Geographic Information System (GIS) database; and identification of priority projects along the selected routes, are some of these approaches.

Improving border crossing is a major focus of the project. This is exactly the objective of this workshop. We wish to discuss with major stakeholders in your country the border crossing and transport facilitation issues. We are here together with our colleagues from ESCAP to offer you our support and to assure you of our readiness to work together in the solution of our common problems.

In these two days we will review the main UNECE and UNESCAP tools and initiatives and address a number of these problems. We will discuss with you on related developments and try to establish a more close cooperation between your Ministries, organizations and companies, and you personally, with the work developed and the efforts made by the UNECE and UNESCAP.

Georgia is the crossroad of one of the most important Euro-Asian transport Corridor, TRACECA. Its importance as a transit country for the transport flows is widely recognized. The Government of Georgia is working constantly for the development of a favourable transit environment to facilitate international transport and trade from Georgia and through Georgia to its main strategic partners in Europe, Central Asia, as well as to other Caucasus countries and worldwide. Transport infrastructure is in the process of development and harmonization of national transport legislation to meet international standards, is being promoted.

Of course there is a lot more to be done. Though the road is long and the challenges difficult, I am persuaded that, through mutual understanding and close cooperation, the road will be made, the challenges will be taken up successfully and we will get to our destination, which is the development of the economies and the improvement of the living standards of the people in your country, and in other countries in the region.

For this to happen, we need also your support. Your active involvement in our endeavours, starting from this two-days workshop, and thereafter continued in the future through intensive follow-up, can be the vehicle to drive us to the expected solutions.

I wish every success to our Workshop and thank you for your kind attention.