

Speech of Mr Kazatsay

**Deputy Director General
Directorate-General for Energy and Transport**

Meeting of Ministers of Transport of Countries in the Euro-Asian Region

19 February 2008, Geneva, Palais des Nations

Ministers,

Ambassadors,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Introduction

First of all I should thank the organisers for inviting the European Commission to this important event. I would also like to convey to you the best greetings of Mr Barrot, Vice-President of the European Commission, responsible for transport.

Transport connections between Europe and Asia are a topical issue of rapidly growing importance. The land-links between Asia and Europe are among the oldest trade routes in the world – who would not know the legendary Silk Route and Marco Polo! However, today these routes are not used at a large scale. Transport by sea is by far the dominant mode for trade between Europe and Asia. Therefore I would like to reiterate my appreciation to the United Nations for organising this meeting today.

The TENS

Transport infrastructure is key to the free movement of people, goods and services, strengthens therefore economic and social cohesion. It contributes to

further economic development and integration, improves the competitiveness of our economy and is, as a consequence, an irreplaceable factor for growth, employment, mobility, accessibility and quality of life.

The trans-European transport networks - the so-called TENs - of the European Union contain the main arteries of transport infrastructure, which link and interconnect European Member States and regions. In other words the TENs provide the physical infrastructure for the internal market and for cohesion.

An important objective for the European Union's transport policy is to ensure that legislation, standards and technical specifications of our main trade partners are compatible with our legislation, standards and technical specifications, and thus contribute to the achievement of economic development and integration. Good quality interconnected transport networks are a prerequisite for this.

Extension of the TENs to the neighbouring countries

To find ways how to better connect the EU with its neighbours, the European Commission, first, established in 2004 a High Level Group and, second, outlined in 2006 the first steps of a comprehensive policy for the extension of the major trans-European axes to the neighbouring countries and regions. Over time this approach may lead to approximation of rules and regulations for the transport sector as a whole and thus create an effective transport market and an integrated transport infrastructure network involving the EU and its neighbours.

The policy focuses on five main transport axes used for international trade and on the relevant standards and legislation – the so-called “horizontal measures” – affecting the use of these routes by all transport modes.

Exploratory talks

To implement this ambitious and comprehensive policy, the Commission is now holding exploratory talks with the neighbouring countries. Following the outcome of these talks, the Commission will make concrete proposals to implement the policy and to strengthen the coordination and monitoring frameworks.

The talks are progressing well and the first concrete proposal will be tabled on 5 March 2008 concerning a proposal for a treaty establishing a Transport Community in South East Europe. A second set of concrete proposals will be made in the second half of this year.

TRACECA

Let me now turn to the so called TRACECA corridor that was established in the early 1990's. As you probably know the name TRACECA comes from "Transport Corridor Europe – Caucasus – Asia" and it is sometimes called the "New Silk Road".

Transport is an area of established cooperation between the EU and the countries along the TRACECA corridor in Southern Caucasus as well as in Central Asia.

Until today the TRACECA programme has financed projects for 170 million EURO. Beyond the funds devoted to concrete cooperation projects themselves, TRACECA countries and the European Commission have invested considerable political capital in this endeavour. TRACECA has developed into an important element of our relations at large, becoming a brand name that generates cooperation over a very large area, including many different regions.

The priorities – including both infrastructure and horizontal measures – are reflected in the **long-term strategy for the TRACECA corridor up to 2015**, which was approved at the 5th Annual meeting of the TRACECA Intergovernmental Commission in Sofia in May 2006. The very important short-term Action Plan 2008-2009 was approved in December 2007 by the 6th TRACECA Ministerial Meeting in Kazakhstan.

The Commission continues to be committed to TRACECA for the implementation of a well functioning and attractive transport corridor in the region. Development of the TRACECA corridor is clearly an important element of the extension of the trans-European transport axes.

This is why, as I mentioned earlier, the Commission is presently conducting exploratory talks with all TRACECA Member countries on the conditions for strengthening the cooperation. We listen to their opinion and suggestions with an open mind and intend to develop a concept based on common interests. Our assumption is that this course of action will lead to a renewed set of documents and structures, able to efficiently serve both corridor and regional cooperation.

Conclusion

Ministers, Ambassadors, Ladies and Gentlemen, let me now conclude. I am glad to see the interest you all show on the development of good transport connection between Europe and Asia. I am also happy that I have been given this opportunity to tell you about the extensive cooperation the European Commission is carrying out in this area.

In short, the extension of the trans-European networks and notably the implementation of a safe, secure and efficient TRACECA corridor, will give a new impetus for economic development in the neighbouring regions, both in

Europe and in Asia. The prospect of improved infrastructure, simplified procedures and plans to cut red tape promote trade and business contacts and closer integration to Europe.

I invite you all to join us in these efforts and make also the land connections between Europe and Asia well functioning, environmentally sound and economically competitive routes of the future decades.

Thank you for your attention.

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