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Report of the group of experts on the Euro-Asian Transport Links on its third session (Istanbul, 12-13 November 2009)

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I. Attendance

1. The Group of Experts on the Euro-Asian Transport Links held its third session on 12 and 13 November 2009. The session was held under the chairmanship of Mr. E. Direkler (Turkey) due to the absence of the Chair and vice-chairs. Representatives of the following United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) member States participated: Armenia, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hellenic Republic, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. The following intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations participated: Black and Azov Seas Ports Association (BASPA), Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), Black Sea Ring Highway Joint Permanent Technical Secretariat (BSRH JPTS), Intergovernmental Organisation for International Carriage by Rail (OTIF), International Freight Forwarders Associations (FIATA), International Rail Transport Committee (CIT), International Road Transport Union (IRU), International Union of Railways (UIC), Organization for Cooperation of Railways (OSJD), Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (PABSEC), Project for the Integration of Ukraine in the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T), Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB), Union of Road Transport Associations in the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Region (BSEC-URTA), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and "PLASKE" JSC.

II. Adoption of the agenda (agenda item 1)

Documentation: ECE/TRANS/WP.5/GE.2/5

2. The provisional agenda (ECE/TRANS/WP.5/GE.2/5) was adopted.

III. Adoption of the report (agenda item 2)

Documentation: ECE/TRANS/WP.5/GE.2/4

3. The Expert Group adopted the report (ECE/TRANS/WP.5/GE.2/4) of its second session that took place on 7 September 2009.

IV. Recent developments related to the Euro-Asian Transport Links Phase II initiative (agenda item 3)

4. The Expert Group was informed about the recent developments related to the activities of the Euro-Asian Transport Links (EATL) Phase II. In particular, the experts were briefed about recent developments in three important areas. First, representatives from Asian and European countries and transport/logistics sectors met in Vilnius (Lithuania) on 19 October 2009 at the first ever ASEM (Asia Europe Meeting) Transport Ministers' Meeting. The meeting focused on creating a common vision for Asia and Europe in the field of transport; on meeting challenges in trade between Europe and Asia; and on finding solutions for balanced freight transport flows through the promotion of an integrated approach towards the use of different modes of transport (ie. intermodality).

5. Second, the First Preparatory Conference for the eighteenth OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum was held in Astana (Kazakhstan) on 12 and 13 October 2009. The theme of the conference was "Promoting good governance at border crossings, improving

the security of land transportation and facilitating international transport by road and rail in the OSCE region". At the conference, almost 200 participants discussed various agenda items such as international legal instruments and new technologies for efficient border crossing and customs procedures, efforts to battle corruption, the transit needs of landlocked developing countries and public-private partnerships in road transport as well as best practices in combating trafficking.

6. Third, a United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) Expert Group Meeting "to Develop Corridor Based Cooperative Arrangement for Operationalization of International Intermodal Transport Corridors in North-East and Central Asia" met on 4 and 5 November 2009 in Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan). The objective of this UNESCAP initiative is to further develop international intermodal transport corridors linking North-East and Central Asia.

7. Finally, members of the Expert Group shared information about recent national developments and events that could impact transport and trade in the EATL region. National reviews of transport infrastructure and border crossing facilitation were provided by Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Turkey, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

8. The IRU presented the latest information concerning the "Bishkek Agreement" among the governments of China, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. The IRU worked to activate the 1998 trilateral Agreement to facilitate international road transport along the Tashkent – Andizhan – Sarytash – Irkeshtam – Kashgar highway. This Agreement is expected to facilitate trade and transit in Central Asia by opening the Chinese market to Uzbek hauliers and by creating a new throughway for Kyrgyz operators to European, South-Asian and Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) markets. The trilateral permits are to be exchanged and a pilot truck caravan to be organized in early 2010.

V. Transport infrastructure: identification of priority routes and investment (agenda item 4)

9. The Expert Group discussed the ways and means of collecting, reviewing and updating national information on the EATL routes and priority transport infrastructure projects. In particular, Informal document No. 1 entitled "Extension of EATL priority routes to newly involved countries and update of related information" which contains (a.) explanation of the methodological framework for the extension of EATL priority routes in the countries joining this phase of the EATL initiative; (b.) copies of relevant questionnaires; and (c.) elaboration of the process for collecting and updating related information was explained and discussed. The Group agreed to set 31 January 2010 as the deadline for submissions of replies. The Group also agreed to invite the governments of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, India and Japan to join the EATL Phase II project. In this context, the Group asked the secretariat to send official invitation letters to these countries.

10. The Expert Group was informed about and discussed "Updating the EATL priority transport infrastructure projects and developing an international investment plan under EATL Project Phase II" (Informal document No. 2). It was agreed that the secretariat would provide electronic and paper copies of relevant questionnaires to national focal points. The Group agreed to set 31 January 2010 as the deadline for submissions of replies.

VI. Euro-Asian Transport Links Phase II: studies to identify and analyze inland transport options, examine non-physical obstacles to transport and collection of data on transport flows (agenda item 5)

11. The secretariat presented a detailed plan of action for elaboration of studies to be undertaken during the Euro-Asian Transport Links Phase II initiative: (a.) EATL Strengths – Weaknesses – Opportunities – Threats (SWOT) Analysis; (b.) Collection of data on transport flows in the EATL region; (c.) Comparison and analysis of EATL inland transport options with existing maritime routes; and (d.) Identification of non-physical obstacles to international transport.

(a) With respect to the SWOT Analysis, the Expert Group had already provided comments. These comments have been incorporated into the final version of the SWOT Analysis (Informal document No. 3 – originally presented at the second session of the EATL Group of Experts). The document was adopted by the Group of Experts.

(b) The Expert Group agreed to continue to support undertaking a study to collect data on EATL transport flows. The secretariat encouraged the experts to provide any relevant data.

(c) The consultant presented draft questionnaires prepared to compare and analyze EATL inland routes with maritime transport. It is expected that the questionnaires will be replied to by national railways companies and freight forwarders. For railways, a six question survey deals with time scheduling, train speed, tariffs, loading of containers, capacity of locomotives, consignment notes and investment projects. For freight forwarders, a cost-time analysis survey deals with issues such as cost of delivery to final destination, value added services, handling of containers and qualitative assessment. The Expert Group discussed the consultant's approach and agreed on the proposed course of action. National focal points, upon the receipt of final questionnaires, will distribute them to relevant railways companies and appropriate freight forwarders. The Group agreed to set end of April 2010 as the deadline for submissions of replies.

(d) The consultant presented draft questionnaires prepared to identify non-physical obstacles to international transport in the EATL region. The Expert Group put forward suggestions for improvement and agreed to have revised drafts circulated prior to the next EATL session (likely to take place in March/April 2010). The questionnaire is to be approved at the fourth session of the EATL Expert Group.

VII. Coordination with work of other international organizations (agenda item 6)

12. The Expert Group members adopted Informal document No. 4 presented at the second EATL EG session entitled "Review of International Transport Networks and Initiatives Linking Europe and Asia".

VIII. Other business (agenda item 7)

13. The Group of Experts discussed a proposal to organize a demonstration train run along one (or several) EATL route(s). The Expert Group agreed in principle with the suggested proposal and requested the secretariat to communicate a written proposal for funding to the government of the Russian Federation. If successful, the earmarked

“demonstration train” funding would be used to set up a working group which, in turn, would be responsible for the design and implementation of the demonstration train run.

14. The Expert Group appreciated the initiative of the secretariat to organize an “Interregional Workshop on Developing Euro-Asian Transport Links” on 11 November 2009 (immediately preceding the third EATL session) where some 20 speakers shared their expertise and experience on how to most effectively assist in developing Euro-Asian Transport links.

15. The Expert Group believed that organizing these two events (the EATL Expert Group Meeting and the Interregional Workshop) in partnership with BSEC offered an opportunity to further explore EATL-BSEC interaction and synergies and to address issues of specific interest in the BSEC region.

16. The Expert Group noted that closer collaboration and synergies between the UNECE Trans-European Motorway (TEM) and Trans-European Railway (TER) Projects and the EATL work is an area that needs to be further explored.

17. The Expert Group expressed its appreciation to the Ministry of Transport of Turkey and to the BSEC secretariat for co-hosting these events and their generous hospitality.

IX. Date and place of next meeting (agenda item 8)

18. The Expert Group agreed to hold its next two meetings in Central Asia. To this end, the Expert Group requested the secretariat to approach the governments of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan to seek their interest in hosting EATL sessions in March/April and September 2010 respectively.
