



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
17 June 2010

Original: English

Economic Commission for Europe

Inland Transport Committee

Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics

Twenty-third session

Geneva, 7–8 September 2010

Item 4(a) of the provisional agenda

Report of the Expert Group on Euro-Asian Transport Links

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1. At its seventieth session, 19–21 February 2008, the Inland Transport Committee (ITC) agreed to establish a Group of Experts on Euro-Asian Transport Links, adopted its terms of reference and asked that the results of the Group be reported to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics and to the ITC (ECE/TRANS/200, para. 30, and its Annex III, para. 8). The following report is a partial fulfillment of the reporting requirement requested by the ITC.

I. Euro-Asian Transport Links

2. In 2000 and 2002, the UNECE extended its European Agreement on Main International Traffic Arteries (AGR) and its European Agreement on Main International Railway Lines (AGC) (road and rail) infrastructure network agreements to include transport infrastructure in the Caucasus and Central Asia. These international agreements do not set priorities nor do they posit deadlines to meet the AGR/AGC standards. In addition, the governments in the region have generally lacked sufficient funds to upgrade and/or maintain transport infrastructure. As a result of these two factors, the Euro-Asian inland transport links remain relatively undeveloped and underutilized.

3. At the same time, to promote the development of Euro-Asian transport links, the UNECE and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) created and adopted a Common ECE/ESCAP Strategic Vision for Euro-Asian Transport Links. This document took into account the findings of the Second International Euro-Asian Conference on Transport (St. Petersburg, 2001) and was the seminal step in the preparations of the two regional commissions to develop Euro-Asian transport links.

II. Euro-Asian Transport Links Project – Phase I

4. In 2003, with funds from a United Nations Development Account Project, the UNECE and UNESCAP secretariats with designated national focal points from 18 countries in the Euro-Asian region began to promote the framework of the Euro-Asian Transport Linkages Project (EATL). The following countries participated: Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, China, Georgia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

5. In the four Expert Group Meetings that took place in Almaty (March 2004), Odessa (November 2004), Istanbul (June 2005) and Thessaloniki (November 2006), government representatives from these countries identified the main Euro-Asian rail, road and inland waterway routes to be considered for priority development, and the main transshipment points along these routes (Annex I and II). Country experts also provided data for the creation of a GIS database and related maps. This included data on technical characteristics and performances of main rail, road and inland water transport infrastructure, borders crossing points, ferryboat links, intermodal terminals and ports along the Euro-Asian routes. This work has been made available to participating countries and constitutes a basic tool for future efforts aimed at developing efficient, safe and secure Euro-Asian transport links.

6. These government representatives have also agreed on a common methodology, similar to that used in the United Nations Trans-European Motorway (TEM) and Trans-European Railway (TER) projects' Master Plan, for the evaluation and prioritization of projects along the selected routes. On the basis of this methodology and national proposals submitted by 15 countries, 230 transport investment projects, of an estimated total cost of over US\$43 billion, have been evaluated and prioritized. About one-half of the projects have secured financing and are likely to be implemented in the medium term (Annex III).

7. Non-physical obstacles, which constitute a major barrier to Euro-Asian transport, have also been addressed. Capacity-building national workshops on facilitation of international transport and trade were organized in the framework of the EATL project in six participating countries: Azerbaijan (May 2006), Belarus (May 2007), Georgia (May 2006), Kyrgyzstan (December 2006), Republic of Moldova (November 2007) and Ukraine (December 2007). Workshop participants included government officials and business sector representatives from the beneficiary countries.

8. A study, elaborated and published by UNECE and UNESCAP, describes the routes and projects that have been identified and considers the status and problems of international transport along the Euro-Asian land bridge. It shows that a successful development of the EATL network depends on intergovernmental cooperation that is necessary to address technical and operational issues as well as non-physical obstacles to efficient transit and border clearance. The study also presents specific recommendations on infrastructure development, facilitation and policy.¹

9. Government representatives have identified priority areas for future work, including: monitoring of implementation of the identified priority projects; removing non-physical obstacles to transit transport; improving the performance of border-crossing facilities; promoting harmonization of transport legislation; and promoting best practices and sharing of know-how.

¹ The English and Russian versions of the study are available free of charge at the UNECE website: http://www.unece.org/trans/main/eatl/in_house_study.pdf.

10. During the seventieth Session of the ITC, Ministers of Transport and high-level officials from countries in the Euro-Asian region, signed a Joint Statement on Future Development of the EATL Project. The statement has confirmed the need for continued cooperation, endorsed the identified Euro-Asian routes and their priority developments and supported the establishment of an adequate mechanism to continue the development of EATL links. The high-level officials also invited governments, international organizations and potential donors to consider providing the needed financial assistance to ensure implementation of the EATL Project Phase II (2008-2011).²

III. Euro-Asian Transport links Project – Phase II

11. In 2006, the ITC had asked the secretariat to present, together with ESCAP, a joint proposal that would ensure the continuation of the project in a new Phase II. In early 2008, UNECE began establishing an institutional structure to make further EATL work possible. At its seventieth session, ITC agreed to establish a Group of Experts on Euro-Asian Transport Links and adopted its terms of reference. The primary objective of the Expert Group was to ensure monitoring and coordination of the activities related to developing efficient, safe and secure Euro-Asian inland transport links. Its duration was set for two years with a possibility of further extension. During ITC's seventy-second session on 23–25 February 2010, the Committee approved the extension of the mandate of the EATL Group of Experts by two years until February 2012. This decision was endorsed at the Meeting of the Executive Committee on 31 March 2010. The UNECE invited governments to nominate National Focal Points who would actively contribute to the work of the EATL Group of Experts and the EATL Phase II. Related international organizations and international financial institutions were also invited to take an active role in the work. In response, 26 governments have nominated national EATL focal points (Armenia, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, China, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Republic of Moldova, Mongolia, Romania, Russia, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan).

12. Three Expert Group meetings have been organized under EATL Phase II. The UNECE hosted the two of them in Geneva, in September 2008 and 2009. The third meeting of the group was held in Istanbul, in November 2009, back to back with an interregional workshop on developing Euro-Asian transport links, hosted by the Ministry of Transport and Communications of Turkey and the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC). A subregional workshop was also organized under EATL project in Tehran, in May 2009, together with the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO).

13. During these meetings National Focal Points from 26 participating countries put together the basis for the development of the EATL Phase II. Government experts agreed on the specific tasks and expected accomplishments of the project; on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) to the Euro-Asian Transport Links; on the basic data that need to be further collected and processed; and on the basic methodological aspects of the work. They have also agreed on the studies to be elaborated with the support of external consultants and country inputs, related to the transport flows and statistics, the comparison of inland transport options with those of existing maritime and on the analysis of non-physical obstacles to international transport along the EATL routes. Questionnaires have been developed for some of the above studies, in some cases they were already sent out.

² See <http://www.unece.org/trans/MinisterialITC70/index.html>.

14. Moreover, during the Tehran and Istanbul events experts from participating governments and international organizations discussed on the most recent developments on transport infrastructure and facilitation in ECO and BSEC regions and on specific projects. In addition they reviewed related national experiences along the Euro-Asian Links and dealt with other issues of implementation of various tasks under the projects. Holding these events in partnership with ECO and BSEC offered the opportunity to explore further interaction and synergy.

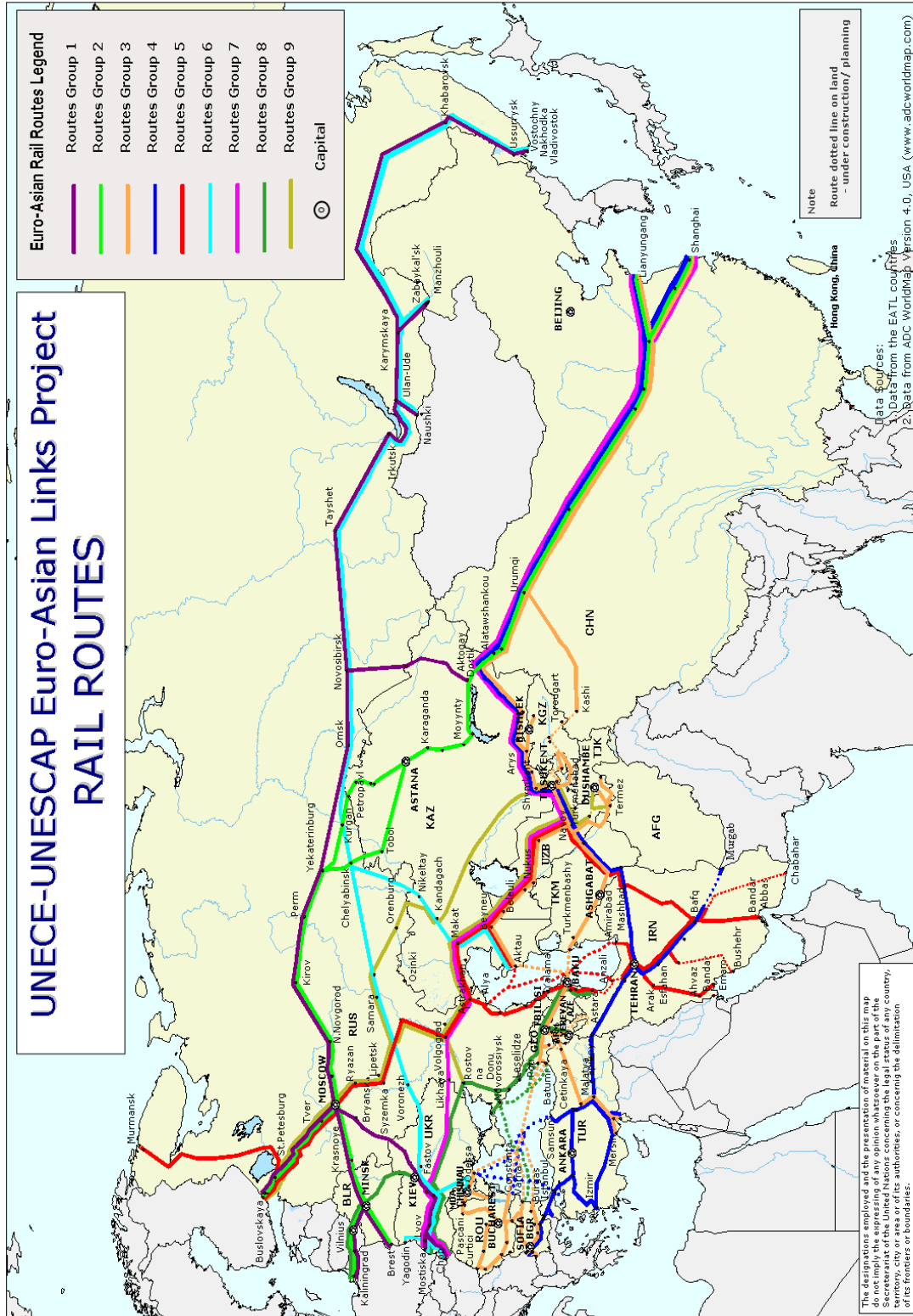
IV. Conclusions

15. Globalization has led to significant increases in trade and transport between Asia and Europe. While most of the traffic has used – increasingly congested – maritime routes, further development of efficient and integrated inland transport routes would provide credible and competitive additional transport options. Once established, these routes could become an effective tool for economic development and integration of the Euro-Asian region, including facilitating greater participation in the globalization process by Central Asia's landlocked countries.

16. International cooperation under EATL Project promoted by the UNECE and UNESCAP has produced tangible results. These results have been considered as a solid basis for continued cooperation for the development of Euro-Asian transport linkages. The EATL work is being continued through the activities of an ad hoc Group of Experts on EATL established by UNECE. The Group is implementing a well-focused workplan, including studies and analyses, promoting transport infrastructure and facilitation initiatives and actions, organizing meetings and capacity building events.

17. Notwithstanding the value of the results achieved, there are also many challenges ahead. The work done so far has made it clear that the real development potential of EATL inland transport connections lies upon their capacity to become parts of the main EATL supply chains, functioning complementarity among various transport modes, focusing on efficiency and reliability and on urgent facilitation and cost/time-reducing transportation measures and reforms that need to be undertaken in the EATL transitions economies involved. It is important to stress that EATL countries, particularly EATL landlocked developing countries, depend on each other. A weak part or missing link in one country can render a whole EATL route economically unviable for international transport. It is, therefore, evident that developing Euro-Asian inland transport links would be a long-term undertaking, requiring a great deal of effort and perseverance, and enhanced coordination and cooperation among all countries along the EATL.

Annex I



Annex III

EATL projects

(Millions of United States dollars)*

ISO Country Code	All types of projects		Per type of infrastructure									
	No. of projects	Cost of projects	Road		Rail		Maritime		Inland waterways		Other	
			No. of projects	Cost of projects	No. of projects	Cost of projects	No. of projects	Cost of projects	No. of projects	Cost of projects	No. of projects	Cost of projects
ARM	8	121.7	3	56.4	5	65.3	–	–	–	–	–	–
AZE	10	1 681.5	7	1 079.1	1	600.0	2	2.4	–	–	–	–
BLR	4	28.1	3	27.4	1	0.7	–	–	–	–	–	–
BGR	24	5 488.9	15	1 532.8	7	3 816.8	1	115.6	1	23.7	–	–
CHN	3	4 603.0	1	413.0	–	–	2	4 190.0	–	–	–	–
GEO	49	3 312.0	4	108.2	21	2 140.5	24	1 063.3	–	–	–	–
IRN	44	8 428.3	34	3 700.3	10	4 728.0	–	–	–	–	–	–
KAZ	14	1 902.4	14	1 902.4	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
KGZ	8	1 555.1	5	218.7	3	1 336.4	–	–	–	–	–	–
MDA	9	888.9	5	225.5	3	413.4	–	–	1	250.0	–	–
ROU	12	721.8	–	–	–	–	7	333.3	5	388.5	–	–
TJK	7	240.2	4	237.0	1	–	–	–	–	–	1	3.1
TUR	19	11 450.0	12	3 124.0	7	8 326.0	–	–	–	–	–	–
UKR	7	1 226.2	–	–	2	292.6	1	1.5	4	932.2	–	–
UZB	12	1 774.5	5	100.8	7	1 673.7	–	–	–	–	–	–
Total	230	43 422.6	112	12 725.7	68	23 393.4	37	5 706.0	11	1 594.3	1	3.1

* Note: The table includes only the countries that provided data