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Group of Experts on Euro-Asian Transport Links

Fifteenth session

Warsaw, 31 January and 1 February 2017

Report of the Group of Experts on Euro-Asian Transport Links on its fifteenth session

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I. Attendance

1. The Group of Experts on Euro-Asia Transport Links (EATL) held its fifteenth session on 31 January and 1 February 2017 in Warsaw. Representatives of the following member States of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe participated: Poland, Russian Federation and Turkey. Representatives of Afghanistan and Iran (Islamic Republic of) also attended.
2. The following United Nations organization and specialized agency was represented: United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Trans-European Railway (TER) Project Central Office.
3. The following intergovernmental organizations were represented: Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC) and Organization for Cooperation between Railways (OSJD).
4. At the invitation of the secretariat Russian Railways and "CTM" LLC also attended the meeting.

II. Adoption of the agenda (agenda item 1)

Documentation: ECE/TRANS/WP.5/GE.2/29

5. The Group of Experts adopted the session's agenda as contained in ECE/TRANS/WP.5/GE.2/29.

III. Identification of cargo flows on the Euro-Asian Transport Links (agenda item 2)

6. The "Scientific and Research Institute of Motor Transport" (NIIAT) from Moscow, as the consultant for drafting of the EATL Phase-3 report, explained briefly the content of the report (Informal doc. No. 1) making the link between the sections of the report and the main focus areas of the Group of Experts as formulated in items 2, 3, 4 and 5 of the agenda. He also informed about further changes and additions to be introduced to the existing version of the report such as: (i) statistical analysis of trade flows for 2011-2015 in Euro-Asian region in chapter I, (ii) recent outcomes from various intergovernmental transport and trade facilitation processes in chapter II, (iii) updated information on the south-north corridor in chapter I, and (iv) activities in support of the development of cargo flows along the Euro-Asian corridors by the Eurasian Economic Commission in chapter II.
7. OSJD presented information on its activities and those of its member countries in order to develop railway traffic. Information on the OSJD member countries' transport policy that was elaborated within the OSJD framework of cooperation was also mentioned.
8. OSJD further provided an update on its work in support of enhancing cargo flows in the Euro-Asian transport corridors with the aim to make maximum contribution to the expansion of trade economic relations between the OSJD member countries and to pursue these countries' stable development. More specifically, information on the opportunities and prospects of further containerization, tuning of combined and multimodal traffic as well as work on facilitation of border crossings for railways was provided.
9. Finally, OSJD informed about ongoing activities on the update of technical passports for OSJD railway corridors and Comprehensive Plans for the development of OSJD Corridors until 2020. Information on the implementation of provisions of Memoranda on cooperation in the field of technical, operational and commercial

development of the OSJD Corridors, which were signed for each OSJD Corridor, was also provided. In the case of interest, OSJD offered to provide updated general information based on the data from the technical passports for inclusion in the EATL Phase-3 report. OSJD would also submit the timetables as of 14 October 2016 for trains operating regular transport services between Europe and Asia for the report.

10. The Coordinating Council on Trans-Siberian Transport and TER project manager informed about cargo flows on Trans-Siberian and north-south lines as well as told experts about a project in postal operation testing usage of unified postal consignment note. The project showed positive results.

11. The Group of Experts took note of the information provided by NIIAT, OSJD and the Coordinating Council on Trans-Siberian Transport. It highly appreciated the work carried out by OSJD aimed at the improvement of railway traffic in the Euro-Asian area.

IV. Facilitating of the coordination of integrated time schedules and tariffs on the Euro-Asian Transport Links (agenda item 3)

12. Russian Railways made a presentation on its tariff policy. The presentation triggered a discussion by the Group of Experts on tariffs inclusion in the EATL Phase-3 report. The Group of Experts agreed that no specific tariffs should be referred to in the report. Any comparative analysis should refer to average tariff estimates.

V. Identification of needs and requirements by producers, shippers, traders and freight forwarders in transport and trade on the Euro-Asian Transport Links routes (agenda item 4)

13. CTM LLC -Internet Technology enterprise from the Russian Federation and an OSJD Affiliated Enterprise -informed the Group of Experts of its work in developing and testing software supporting the single window approach in border crossing procedures.

14. The Group of Experts took note of this information and of the benefits for producers, shippers, traders and freight forwarders from an operational single window approach.

VI. Information from participants on recent developments in transport infrastructure priority projects along the Euro-Asian Transport Links routes (agenda item 5)

15. Iran (Islamic Republic of), the Russian Federation and Turkey provided brief information about national development projects in transport infrastructure along the EATL corridors and requested its inclusion or necessary update in the EATL Phase-3 report. In addition, Turkey also informed about the rail reform process and requested this information to be adequately reflected in the EATL Phase-3 report.

16. Russian Railways suggested to include information in the EATL Phase-3 report on progress achieved in improving border crossing procedures along the EATL corridors, on the positive results of the postal consignment project and on benefits from operationalizing the single window approach. Furthermore, if possible information on passenger traffic, luggage and loaded luggage should be also added to the report.

17. Poland suggested that the EATL Phase-3 report would refer to the work done by the Ad-Hoc Working Group for Updating the OSJD Fundamental Documents in the last 10 years and resulting in elaboration of a draft Convention on Direct International Railway

Traffic. The draft Convention text comprises as appendices the Agreement on International Passenger Traffic (SMPS) and the Agreement on International Goods Transport by Rail (SMGS) in the form of general provisions of the agreements for the transportation of passengers and goods in the international traffic.

18. The Group of Experts welcomed the proposed additions to be incorporated in the EATL Phase-3 report except the information on passenger traffic, luggage and loaded luggage. The Group believed that the latter was not included in its mandate.

19. In addition, Turkey made a declaration on its and Cyprus participation in EATL project and requested inclusion of this declaration in the minutes of the fifteenth session as well as in the EATL Phase-3 report in a footnote to the paragraph specifying countries, members of the EATL project. The declaration is provided in annex.

20. With regard to the declaration from Turkey, the Group of Experts found that the EATL Phase-3 report should be focused on technical EATL aspects in accordance with the Group's mandate and, to that end, should not include any declaration from countries.

21. The Group of Experts considered then the Informal doc. No 2 containing the updated chapters IV and V of the EATL Phase-3 report. In this regard, the Group of Experts welcomed the proposal from NIIAT and the UNECE secretariat:

(a) to change the format of presenting the results of the Strengths - Weaknesses - Opportunities - Threats (SWOT) analysis in chapter IV with the new format presenting strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in a matrix ordered by specific themes; and

(b) to reorder the recommendations in chapter V specifying their addresses, i.e. countries, international organizations and other stakeholders.

22. The Group of Experts also took note of the OSJD suggestions for corrections of technical terms used in the recommendations and requested NIIAT to insert them into the updated version of the EATL Phase-3 report.

23. The Group of Experts further discussed and agreed on the next steps needed for finalizing the EATL Phase-3 report at its sixteenth session foreseen to take place on 16 and 17 May 2017:

(a) Step 1 - by 3 March 2017, experts, especially those absent at the fifteenth session, should provide their comments to the existing version of the EATL Phase-3 report (as contained in EATL fifteenth session's Informal doc. No.1 and No.2 for chapters IV and V);

(b) Step 2 - by 7 April 2017, NIIAT and the secretariat should prepare and circulate the next version of the report to experts for their feedback. The new version should include information agreed during the fifteenth session and possible comments and additions received from experts (see Step 1);

(c) Step 3 - by 28 April 2017, experts should provide their final comments to the report (version of Step 2); and

(d) Step 4 - by 10 May 2017, NIIAT and the secretariat should consolidate all the final comments received in a new version of the report and issue it for review and finalization at the sixteenth session.

24. Finally, the Group of Experts requested the secretariat in consultation with the Chair to prepare an informal document for the upcoming seventy-ninth session of the Inland Transport Committee presenting progress achieved by the Group to date in delivering on its mandate. The document should inform of the content of the EATL Phase-3 report such as its main sections, insight into analyses made as well as conclusions and recommendations proposed. It should also inform of the steps agreed by the Group to finalise the report in

time for the next session of the Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics (WP.5) in early September 2017.

25. The Group of Experts further invited the Chair and the secretariat to present that document during the seventy-ninth session of the Inland Transport Committee on its behalf.

VII. Geographical Information Systems (agenda item 6)

Documentation: ECE/TRANS/WP.5/GE.2/2014/1

26. No new information was provided on this agenda item.

VIII. Other business (agenda item 7)

27. The Group of Experts was invited to reflect on the organization of an international conference launching the “operationalization of Euro-Asian transport links” as per its mandate contained in its work plan and terms of reference (ECE/TRANS/WP.5/GE.2/2013/1).

28. The Group of Experts agreed to discuss in more detail the organization of the international conference at its next session after all the experts would have consulted their ministries in this regard. Such internal consultation should be the basis for the Group of Experts to formulate its recommendation to WP.5 on the conference modalities.

IX. Date of next meeting (agenda item 8)

29. The secretariat informed the Group of Experts that in the absence of offers for hosting the next, sixteenth session, it could be held in the Palais des Nations, in Geneva, on 16 and 17 May 2017, at which dates relevant meeting services had been tentatively reserved by the secretariat.

30. The Group of Experts, in view of other meetings taking place in the week of 15 May, kindly requested the secretariat to explore possibilities for moving the sixteenth session by one week to 22 and 23 May and to inform the Group of Experts accordingly.

X. Summary of decisions (agenda item 10)

31. The Group of Experts adopted its decisions as stipulated under agenda items 2-8.

Annex

Declaration by Turkey

1. Turkey's participation in the context of phase III of the Euro-Asian Transport Links (EATL) project is in no way to be construed as the recognition by Turkey of the Greek Cypriot Administration as the legitimate government of Cyprus. It does not bring any change to Turkey's position that the Greek Cypriot side does not possess the right or authority to act or to speak on behalf of Cyprus as a whole nor does it imply any obligation on the part of Turkey to agree to or enter into any common arrangements with the Greek Cypriot Administration within the framework of phase III of EATL project.
 2. Therefore, Turkey's participation in this EATL phase III project cannot and should not be interpreted as a deviation from or change of Turkey's position on Cyprus
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