

First regional workshop of the Euro-Asian Transport Links Phase II – facilitation of Euro-Asian Transport in the ECO region.

First regional workshop of Phase II of the Euro-Asian Transport Links (EATL) project was held in Tehran, Iran on 27 to 29 April 2009. The meeting focused on the facilitation of Euro-Asian Transport in the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) region.

The first phase of the EATL project lasted between 2004 and 2008 and had as basic objectives to take stock of what transport infrastructure exists in the Euro-Asian region, to strengthen capacity of officials, and to put in operation some selected transport links. Eighteen countries participated in four major interregional expert meetings plus six workshops in the first phase. The project developed GIS maps etc for the development of the transport network. A total of 240 transport development projects totalling \$43 billion were identified and prioritised.

A joint statement on Euro-Asian Transport Links was signed at the EATL ministerial meeting in February 2008 in Geneva. Phase 2 has now commenced and this is being partly funded by the Russian Federation. This phase will have increased geographical coverage (Mongolia has joined, Pakistan will join and it is hoped to have 25 countries involved). In this phase will continue the prioritisation exercise, update and enlarge the GIS database, and continue capacity building.

Mohammad Mirzaei, Director of Transport for ECO discussed the development of the EATL project in ECO region. The economic growth in ECO region is one of the highest in the world even with current financial crisis, amounting to \$1 trillion by 2010. ECO is at the heart of the international north-south and east-west corridors. Transit transport and trade facilitation are key. ECO trade agreement entered force 1 year ago and envisages reduction of tariff and other barriers within 8 years.



The ECO countries created the Transit Transport Facilitation Agreement (TTFA) which entered force in May 2000 when eight countries ratified agreement. The TTFA is a major document liberalising transport and transit in the region. One of the projects is the ECO White Card system, similar to the Green Card operating in Europe to facilitate insurance for vehicles crossing borders, and a reinsurance company. A new programme of action is being developed focusing on the ECO transport infrastructure fund, and the ECO bank established in Istanbul in collaboration with IDB and UNECE. There will be a regional seminar on the Silk Roads organised with China in 2009. ECO is also developing GIS maps.

Michaelis Adamantiadis of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe summarised the major challenges for the development of EATL:

- Inadequate transport infrastructure, performing below capacity
- Only 1% of the \$1 trillion Euro-Asian trade uses EATL
- Maritime transport cost lower and quality of service higher
- Long and cumbersome border procedures and controls
- Non proper implementation of TIR convention
- High transit fees and restrictive permits
- Transport market structure and competition
- Homogeneous transport rules and regulations

- Safety, security, environmental and health concerns

There were presentations by the ECO member states: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Turkey and Uzbekistan.

Anthony Pearce, former Director General, presented on behalf of IRF the key challenges for transport facilitation in Central Asia. He said that on the basis of work carried out for the project for the coordination of the national transport policies for the countries of central Asia, it is clear that both within Central Asia and between Central Asian states and the rest of the world, transit transport continues to be hampered by numerous barriers:

- complex trade policies that are badly coordinated and lack transparency;
- high costs from poor transport and transit conditions;
- delays at border crossings;
- onerous administrative and clearance requirements.

He said that to advance trade and transport facilitation requires interventions at the following three levels:

- Transport simplification, eliminating unnecessary duplications in formalities, processes and procedures;
- Transport harmonisation, alignment of national procedures, operations and documents with international conventions, standards and practices; and,
- Transport standardisation, developing internationally agreed formats for practices and procedures, documents and information.

Other meeting sessions focused on developing EATL transport routes. The next regional workshop will be held in Beijing on 10-12 June 2009.