



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
14 December 2015

Original: English

Economic Commission for Europe

Inland Transport Committee

Seventy-eighth session

Geneva, 23–26 February 2016

Item 5 (a) (ii) of the provisional agenda

Strategic questions of a modal and thematic nature:

Project related activities – Euro-Asian Transport Links (EATL) Project

Euro-Asian Transport Links

Note by the secretariat

Summary

Following the Second EATL Ministerial Meeting (2013) that marked the launch of the EATL Phase III, the EATL project is now in its most critical phase. Operationalization of Euro-Asian transport links is the core activity of Phase III and will require not only specific knowledge and additional skills, but also full and committed political, as well as financial support from participating Governments.

The Committee may wish to:

- **extend** the mandate of the EATL Group of Experts for one more year;
- **support** EATL activities aimed at operationalization of Euro-Asian transport links;
- **encourage** Governments and other stakeholders to more actively **participate** in the activities of the EATL Group of Experts;
- **invite** Governments and other donors **to contribute** to the EATL activities on a concrete project basis, in line with the adopted work plan.

1. In 2014 and 2015, the Euro-Asian Transport Links (EATL) project continued to fulfil its role as the platform for cooperation between participating countries. At the same time, it ensured the coordinated development of Euro-Asian land transport links as well as transition into the concrete operationalization of the routes identified in the previous phases. Up till February 2013, Phase II of the project revised EATL priority transport infrastructure projects and updated the international Investment Plan for new projects that would entail a

consistent and realistic short-, medium- and long-term investment strategy for road and rail EATL routes. Furthermore, Phase II provided an extensive inventory of specific road, rail, inland waterway, maritime port, inland terminal and other infrastructure projects for the twenty-seven participating countries, their estimated budget and an implementation timetable.

2. The Second EATL Ministerial Meeting which took place on 26 February 2013 marked the launch of the EATL Phase III (2013–2015). In a Joint Statement, the participating Ministers supported continuing the project into the next phase. At that time, thirty-two Governments signed the Joint Statement on Future Development of Euro-Asian Transport Links which, inter alia, reiterated their willingness to work together towards the implementation of activities that:

(a) aim to develop and enhance favourable financial conditions to ensure sustainable and long-term financing of priority transport infrastructure projects in order to integrate them into medium- and long-term investment programmes adopted at the national level;

(b) foster and sustain coordination and collaboration with other participating member States, international organizations and international financial institutions as well as other stakeholders from the public and private sector to ensure that additional financial resources for the completion of identified priority projects are made available;

(c) remove, in an orderly and systematic manner, the remaining non-physical barriers along the Euro-Asian transport routes crossing their countries;

(d) support the establishment of an adequate mechanism to ensure continued monitoring and the follow-up activities of the project, and the most appropriate modalities to use the existing structures and available resources of UNECE; and

(e) support further implementation and continuation of the EATL project in the new Phase III with clearly defined targets and measurable objectives and ensure the necessary resources for its timely implementation.

3. The number of EATL participating countries increased from 27 (Phase II) to thirty-eight countries (Phase III). This increase demonstrates both the growing interest in and relevance of the work carried out so far in the first two phases.

4. The primary objective of Phase III is to operationalize the nine road and nine rail EATL routes that have been identified. The Group of Experts and the secretariat initiated the process that should convert the results of Phase II into reality during Phase III, as far as available resources permit. To this end, the EATL Group of Experts held three sessions in 2014 in Geneva (4–5 February, 27–28 May and 30–31 October) and two sessions in 2015 (3–4 February in Geneva and 9–10 June in Dushanbe). The Group held an informal meeting on 20–21 October 2015 in Istanbul, Turkey. The host of the Dushanbe session was the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), while for the one in Istanbul was the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States. At the same time, the mandate of the EATL Group of Experts expired at the end of 2015. In order to contribute to the continuity of the EATL project, OSCE will host an informal meeting on 2–3 February 2016 in Vienna. The EATL project continues to receive a strong international support.

5. The main objectives of the meetings were: to identify the specific structure of cargo that could be transported overland between two continents; to facilitate the coordination of integrated time schedules and tariffs on the Euro-Asian transport links; to identify needs and requirements of producers, shippers, traders and freight forwarders in transport and trade on the EATL routes; to exchange information, plans and problems among stakeholders, as well as to propose solutions; and to consider further application of the Geographical Information System (GIS) on EATL routes.

6. The EATL Group of Experts also identified potential cargo for overland (rail) transport between Asia and Europe. This included a group of 'light weight' but higher value products such as cars, automobile components, computers, electronic equipment and parts (television sets, image and sound recording and reproducing equipment), optical and medical equipment, clothes, shoes, sports-related items, as well as food.
7. Phase III of the project has been extremely demanding and complex in terms of specific expertise, volume of data and information to be processed and the necessity to involve various stakeholders.
8. The Government of the Russian Federation provided financial resources, primarily, to support participation of the national EATL focal points from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries at the EATL sessions. This is considered an essential factor for advancing the work of the Group of Experts. Relatively low participation at the earlier sessions of the EATL Group of Experts slowed the progress of the Group's work. In addition, a lack of financial resources hampers the development of the EATL GIS application. The Group of Experts is exploring possibilities both with Governments, international organizations, international financial institutions and the private sector to solve this problem.
9. OSCE continued its support of the EATL project. OSCE sponsored the preparation of a study on recent developments in transport and trade between Europe and Asia which will be a valuable input in the final report. The Organization for Cooperation of Railways (OSJD) prepared a document with the title "List of Container Trains and Combined Transport on the Railways of OSJD Member Countries" which served as a platform for discussion and further work by the Group. The Hellenic Institute of Transportation also prepared a valuable document on Euro-Asian transport for discussion.
10. The EATL Group of Experts welcomed the involvement of the Scientific and Research Institute of Motor Transport – (NIIAT) from Moscow in the project. Discussions about the modalities of involvement by NIIAT in the drafting of the Phase III study are ongoing.
11. A high level meeting of transport ministers in the framework of the Asia-Europe meeting (ASEM) took place in Riga on 29 and 30 April 2015, as Latvia held the presidency of the European Union at that time. UNECE participated in this meeting and presented the EATL project.
12. Phase III of the EATL project is critical since the core activity will require specific knowledge and additional skills which may only be available in the private sector. Accomplishing the agreed objectives of Phase III in a timely manner may require additional financial support from Governments, the private sector and international financial institutions. Full and committed political support from participating Governments is also needed to attain the full benefits of the EATL project.
13. An initial lack of financial resources delayed the start of Phase III of the project. However, the EATL Phase III activities got momentum and there are already tangible results. None the less, the EATL Group of Experts asked the Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics (WP.5) for an additional year to finalise its work in Phase III (ECE/TRANS/WP.5/GE.2/26, para. 38) based on the original terms of reference. WP.5 decided to support the extension of the mandate of the EATL Group of Experts for one more year (ECE/TRANS/WP.5/58 para 34). ITC is requested to approve the WP.5 decision before submission to the Executive Committee of the ECE for final consent so that the regular work of the EATL Group of Experts may continue for one more year.