



**High-Level joint event**  
**“United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and**  
**The Secretariat of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization; Round**  
**table on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable**  
**Development along the trans-continental Eurasian Transport**  
**Corridors”**

*13:15 - 14:15 hours, 27 February 2020  
Palais des Nations, Salle XXIV, Geneva*

**Concept Note**

Eurasia forms a critical landmass connecting east-west and north-south. Creation and the effective operation of international transport corridors linking Europe and Asia will facilitate the integration of transit countries, including landlocked countries of the Eurasian region with the world economy.

Economic growth and effective transport connectivity are closely interrelated to the Eurasian landmass. By operationalizing Eurasian inland transport routes, countries and people of both continents would be able to participate more effectively in global production networks, global distribution and value chains. On the other hand, economic growth in countries on Eurasian inland routes is accompanied by an increase in exports and imports, and in demand for transport services. Boosting the trade potential of the region requires diversification of transport links, optimization of transport costs, and time needed for the delivery of goods.

The Eurasian Transport Corridor could play a significant role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 – SDGs 2, 8, 9, 11, 12. Developing and upgrading a Eurasian transport network would only be the reflection of a crucial geopolitical shift taking place across this landmass.

## **SCO and cooperation with the UN**

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), established in 2001, has evolved to become an important regional structure to ensure peace, stability and security and to develop regional economic ties and infrastructure. With the admission of India and Pakistan as full members in 2017, the SCO has become the largest transregional organization with a share of more than 44% of the world's population and 60% of the Eurasian continent.

The SCO currently consists of eight Member States - India, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The SCO has four Observer States (Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran and Mongolia) and six Dialogue Partners (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Turkey).

The SCO Member States are committed to strict compliance of the purpose and principles of the UN Charter. They regularly reaffirm their support for the efforts of the UN as a universal multilateral organization to maintain international peace and security, enhance global development, and promote and protect human rights.

The SCO attaches great importance to its cooperation with United Nations and its agencies. Pursuant to UN General Assembly resolution 59/48 of 2 December 2004 granting the SCO Observer status and the signing of the Joint Declaration on Cooperation between the Secretariats of the UN and the SCO on 5 April 2010, both the organizations have established a strong partnership with proactive engagement mechanisms.

The resolution on “Cooperation between the UN and SCO” adopted at the 73<sup>rd</sup> session of the UN General Assembly on 30 August 2019, calls for greater cooperation between the SCO and the United Nations and its specialized agencies.

Since 2016, the UN Secretariat and SCO Secretariat have been holding joint High-level Special events on promoting peace, security and stability. So far 3 such events have been held, including the last one in November 2019.

In order to establish closer ties with UN entities and specialized agencies, the SCO signed memoranda of understanding with UNODC (14 June 2011, Astana, Kazakhstan), UNESCAP (15 December 2015, Zhengzhou, China), UNESCO (10 June 2018, Qingdao, China), UN-

OCHA, UNWTO (14 June 2019, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan) and FAO (2 November 2019, Tashkent).

An Agreement on creating favorable conditions for international road transport was signed between the SCO Member States in 2014, which is being implemented with help of technical expertise of the UNESCAP. Under the Agreement 6 routes, including one from Lianyungang to St. Petersburg would be built by 2021.

The UNESCAP and the SCO have been holding joint events to deliberate on issues of transport infrastructure. At the seminar on capacity building regarding application of new technologies in transit facilitation to improve the transport connectivity in Central Asia, held on 26-27 November 2019 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, UNESCAP and the SCO discussed issues of usage of new technologies in facilitating transit traffic between Central Asian countries.

Participants of the seminar reaffirmed that effective facilitation of transit transport between landlocked countries in Central Asia is key to taking advantage of geographical proximity and increasing global and regional trade. However, it was recognized that transit transport facilitation was constrained by differences in national legislation as well as in the institutional capacity and implementation capabilities of the countries concerned.

Participants commended the joint initiative of UNESCAP and the SCO in organizing the workshop and requested the secretariat to continue organizing follow-up workshops, given the scope of the challenges.

**The SCO Secretariat is working with the UNECE to finalize a MoU, which would be possibly signed this year.**

### **UNECE and SCO Member States**

The UNECE has among its 56 States, 5 SCO members (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan), one Observer State (Belarus) and 3 Dialogue Partners (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkey). Of the SCO Member States, the Russian Federation is one of the main donors to the UNECE. All the SCO member States are Contracting Parties to 3 to 33 UN transport Conventions administered by UNECE.

The United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) was launched in 1998 to strengthen sub-regional

cooperation in Central Asia and its integration into the world economy.

The countries of SPECA are Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The UNECE and the UNESCAP jointly provide overall support to the Programme.

The SPECA Governing Council agreed (11 November 2015) to support the efforts of participating countries to implement the 2030 development agenda by enhancing the sustainability of transport and ensure more focus on efforts which would result in strengthening regional cooperation aimed at achieving transport-related Sustainable Development Goals.

## **SCO and Eurasian Transport Corridors**

Due to geographical position of its member states, the SCO has become a cornerstone of the Eurasian continent. The Organisation is a powerful transcontinental structure stretching from the Arctic in the north to the Indian Ocean in the south, and from Lianyungang, China in the east to Kaliningrad, Russia in the West. The SCO Member States would play a crucial role in building sustainable Eurasian Transport Corridors.

For any transport infrastructure to be sustainable, robust economic activity backing it up is necessary. The SCO space is characterized by a huge consumer market, highly qualified human resources, rich mineral and energy reserves, as well as advanced production facilities and technologies. According to preliminary estimates, the total GDP of the SCO member states for the last year amounted to 22 per cent of the world GDP (\$18.4 trillion). It is expected that in 2030 this indicator may reach 35-40 per cent of the world GDP (by PPP).

The “Programme of Multilateral Trade and Economic Cooperation of the SCO Member States until 2035” envisages implementation of the tasks on balanced development of efficient transport infrastructure and expansion of application of digital technologies and intelligent systems in transport to ensure sustainable economic growth in the region.

More than 13 million km of highways (or almost 20 per cent of world highways) and about 250,000 km of railways, have already been laid in the SCO region, which contribute to the development of regional transport connectivity.

There is a trend of growth in cargo transportation by rail from China to Kazakhstan, Russia and further to Europe, Central Asian countries and the

Persian Gulf. The volume of railway traffic through two railway crossings on the Kazakh-Chinese border in 2018 amounted to about 14 million tons and increased by 38%.

There have been several active transport initiatives by the SCO Member States to realise the transit and transport potential of the Eurasian continent, including:

China's One Belt One Road initiative plans to build "New Asian-European Transcontinental Transport Corridor" with a total length of 10,900 km which originates from China and passes through Central Asia and Russia to Rotterdam in the Netherlands.

In the context of increasing the transit potential of the SCO countries, the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) from St. Petersburg to the port of Mumbai (India) with a total length of more than 7,200 km, initiated by the Indian and Russian sides.

Russia plans to increase the capacity of the Trans-Siberian and Baikal-Amur Railways by 2025 by one and a half times.

The proposed China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway project by Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan is designed to become an important link in the East-West and North-South regional transport networks, providing access to international seaports for the geographically closed states of Central Asia, which is the core of the SCO.

Understanding the symbiotic relationship of development of transport infrastructure and economic development of the region, the SCO Member States have prioritized their work in the direction of realizing immense transport and transit potential in the region.

## **UNECE Transport**

Since the late 1940s, UNECE has been the custodian of regional and global conventions and agreements that form the basis of regulatory governance for safe, efficient and environmentally friendly mobility and interregional/regional connectivity by inland transport including road, rail and inland waterway. Of the 193 United Nations Member States, 148 are Contracting Parties to at least one of 59 conventions/agreements on inland transport, in addition to 2 Permanent Observers and one non-State Contracting Party. Of these Contracting Parties, 94 are not ECE members.

United Nations General Assembly Resolutions (including A/RES/72/271 adopted in April 2018 and other biennial road safety resolutions; A/RES /72/212 on intermodality; and A/RES/70/197 on connectivity and corridors) stress the global role of the conventions/agreements on safety and facilitation under the purview of ECE/ITC and encourage all UN Member States to accede to them.

The 59 conventions/agreements administered by UNECE cover the full spectrum of inland transport, including infrastructure networks, traffic rules, signs and signals, vehicle design and construction regulations, vehicle periodical inspections, driving licenses, dangerous goods, transport contracts, customs procedures, containers, harmonization of cross-border formalities, driving and rest times of professional drivers and perishable foodstuffs. Additional information is provided in accompanying flyers.

Its unique comprehensive platform for inland transport is supported by Inland Transport Committee (ITC), 34 Working Parties and Administrative Committees, that bring together annually close to 6,000 technical experts from around the world.

Due to its recognized, wide-ranging and comprehensive role in inland transport, UNECE also hosts the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Road Safety and the United Nations Road Safety Fund as well as ECOSOC Committee of Experts on Transport of Dangerous Goods and on the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals and its two subcommittees.

### **The UNECE Euro-Asian Transport Linkages (EATL)**

The EATL project was jointly implemented by UNECE and UNESCAP in 2002-7. It has continued by UNECE since 2008 with an open invitation for UNESCAP. The ongoing Phase IV (2018 –) focuses operationalization to make transport between Europe and Asia safer, more efficient and more environmentally friendly.

The project has identified and reached consensus on 18 EATL rail and road routes and 17 inland waterway transport links, 52 inland river ports and 70 seaports, with 311 infrastructure priority projects in a total cost of US\$ 215 billion. Today, Euro-Asian railway links connect 59 Chinese cities with 49 European cities across 15 countries in Europe. Container volumes on the four main China-Europe rail routes jumped almost 30 per cent per year to 324,700 TEU in 2018 and average cost per 40-ft container reduced from US\$ 9,000 in 2010 to US\$ 4,000 now.

The current phase provides an EATL Platform on Sustainable Transport Connectivity (WP.5, promote investment in infrastructure, facilitate international operation, promote road safety, protect environment, and provide technical assistance and capacity building.

### **The TIR Convention: a global customs transit system**

Anyone who has ever travelled on roads from Europe to Central Asia will recognize the familiar blue and white TIR plate, borne by thousands of trucks and semi-trailers using the TIR customs transit system. For the drivers, the transport operators and the shippers, this plate stands for fast and efficient international road transport. For customs administrations it means more reliable transport operators, reduced need for inspections and a guarantee covering duties and taxes which may become due in case of infringements.

Today, the TIR Convention of 1975 has been ratified by 76 countries from all around the world and is currently operational in 63 of the Contracting Parties, covering a geographical scope from Lisbon to Shanghai, and from Narvik to Mumbai.

The TIR System is based on 5 essential principles:

- Secure vehicles or containers,
- International chain of guarantee,
- The TIR Carnet,
- Mutual recognition of customs controls and
- Controlled access.

After a strict selection process by national customs authorities, the TIR Carnet holder is entitled to use a TIR Carnet. This TIR Carnet, representing both the customs transit declaration and the evidence of an international financial guarantee, is duly completed and stamped by customs authorities who seal the load compartment at departure, and, thus, ensure the integrity of the load to customs authorities at all successive border crossing points, while avoiding time-consuming inspections or bond deposits at each border.

Over the years, the TIR guarantee system has proved its effectiveness and convenience for Customs administrations. Every national guaranteeing body is authorized by the customs administration of that country to guarantee payment within that country of any duties and taxes which may become due in the event of any irregularity occurring in the course of a

TIR transport operation. The national guaranteeing association, thus, guarantees the payment of duties and taxes of national and foreign carriers for TIR Carnets which have been issued by itself or by a guaranteeing association in another country.

National guaranteeing associations constitute a guarantee chain managed by an international organization authorized to do so by all Contracting Parties to the TIR Convention. Until today, the only authorized and well-functioning guarantee chain is administered by the International Road Transport Union (IRU), a non-governmental organization representing the interests of road transport operators worldwide. The guarantee chain is supported by several large international insurance companies and is supervised by the TIR Executive Board (TIRExB).

## eTIR

Customs administrations around the world have two, potentially conflicting, mandates. On the one hand, they have to collect revenues in an efficient manner as well as prevent fraud and smuggling of contraband. On the other hand, they are increasingly involved in facilitating transport and trade.

Taking into account the limitations of customs manpower and the increasingly sophisticated methods of customs fraud and smuggling, information and communication technology has become an essential tool for all customs administrations.

With this in mind, the Contracting Parties to the TIR Convention have been working for many years on the computerization of the TIR procedure. Taking into account all the efforts already achieved by both the private and public sector in order to computerize various aspects of the TIR procedure, Contracting Parties focused on preparing internationally acceptable standards, a sound legal basis and an international centralized system, the eTIR international system, aimed at ensuring the electronic exchange of customs related data and the management by customs of data on guarantees.

Since 2014, the efforts to computerize the TIR procedure have gained momentum. The TIR Contracting Parties have made great progress with the specifications describing the functional and technical application of the eTIR procedure and, on 5 February 2020, finalized and approved a new Annex 11 to the TIR Conventions, which contains the legal provisions

regulating the computerized TIR procedure. At the same time, a number of Contracting Parties have launched eTIR projects (i.e. Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Turkey) and an even greater number have expressed interest in launching bilateral or multilateral eTIR projects in order to prepare their countries for the full implementation of eTIR.

There is no doubt that the eTIR procedure, an even faster and more secure global transit system, will greatly contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development along the trans-continental Eurasian Transport Corridors

### **Purpose and organizational issues**

The provisions of United Nations resolutions 69/213 «The Role of Transport and Transit Corridors in Ensuring International Cooperation for Sustainable Development» and 70/197 «Towards comprehensive cooperation among all modes of transport for promoting sustainable multimodal transit corridors» call for implementation at the national level.

Taking into account the roles of the UNECE and the SCO in building sustainable Eurasian Corridors and SCO's cooperation with UN agencies, it has been planned to organize the 1st High-Level Event on the theme “United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and the Secretariat of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Round table on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development along the trans-continental Eurasian Transport Corridors” **on 27 February 2020 from 13:15 – 14:15 hours at the Palais des Nations, Salle XXIV in Geneva.**

The purpose of the high-level event is to discuss in detail the development of relations between the SCO and the UNECE in the development of sustainable transport infrastructure in Eurasia. It is expected to enhance practical cooperation between the two organizations.

The High-Level Event will include statements/remarks by the Director-General of the UN Office in Geneva, the Executive Secretary of the UNECE and the SCO Secretary-General. Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives of the SCO Member States to the UN, Representatives of SCO Observer States, SCO Dialogue Partners and other UN Member States may take the floor during the Open Session.

The High-Level Event is open to all UN Member States, representatives of international and regional organizations.

The working language of the event will be English.