

**UNECE INFORMAL MULTIDISCIPLINARY ADVISORY GROUP MEETING
ON TRANSPORT RESPONSES TO THE COVID-19 CRISIS**

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First of all, I would like to extend my thanks to the Chair of the WP.5 and the Secretariat for organizing this meeting. I also would like to take this opportunity to express my best wishes for everyone who has been affected by this pandemic.

Bearing in mind that Turkey is geographically located at the crossroads between the East and the West, it is not surprising that our country is one of the countries that is also at the heart of the measures taken in terms of international transportation and logistics.

Like many countries, our goal during the pandemic has been to maintain a balance between protecting the health and well-being of our people and ensuring the trade flow as smoothly as possible.

In order to limit the spread of the COVID-19 disease, in coordination with several Ministries and institutions and in parallel with the decisions of the Scientific Board established to respond to the pandemic in Turkey, certain emergency measures had been taken for international transportation of goods and passengers.

In this context, during the first days of the pandemic, taking into account the recommendations of the Ministry of Health, our border crossing points (BCPs) with Iran and Iraq were practically closed. However, in order to allow the goods to be transported, we have implemented “contact-free foreign trade” methods with Iran, Iraq and Bulgaria. With this procedure, we have aimed to prevent contact between people and the spread of the disease.

One of the aspects of the contact-free foreign trade was to transship the goods on the border. In this procedure, we have established buffer zones at our Habur BCP with Iraq and Kapıkule BCP with Bulgaria. Goods were transshipped between Turkish and foreign vehicles and drivers after the disinfection of the trailers, without direct contact.

Another aspect of the contact-free foreign trade is about railway transports. For example, due to a lack of a buffer zone with Iran, in our Kapıköy BCP, we have come up with a solution that would allow the train cars to be pushed from one side to the border by a locomotive, and then pulled from the other side by another locomotive. The documents regarding the goods were also transported in the wagons.

During the pandemic, all vehicles have been disinfected in order to be allowed to enter Turkey. Drivers have also been examined to determine if they showed any symptoms.

Vehicles that transit through Turkey are tracked by our Vehicle Tracking System to ensure that they follow the determined routes and rest stops. The drivers are also directed to leave the country at the shortest time following their entry into Turkey. The vehicles are

admitted to Turkey after confirming that the country the vehicle will be entering after leaving Turkey will permit entrance into its territory.

In order to ensure that vital transports arrive timely, customs procedures for vehicles carrying foodstuffs, medicine and medical equipment are prioritized at the customs offices.

For Ro-Ro transports, although trailer transport continues, passengers are not permitted to board the vessels. On the other hand, drivers are allowed to board the vessels for Ro-Ro transports on certain lines.

Regarding the coordination with neighboring countries, as you may agree, based on the nature of international trade and transport, there are no alternatives other than working together and creating a good level of cooperation with your partners and with your neighbors. In case of emergencies such as the present pandemic, it is extremely important to be coordinated very well with each other in order to create an uninterrupted and smooth flow of transportation.

In that sense, I am very much proud of the fact that as soon as the outbreak had popped up at the beginning of this year, we started working with our neighboring and partner countries. We have been in a direct contact on a 24/7 basis with our colleagues in these countries in order to create new alternative routes for the smooth flow of transports and for immediate intervention in case of any unexpected situation.

For instance, we had worked closely with our colleagues in Georgia and Azerbaijan in order to increase the capacity of the route among three countries both for land transport and rail transportation via Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway line in order to compensate the suspended traffic with Iran due to the closure of the BCPs there, and we succeeded in this.

And thanks to the efforts given by each of our partners, smooth flow of goods was provided even at the time of pandemic without putting any extra risks on the health of our people. In that sense, I would like to express once again here our gratefulness for the efforts given by our colleagues in all those neighboring and partner countries.

The last but not the least point I would like to touch upon is the lessons that might be learned from the pandemic in terms of increasing the resilience of the transport systems against this kind of emergency. Personally, I think that there are so many lessons; however, there are two important lessons for us:

-First one is that the proper, functioning coordination mechanisms are crucial at both the national and international levels for tackling the difficulties faced by the global value chains,

-And the second is the importance of the digitalization of transit and customs procedures and formalities for transports. In this regard, I think that we should much more focus on our efforts for digitalization of TIR procedures and eTIR projects in the near future in order to make life easier and healthier for everyone, as several participants already pointed it out.

Thank you very much for your time and attention.