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Transport Ministers to meet on Euro-Asian transport links during the 70th Session of the UNECE Inland Transport Committee

Aimed at promoting safe, efficient and sustainable pan-European and Euro-Asian inland transport Ministers of Transport from 20 countries in the Euro-Asian region together with high-level officials from the 56 UNECE member States, the European Commission, international and European transport organizations and NGOs are expected to attend the 70th session of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Inland Transport Committee, to be held in the Palais des Nations in Geneva on 19-21 February 2008. The session will be opened by Mr. Marek Belka, Executive Secretary of UNECE.

The Inland Transport Committee (ITC) is the highest policymaking body of the UNECE in the field of transport. In the course of the last 60 years, together with its subsidiary bodies, the ITC has provided a pan-European intergovernmental forum, where UNECE member countries – 56 in all – come together to forge the tools of their economic cooperation and negotiate and adopt international legal instruments on inland transport. These legal instruments are considered indispensable for developing efficient, harmonized and integrated, safe and sustainable pan-European transport systems.

The first day of the Committee's session will be marked by a Meeting of Transport Ministers from countries in the Euro-Asian region. Ministers are expected to confirm their support for the joint UNECE-UNESCAP project on Euro-Asian transport links and its continuation by endorsing the identified Euro-Asian routes and their priority development as well as the creation of a mechanism ensuring the efficient coordination and monitoring of project related activities. The UNECE-UNESCAP project on Euro-Asian transport links, as part of the global United Nations Development Account Project on developing interregional transport linkages, has defined a coherent network of rail, road and inland waterways that pass through 19 countries from Europe and Asia. Given the continued growth of trade and resulting congestion of the main ports and their hinterland routes, Euro-Asian inland transport links provide an important extension of the existing transport capacity. The planned Phase II of the joint UNECE-UNESCAP project entails the coordinated development of the Euro-Asian routes and projects identified to date.

Some of the other issues to be addressed at the 70th session are outlined below.

- *Transport infrastructure agreements.* UNECE agreements provide infrastructure and performance standards for major road, rail and combined transport links as well as inland waterways stretching across the European continent. The Committee will review recent amendments and proposals regarding these agreements with a view to promoting the further development of pan-European and Euro-Asian inland transport networks.
- *Border-crossing facilitation.* In addition to establishing harmonized physical infrastructure parameters, UNECE transport facilitation agreements and conventions aim at removing non-physical obstacles to the smooth movement of goods and passengers across borders. The Committee will consider new amendments to the International Convention on the Harmonization of Frontier Controls of Goods aimed at further harmonizing border procedures for international road transport and making them more efficient. It will also consider other recent developments such as the progress with the computerization of TIR, which aims to create a customs-to-customs information exchange system including management of data on the TIR guarantee.

- *Road traffic safety.* The work in progress in this area is geared towards better implementation of the road safety conventions and the accelerated revision of the Consolidated Resolution on Road Traffic (R.E.1). The Committee will discuss follow up actions to the First UN Global Road Safety Week aimed at raising awareness about road safety issues at global, regional and national levels, as well as possible initiatives to be considered by the UN General Assembly.
- *Road transport.* The Committee will be requested to approve the Additional Protocol to the Convention on the Contract for the International Carriage of Goods by Road (CMR) concerning the electronic consignment note and to support the organization of a ceremony for its signature in May 2008. Concerning the European Agreement on the Work of Crews of Vehicles engaged in International Road Transport (AETR), the core of the discussions will relate to the amendments required to harmonize this Agreement with the new EU rules concerning driving and rest periods and the introduction of the digital tachograph by non-EU countries.
- *Vehicle regulations.* The World Forum for Harmonization of Vehicle Regulations adopted 2 new regulations and updated 51 existing ones in 2007. These newly adopted regulations and amendments will improve the active and passive safety of vehicles as well as their environmental performance. The Committee will take stock of all recent developments and provide further guidance on work in this area.
- *Transport of dangerous goods.* UNECE activities in this sensitive area pertain to the development and updating of safety and security requirements for the international carriage of dangerous goods by road (ADR), rail (RID) and inland waterways (ADN) and their harmonization. The Committee will examine new developments in this area, notably the draft amendments to ADR, RID and ADN prepared in 2006-2007.
- *Promotion of sustainable transport.* UNECE administers jointly with WHO/Europe the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP) that aims to integrate environmental and health concerns in transport policies. The Committee will take stock of all recent developments and provide further guidance.
- *Transport of perishable foodstuffs.* The Working Party on the Transport of Perishable Foodstuffs will present a report on its activities and recent developments concerning this important segment of international trade flows.
- *Operational activities/assistance to countries with economies in transition.* UNECE promotes subregional cooperation in the framework of the Trans-European Motorway (TEM) and Trans-European Railway (TER) programmes, aiming at the coordinated development of coherent transport infrastructure networks in Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe and the Caucasus. In 2007, the UNECE Transport Division undertook more than 50 advisory missions and capacity-building activities aimed at assisting its member countries, in particular countries with economies in transition, to accelerate their efforts toward the harmonization of their transport legislation as well as the integration of their transport systems with those of other UNECE member States. The report on these activities, including recent developments and challenges, will be discussed during the ITC session.

For additional information please visit: <http://www.unece.org/trans> or contact:

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