Welcoming Statement

by
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at

coop-organized by UNESCAP, UNECE and UN-OHRLLS

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Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) it is a great pleasure and an honour for me to join previous speakers in opening this high-level review conference of the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries in the Euro-Asian region.

As you are all aware, landlocked developing countries are amongst the most vulnerable countries in the world. Due to their geographic remoteness, their lack of direct access to the open sea and the high transport and transit costs they face, they are at a significant economic disadvantage compared to the rest of the world. Indeed, the inclusion of transport-related issues in the UN 2030 Agenda is testament to a growing recognition in the international community that transport is essential to ensure sustainable development.

The Euro-Asian region hosts about 1/3 of the world’s landlocked countries, including some of the largest landlocked countries (in terms of geographical area) as well as some of those that suffer from the longest geographical distance to the open sea. As a result, at the UNECE we take the challenges that these countries face regarding their integration into the global economy, very serious.

In the field of transport, we focus our attention on harmonization of technical and regulatory standards, formulation of infrastructure networks, development of corridors, provision of facilitation tool, capacity building, and cooperation between LLDCs and transit countries.

UNECE is the custodian of 58 legal instruments and the centre of UN inland transport conventions and agreements. One of the legal instruments is the famous TIR Convention, which is crucially important for LLDCs to facilitate transit transport. Sustainable connectivity, smart mobility, intermodal transport and accessibility, transport networks and infrastructure development are at the core of the UNECE’s work. It provides an intergovernmental forum, where member countries come together to forge tools for economic cooperation and negotiate and adopt international legal instruments on inland transport. As of 1 December 2018, the total number of contracting parties to these legal instruments was 1,753. Of the 193 UN member States, 147 States are contracting parties to at least one of these legal instruments.
When it comes to capacity-building, one of the flagship initiatives of the UNECE in the field of connectivity is the Euro-Asian Transport Links project (EATL) which has recently concluded its third phase.

The EATL Project, which was launched in 2002, has made Euro-Asian transport a reality. Over the years, it has gathered public and private sector stakeholders from over 38 countries in Europe and Asia, including not only many EU member States but also landlocked countries in Central Asia and the South Caucasus as well as non-UNECE countries in Asia.

This collective endeavour has resulted in a set of very tangible outputs, including:

a) The identification of 9 rail and road links, 17 water transport links, 52 inland river ports and 70 maritime ports.

b) The prioritization of over 300 infrastructure investment projects on EATL routes.

c) The development of a detailed Geographical Information System (GIS) database.

d) An in-depth analysis of non-physical obstacles to Euro-Asian transport, including the many obstacles relating to a lack of harmonization of technical standards and inter-operability.

e) A comparison study between maritime and inland transport.

f) Concrete efforts to operationalize the identified corridors by preparing common time schedules and tariffs.

The project has consistently paid attention to the needs of LLDCs and provided substantial inputs to the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action and its predecessor programme.

A new UNECE-led initiative that is currently underway and that is of direct interest to our discussions over the next two days includes the creation of a Unified Railway Law. Once in place, it will enable railway operators to carry out their activity within a single legal regime along the entire East-West axis connecting European and Asian LLDCs to central markets in Europe and Asia.

Recognising that one of the key challenges towards sustainable infrastructure development in the Euro-Asian region remains the lack of funding, the UNECE is in the progress of operating an International Transport Infrastructure Observatory. This web-
based platform, developed in a GIS environment, will enable governments to retrieve the data to prepare, benchmark and present their transport infrastructure projects. Financial institutions on the other hand will use the Observatory to consider, analyse and compare projects from a regional and international perspective and identify those they wish to finance.

**Excellencies,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Since the adoption of the Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs a lot of valuable work has been undertaken in the Euro-Asian region. Tangible efforts have been made, both at the national and international levels.

It is time now to look back and take stock of what has been done so far, identify the remaining needs and challenges and develop tailored responses to remedy them.

Today’s and tomorrow’s review conference will be instrumental in this regard. It will allow us to better focus our future work and further strengthen cooperation among governments, the private sector and international organizations. The work towards untapping the economic and trade potential of Euro-Asian LLDCs has not been finalized yet. More efforts are needed and coordinated actions are required. Let us work all together to make it a reality!

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I wish you success in your deliberations and thank you for your attention.