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The Meeting of Ministers of Transport of Countries in

The Euro-Asian Region

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Honourable Ministers,
Distinguished Representatives,

First of all, I would like to express my sincere pleasure to address you on the occasion of the Meeting of Ministers of Transport of Countries in the Euro-Asian Region held under the 70th session of the Inland Transport Committee. Unfortunately, my Minister HE Binali YILDIRIM could not attend this important meeting because of his program confirmed earlier. It is my honor to express that he supports transport studies initiated in the UN platforms and wishes success for all.

I would like to thank Transport Division of the Economic Commission for Europe of the United Nations for the effective organization of this important event. I truly believe that this meeting will add great value to mutual understanding of our perspectives on the development of Euro-Asian Transport links.

We believe that fast, reliable and integrated transport networks balancing all modes of transport, should be our ultimate objective in this sphere. Turkey, as a country connecting important trade routes in Eurasia, attributes great importance to develop its intermodal transport opportunities, to complete missing links on the main axes serving international transport and to remove bottlenecks especially on the border crossings.

Thanks to increasing economic interactions between Europe and Asia, several transport corridors connecting these two continents are being established. And as is known, many of these corridors pass through the Turkish territory.

Within this context, most of the intercontinental transport routes planned under the Pan-European approach go through Turkey. For instance, TRACECA, which was initiated by the European Union, connects CIS countries and Asian countries to Europe also through the Turkish transport infrastructure.

Turkey also contributes to the development and harmonization of regional transport systems by being actively involved in the Black Sea Economic Organization (BSEC) and the Southeast Europe Cooperation Initiative (SECI). Moreover, Southeast Axis which is one of the five transport axes determined by the High Level Group, established by the EU Commission, connects Europe to the Caucasus, the Middle East, Central Asia and East Africa through Turkey. Furthermore, the South Corridor, which is one of the four corridors determined in the joint study of UN-ECE and UN-ESCAP for the development of the Euro-Asian Transport Linkages, connects Southeast Europe to Iran, Central and South Asia through the Turkish territory.

Turkey as a negotiating country for EU membership has also concluded the Transport Infrastructure Needs Assessment (TINA) study started in 2 December 2005 in order to identify its transport

network that will be a part of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) upon membership.

In the framework of the TINA study, a Core Network was proposed for Turkey as a multi-modal network and designed to be capable of serving all the important international traffic flows within Turkey. In this connection, a transport network database for Turkey based on a geographic information system (GIS) was established.

Moreover, I believe that my country has a great potential in promoting Euro-Asian intermodal transport links. From this point of view, the realization of various projects that are significant for the whole region were achieved or are partly underway, such as; the construction of Black Sea Coastal Road, Istanbul Strait Tube Tunnel Project, the rehabilitation of the Ankara-Istanbul Railway Line, Ankara-Sivas and Kars-Tbilisi cargo and passenger railway lines, the rehabilitation of ports and their hinterland connections, the development of main container terminals and logistic villages, and the promotion of combined transport connections. The restructuring of all modes of transport in accordance with EU aquis is also underway. At this point, I would like to give brief information about some of these ongoing projects:

- Istanbul Strait Tube Tunnel (Marmaray) is one of the Projects that has a great significance for the international concerns and demands, and will provide an uninterrupted, modern, high capacity railway connection between Europe, Asia and Middle East. The total length of new and upgraded railway system will be approximately 76.3 (seventy-six point three) kilometers, of which 13.6 (thirteen point six) kilometers is the tube tunnel. The project will be completed by the end of 2009.
- Another one is the Ankara-Istanbul High Speed Railway Project, which aims to decrease the existing travel time from 6.5 hours to 3 hours by implementing state-of-the-art railway technology and systems that allows running of trains at 250 km per hour. The project started in 2004 and it is expected to be completed at the end of 2008.
- The Project for construction of dual carriageway-express ways of 15.000 (fifteen thousand) km of which construction started in 2003 and approximately 10.400 (ten thousand four hundred) km of a divided road including Black Sea Coastal Road of 589 (five hundred eighty nine) km has been completed so far.

- Kars-Tbilisi-Baku railway line construction, which will provide a link between Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan, has been agreed upon with Georgia and Azerbaijan. 76 km of the project is in the Turkish territory and 29 km of it is in Georgia. With this project a line between Europe and China through Caucasus and Central Asia (Middle Asia and China) will be provided. The construction of the Georgian part of the project started on 21 November 2007 in Georgia with the participation of the Presidents of Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

Distinguished Participants,

Needless to say, beyond the infrastructural developments, smooth and fast operation is of great importance for international trade and traffic. In this respect, facilitation of border crossing is one of the main aims that we have to achieve. This issue relates with various aspects ranking from administrative arrangements to security.

However, a well-conditioned superstructure in border crossing points is the most important aspect. Acting from this point of view, Turkey has effectively implemented PPP financing models, especially BOT, for the renovation of existing border crossings points. For example, the Turkish-Iranian border “Gürbulak”, the Turkish-Iraqi border ”Habur”, the Turkish-Greek border ”Ipsala”, which are the most important border crossing points on the Euro-Asia links, have been modernized and upgraded by considerable private funds. Currently a modernization project is underway at Cilvegözü Border Gate (with Syria), and will also start for the Sarp Border Gate (with Georgia) and Kapıkule (with Bulgaria).

Honourable Ministers,
Distinguished Delegates,

Each country sharing common interests within UNECE platform should take responsibility in order to facilitate improved interregional and international transport. We need improvements not only in the transport infrastructure but also in administrative infrastructure of transport as well as institutional and organisational capacities applied to cross-border traffic.

All countries should have a more liberal approach towards international transport. One of our main objectives should be to set up a gradually free market access for the international road transport.

Moreover, we should intensify our cooperation in the horizontal issues such as the facilitation of border crossing, simplification of visa procedures, harmonization of transport legislations, safety and security in all modes of transport, which are becoming more and more important at present. The decision of the harmonization and simplification of the border crossing and customs procedures is no longer a choice for us but a necessity for the economic integration and development of any country involved in free trade.

As we all understand, the main aim of the Euro-Asian Transport Linkages study is to facilitate and promote the trade and tourism activities between the two continents through establishing international transport links by increasing national capacities. As a transport project serving both to Asia and Europe, Euro-Asian Transport Linkages has also a great value for coordinating and guiding the transport studies in both continents.

As a country involved in almost all important international transport studies in both continents, we believe that in this process Turkey is going to play a vital role thanks to both her geography and vast capacity for the international transport. In this sense, Turkey supports the Euro-Asian Transport Linkages study and its continuation in the forthcoming period.

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To conclude my words, I concede my sincere thanks to all participants and organizers of this important event.