

# Silk Road is open for business purposes by road transportation

The New Eurasian Land Transport Initiative (NELTI) is an essential next step in the IRU strategy of interconnecting businesses in Asia and Europe and along the Eurasian Landmass as well as increasing public and business awareness of the huge opportunities created by this land bridge. Based on support from international organisations and national Governments, NELTI will involve international shippers organising transcontinental delivery of industrial and consumer goods from Central and Western China to Europe and Turkey, in order to demonstrate that the Silk Road is now fully operational and open for business.

The project, which will start on September 16, 2008 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, has already gained support from major international organisations and national Governments, including the UN regional commissions (UNECE, UNESCAP), CIS,

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EurAsEC, GUAM and others. During the first three months of operations, monitoring will be conducted and will involve internationally recognised monitoring methods of registering the situation on roads, at border crossing points, quality of road infrastructure, administrative barriers, etc. The results of the NELTI project will be on the agenda of the 5th IRU EuroAsian Conference in Almaty in 2009.



New Eurasian Land Transport Initiative

## Asian Highway Network

Road Infrastructure for NELTI already exists!



**Ambassador Leonidas Chrysantopoulos**

Secretary General of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), Permanent International Secretariat (PERMIS)

“Road transport (...) will make a concrete difference in the lives of the people of the region.”

The Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) attributes great importance to cooperation in the area of transport and transport infrastructure. Within this framework, BSEC and the International Road Transport Union (IRU) have been displaying an excellent level of cooperation on road transport issues in the region, especially since a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the two organizations in 2006.

Currently, BSEC has two major ongoing projects in the transport sphere. One is on the coordinated development of the Black Sea Ring Highway and the other one pertains to the development of the Motorways of the Sea in the BSEC region. The Memoranda of Understanding for these two projects were signed on 19 April 2007, in Belgrade.

The Black Sea Ring Highway project envisages a four-lane ring highway system, approximately 7100 km long, to connect the BSEC Member States with each other. The project on the development of the Motorways of the Sea in the BSEC region, on the other hand, is about strengthening the maritime links among the ports of the BSEC Member States.

These two projects will not only contribute to increasing intra-BSEC trade, but will also facilitate the development of tourism in the region. As a result, these projects are expected to also indirectly support an increase of intra-BSEC investments in the areas of tourism related services, infrastructure and transport. Most importantly, they will make a concrete difference in the lives of the people of the region. The two projects also con-

stitute regional contributions to the extension of the Trans-European Networks and the development of Euro-Asian transport links. With the establishment of scheduled passenger lines and Ro-Ro ferries that will connect the basic ports of the Black Sea to the Black Sea Ring Highway and to the ports of the Mediterranean, the two projects aim to turn BSEC into an economic power house.

As far as the Black Sea Ring Highway project is concerned, we acknowledge that constructing the highway is only one aspect of the challenge we have to face. Another dimension of the challenge is not to end up with a gigantic traffic jam once the highway is completed. Consequently, BSEC is also making efforts to speed up border controls as well as visa facilitation for lorry drivers.

As part of our efforts to identify the possible elements which could create traffic jams on the Black Sea Ring Highway once it is fully constructed, the BSEC Secretariat, in cooperation with the IRU, as well as the Union of Road Transport Associations in the BSEC Region (BSEC-URTA), jointly organized the Black Sea Ring Highway Caravan. This Caravan consisted of 12 trucks from all Member States which went around the existing road infrastructure in the envisaged route of the Highway. The Caravan started on 19 April 2007 from Belgrade and terminated on 28 May 2007 in Istanbul. The fact that the conception of the idea of organizing the Caravan and the actual execution of this project took place within only a two-month period once again demonstrated the excellent cooperation between BSEC and the IRU.

We organized the Caravan to promote BSEC to its people, to the world and to gather information on the existing infrastructure and other problems that we would have to face. We achieved all these objectives. A report was published on our findings which will be useful for the work on the Black Sea Ring Highway.

The Caravan monitored the waiting times at the borders during its journey. They were indeed long. Hopefully, the situation will be ameliorated with the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding on the Facilitation of the Road Transport of Goods in the BSEC Region, signed in 2002, and the Agreement on the Simplification of Visa Procedures for Professional Drivers Nationals of BSEC Member States which will be signed later this year. Within this framework, we are pleased with the IRU's proposal to co-finance a study on a possible model for a BSEC multilateral system of quotas and developing jointly a regional professional driver database compatible with the Schengen Agreement with respect to the Agreement on the Simplification of Visas for Professional Drivers.

Both the Black Sea Ring Highway project and the project on the development of the Motorways of the Sea in the BSEC region have given a new impetus to transport cooperation in BSEC. We hope to achieve as much progress on the ground as possible on the implementation of these two inter-related projects by the year 2014, when Sochi will be hosting the Winter Olympics.

Finally, we would like to wish success for the 31st IRU World Congress.



President of the Republic of Turkey, Dr. Abdullah Gül (center), IRU Secretary General, Martin Marmy (left) and the Secretary General of the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), Ambassador Leonidas Chrysantopoulos join forces to launch the Black Sea Ring Highway Caravan.

## Driving progress around the Black Sea

To draw governments' attention to barriers to road transport which are impeding economic development, the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, headed by His Excellency Ambassador Chrysantopoulos, in partnership with the IRU, had a Caravan of 12 trucks representing each of the Black Sea states tour the 7,500 km ring road around the Black Sea. Like the Beijing-Brussels Caravan, it demonstrated that barrier to progress to this region is not infrastructure, but rather cumbersome and costly bureaucratic procedures. Total economic costs of bureaucracy in the region are estimated at EUR 229 millions!



### Black Sea Ring Highway Caravan Route

