MEETING OF BSEC MINISTERS OF TRANSPORT

Istanbul, Turkey, 5 July 2007

“Policy Actions for Developing Efficient Inland Transport Links between Asia and Europe”

Alain Rathery
Deputy Secretary General

International Transport Forum
European Conference of Ministers of Transport
Ministers,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the International Transport Forum I would like to thank the BESEC Authorities and the BESC Secretariat for their kind invitation to attend this important meeting.

A special thank also to the Turkish Minister, Mr. Ismet Yilmaz, and all the responsible from the Turkish Ministry of Transport for the perfect organisation of this meeting and for their warm and kind hospitality.

As you probably all know, the International Transport Forum has been created by the ECMT Transport Ministers in a Declaration last year in Dublin. This new entity was officially launched by Transport Ministers at the end of May in Sofia and is now the successor of ECMT.

The International Transport Forum is a worldwide entity and not any more a purely European body. The Forum is global in scope. Globalisation has a radical impact on international trade and an increasing number of transport challenges and problems are now worldwide. Many require global answers. This is clearly the case of the transport links between Europe and Asia and the area of the Black Sea will certainly be a strategic focus for these links.

Contrary to ECMT, the International Transport Forum is also not limited to surface transport but deals with all the modes including maritime and air transport. The globalisation and the rapid and dynamic development of all modes of transport makes it necessary to take all of them into consideration.

Finally while the ECMT was a closed meeting of Ministers and their delegations, the Forum will also be open to key figures from Civil Society. It will involve representatives of governments and politics, business and industry, research and education. Each year the annual meeting will be a broad forum of discussion on a single topic of worldwide strategic importance. The next meeting of the Forum is scheduled in Leipzig in Germany from 28 to 30 May 2008 on the topic “Transport and Energy: the challenge of climate change”. This theme is crucial for a sector whose role is to facilitate trade and economic growth but which also must reduce its dependence on oil and limit its environmental impacts.
All the BSEC countries are already members of the Forum which will be progressively enlarged with the participation of new countries from other continents than Europe. We look forward to important contributions to the work of the Forum from the countries represented here today.

While there is no doubt that in the future sea transport will continue to be a key player in the Europe-Asia transport market, there are nonetheless three factors currently driving the diversification of routes and the opening of new inland links between Europe and Asia:

- the problem for land access to sea ports;
- the vulnerability and security of maritime shipping routes;
- the need to meet the demands of developing regional trade along Europe-Asia corridors and this is clearly the case of the Black Sea region.

Establishing efficient inland links between Europe and Asia poses a certain number of problems, mainly in the Caucasus and Central Asian countries that can only be overcome by taking the appropriate policy decisions on issues such as the development of adequate infrastructure and the removal of regulatory and institutional barriers that prevent the development of efficient transport services.

It was with this in view that the ECMT Council of Ministers at its 2005 session in Moscow, adopted recommendations for a whole series of actions in support of a comprehensive approach to the provision of efficient inland transport links between Europe and Asia. All the measures recommended by Ministers in Moscow are crucial for the improvement of the inland transport links between Asia and Europe. Countries of the BSEC region are particularly concerned by this recommendation:

- The first of this recommendation is, of course, to adapt capacity and make adequate infrastructure available.

The provision of good quality land links between Europe and Asia requires investment in order to bring existing infrastructure to standard and to build missing links chiefly in border areas. The Memorandum of Understanding for the co-ordinated development of the Black Sea Ring Highway is certainly an important step in this field.

- Infrastructure bottlenecks are undoubtedly part of the problem but they seem to be overemphasized while institutional reforms are overseen or even neglected.

This is why Ministers in Moscow recommended also a series of actions in this field in order to remove barriers to the provision of efficient transport services by implementing a Trade and Transport Facilitation Programme.
• In detail, such a programme requires a deepening of transport sector reforms, expanding liberalisation of transport services and targeted modernisation. Increased competition has already shown its beneficial impact. For international road freight transport, the ECMT multilateral quota has been and continues to be a unique opportunity for phased liberalisation. Undoubtedly the BSEC-URTA proposal to develop a quota system in the BSEC region seems a step in the right direction.

• Such a programme also requires modernisation of customs procedures. The main weaknesses creating a barrier to the real growth of land transport between Europe and Asia are undoubtedly the recurrent problems encountered at border crossings. Do not forget that one extra day in customs adds on average 0.8% to costs. Simplifying and harmonising border control procedures ensuring co-operation between border agencies, transport, customs and controlling authorities, implementing effectively the provisions of the TIR convention and finding a long-standing solution to visa problems are some of the measures to be taken among the long list of actions necessary to reform and modernise border crossings. In this field, the International Transport Forum can only support the draft joint Declaration to be signed today where it acknowledges the necessity to intensify efforts to ease custom formalities and reduce waiting times at the border crossing points.

At the end of this intervention, I would like to stress again that the International Transport Forum, successor of the ECMT, encourages strongly regional organisations such as BSEC to take all necessary steps to implement the actions recommended by ECMT Council of Ministers in Moscow and to strengthen regional co-operation on transport in order to harmonise the legal and regulatory framework governing the conditions for the provision of transport services. This is clearly a pre-requisite for an efficient development of inland transport links between Europe and Asia.