Introduction

Please allow me first to thank the seminar organisers, for having invited the IRU, the Ukraine Transport Minister, UNECE and the ECMT.

On the theme “opportunities and advantages of intermodal transport between Europe and Asia” one could expect the IRU, which represents and defends the interests of road transport operators across the globe, to be sceptical about combined transport, whereas sustainable development is the first of IRU objectives.

THE IRU.

For the IRU, the promotion of sustainable development should include:
1) Technical progress, to build more efficient vehicles and less polluting fuels;
2) Improved logistics processes;
3) Improved intermodal cooperation.

For this reason, we are always in favour of all intermodal transport possibilities, especially over long distances, and when this contributes to the development of interregional and intercontinental transport, as is notably the case between Europe and Asia.

I will now present why the supports intermodal transport. Then I will evoke remaining problems and remaining questions and propose some ways of answering them.
1. **The complementary and indispensable nature of road with rail, maritime or inland waterways over long distances and the importance of reinforcing links between Europe and Asia.**

The IRU closely monitors activities beyond Europe’s borders, in Asia and the Far east, where need for economic cooperation is increasing. Our organisation has already brought together members on two continents for two Euro-Asian conferences: the first in Irkutzk in September 2001, and the second, in Teheran, in October 2003 and we are already preparing a third which will take place in Beijing, in September 2005.

In this way, the IRU promotes the development of interregional and intercontinental long distance transport services with its members and partners.

The IRU supports combined transport as a complete transport management system supplementing traditional road transport. Nevertheless, I must point out that our organisation is against the excessive use of the concept of combined transport which, too often, is used by politicians against trucks on roads!

Allow me to repeat that there are no economically viable alternatives to road over short distances and whatever the circumstances road is always the indispensable partner in all types of freight transport.

Moreover, it seems to be “politically correct” to associate rail, maritime or inland waterways transport with environmentally friendly transport – against road! Whereas, trucks engaged in international transport, in particular, are recognised as being very low polluters, road has made enormous progress, within just a few years.

However, road does not naturally tend towards a monopoly but is always ready to use other modes at its disposal, according to the customer’s preferences, particularly over long distances.

Obviously, a train with 60 swap bodies and one engine and one driver is more competitive over long distances than thirty road trains and their drivers.

The transport of dangerous goods is a good example: tanks, which can be transported in combined transport mode use the rail-road option, especially over transcontinental distances.
The IRU’s experience in the transport of dangerous goods clearly shows that the IRU Members who are experts in this field are very faithful partners in combined transport.

However specific problems subsist at terminals which prevent using combined transport more for dangerous goods, because tanks must be removed from the terminal as soon as the train arrives.

Which brings me to:

2. **Lack of facilities for intermodal transhipping and bureaucratic red tape at border crossings which too often are prejudicial to international trade and combined transport.**

Indeed, rail transport is only an option if it eliminates fractioning shipments, which always generates extra costs, increases risks of damage to goods and lengthens delivery times.

To prevent this, multi-modal platforms should be developed which place at the disposal of companies: reception and information services, parking areas for heavy goods vehicles, a freight office, a transit centre, warehouses, container loading and unloading installations.

Moreover, another problem resides in the fact that railways cannot provide the degree of precision required by combined transport trains. Delays of between 2 and 3 hours, and even 24 hours are commonplace.

The first time this occurs, our member accepts an extra cost of 30 euros per hour for waiting time at terminals.

The second time, he politely asks for compensation for these extra costs. In reply, he receives an example of CIM regulations which stipulate that railways may, in principle, register up to 7 days delay… before any compensation is due!

The third time this happens, he returns to road and a certain it will be some time before he is seen again! To cap it all, our members are also confronted with annual rail price increases which in no way correspond to the quality of services.

Same again for sea-road or river-road combined services where we see load fractioning and where technical problems exist for the transhipment
of mobile boxes which are too often technically dissimilar, harmonisation is therefore indispensable.

In addition, there are legal issues and red tape and the IRU takes advantage of the opportunity given to it today to appeal to governments to encourage the establishment of international facilitation measures, in order to remove obstacles at borders which affect not only road but all other transport modes and cause economic losses and greatly prejudice international trade.

Multimodal transport with sea links does not have its own legal regime which results in the need for: double documentation, double insurance contract…etc. which increases the number of administrative tasks and is extremely time consuming.

As far as our sector is concerned, we need more flexible transit conditions enabling us to go from Europe to Asia, harmonised and flexible border crossing conditions, in particular for the granting of annual visas and multiple entry visas for professional drivers. Time and costs to obtain visas should be reduced.

Finally, especially for international transport corridors, the IRU recommends the establishment of complete, bilateral and multilateral legal frameworks with harmonised and simplified procedures.

**Conclusion**

To conclude, the IRU invites national authorities, in cooperation with IRU Member Associations present in the Euro-Asian region to take steps to promote road transport as well as its modal partners and remove remaining obstacles in response to the needs to develop commercial and economic relations between Asia and Europe.

To achieve this objective, the IRU is ready to place its network of national road transport associations and its resources at the disposal of governmental organisations and commercial circles concerned.

Finally, I would like to invoke the IRU’s 3 « i » strategy: “I” as in innovations to develop ever more effective at source technical and measures and operating practices, the second “I” as in incentives to encourage transport operators to accelerate the introduction of the best available technology and practices for combined transport and the third
“I” for infrastructure to remove bottlenecks and missing links on the Euro-Asian transport corridors as well as the efficient use of existing road infrastructure.