

COMMUNIQUE

on the Outcomes of the Ministerial Roundtable on the Sustainable and Digital Middle Corridor and Beyond

On 20 November 2024, the Ministerial Roundtable on the Sustainable and Digital Middle Corridor and Beyond was held in Baku, Republic of Azerbaijan. The event took place during COP29 and was organized by the Ministry of Digital Development and Transport, and supported by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

The agenda and the list of participants are herewith attached (Annexes 1 and 2).

The event provided a unique platform for regional and international collaboration, fostering dialogue on the sustainable and digital transport corridor development worldwide, and highlighted the importance of developing the Middle Corridor into a sustainable, efficient, and digitally enhanced transport route that would serve the future needs of the region. The discussions were constructive and forward-looking, with all participants underscoring the critical role of this corridor in linking Asia with Europe through a seamless and environmentally conscious transit network.

The participants recognized the following key points and agreed to pursue further cooperation on the development of the Middle Corridor:

1. Strengthening Infrastructure Sustainability and Resilience and Reducing Bottlenecks

The participants acknowledged the critical importance of addressing infrastructure deficiencies along the corridor. It was agreed that the removal of bottlenecks remains a priority to ensure smoother transit operations. The participants called for a coordinated effort to accelerate sustainable and resilient infrastructure projects, including upgrades to road and rail networks, modernization of port facilities, and improvements in logistics hubs for greater efficiency, regional connectivity, economic growth, environmental sustainability, climate resilience, and safety, while leaving no one behind.

In particular, there was a consensus on the need for comprehensive assessments of the physical infrastructure across the corridor, identifying key areas for improvement. The participants agreed to share technical expertise and best practices to expedite the implementation of projects aimed at enhancing transport efficiency and embracing a just transition. This includes innovative and interdisciplinary approaches to transport infrastructure design and operations, as well as mobilizing resources and support from various sectors, including the use of public-private partnership mechanisms and Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) financing for transport initiatives. Additionally, the participants highlighted the importance of harmonization of the capacity of border infrastructure and reviewing border-crossing points to reduce delays and streamline customs procedures.

Greater collaboration on the strengthening of the efficiency of multimodal transport operations along the Middle Corridor, including leveraging existing harmonized

regulatory frameworks and deployment of practical digital solutions, will also enable the creation of an operational environment for sustainable and resilient multimodal transport development.

2. Enhancing Digital Connectivity and Data Exchange

Considering the growing need for digitalization in transport, the participants emphasized the significance of digital innovations in streamlining transport operations across the corridor. It was widely acknowledged that the implementation of electronic versions of well-known United Nations Conventions such as e-CMR and eTIR, electronic customs documentation, and real-time data-sharing platforms will play a crucial role in optimizing the corridor's operational efficiency.

The participants expressed their commitment to accelerating the adoption of digital technologies while ensuring interoperability, which would enable better coordination between competent authorities, smoother movement of goods, and optimized logistics, customs, and border-crossing procedures, as well as greater transparency in transport operations. In this context, several ongoing pilot projects on digital data exchange between corridor countries were highlighted. These initiatives aim to establish seamless, interoperable digital data flows that will reduce paperwork, lower costs and transport emissions, and improve connectivity, reliability, safety, and resilience.

It was also noted that enhanced digital connectivity is expected to attract greater international trade flows through the corridor, providing an opportunity for countries to strengthen their economies by integrating into global supply chains more effectively.

3. Implementation of the SPECA Roadmap on Multimodal Document Exchange

The participants recognized the importance of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) Roadmap for the digitalization of multimodal data and document exchange along the Middle Corridor, using United Nations Legal Instruments and Standards. This roadmap serves as a vital tool in promoting seamless trade and transport connectivity between the countries involved. The participants committed to supporting the implementation of the roadmap's initiatives, which include the standardization of digital documents and procedures across borders.

It was agreed that these efforts will facilitate faster and more efficient cross-border trade, minimize paperwork, and enhance the transparency of goods movement along the corridor. The participants encouraged all States particularly those that have not yet done so, to interconnect their National Customs Systems with the eTIR international system hosted by the UNECE Secretariat and start implementing the eTIR procedure based on the Convention; participate at the sessions of the UNECE Group of Experts on the operationalization of eCMR that prepares the technical specifications of the future eCMR system(s) ensuring full digitalization of the CMR Convention; signing and ratifying the Convention for the International Carriage of Goods by Rail, as outlined in various United Nations General Assembly resolutions. This is expected to demonstrate the viability of full-scale digitalization of transit operations and customs processes by 2025.

The participants also called for close cooperation between governments, international organizations, and the private sector to ensure the effective realization of

the SPECA Roadmap. Regular updates and assessments will be conducted to track progress and address any challenges that may arise during implementation.

4. Regional Cooperation and Partnership Development

The participants emphasized that the success of the Middle Corridor and other transport corridors depends heavily on continued regional cooperation. They recognized the importance of aligning national policies with regional and international frameworks, such as the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to ensure the corridor's development is inclusive, resilient and sustainable.

To this end, the participants agreed to enhance cooperation at both the governmental and business levels. This includes fostering public-private partnerships (PPPs) that would facilitate investments in key infrastructure and technological advancements. The need for more robust cooperation between transport authorities, customs agencies, and private sector stakeholders was underlined, with participants agreeing to regularly convene meetings to address ongoing challenges and identify new opportunities for collaboration.

It was also emphasized that close cooperation with multilateral development banks (MDBs) and development partners is needed to secure funding for key infrastructure and digital projects. This would ensure the long-term viability and competitiveness of the corridor, while also promoting economic growth and sustainable development in the region.

5. Monitoring and Future Coordination

The participants agreed on the need for continuous monitoring and evaluation of the progress made in enhancing the Middle Corridor and collecting information on the best practices applied to other transport corridors.

In this regard, it was proposed to make better use of the regional corridor coordination mechanisms already administered by UNECE and ESCAP to monitor the implementation of digitalization, and efforts toward sustainable, resilient, and inclusive infrastructure. It was noted that these existing mechanisms could be more effectively leveraged to gather data on progress, identify bottlenecks, and provide recommendations for overcoming remaining challenges.

The participants expressed their support for continued regional dialogue and engagement on the development of the Middle Corridor, underscoring the need for closer collaboration between governments, regional organizations, the private sector and international partners.

6. Next Steps and Future Meetings

The participants agreed to hold follow-up meetings, including within existing formats, to further evaluate progress and discuss new developments in the Middle Corridor initiative. Continuous follow-up on the implementation of the commitments through the respective platforms of UNECE and UNESCAP will be vital to ensure that progress is maintained.

In conclusion, the participants reiterated their commitment to advancing the Sustainable and Digital Middle Corridor as a model for regional cooperation, sustainable, resilient and inclusive development, and digital innovation. They reaffirmed their shared

vision of transforming the corridor into a key trade and transit route that contributes to regional prosperity, the Paris Agreement and global sustainability goals. Finally, they strongly encouraged other transport corridor initiatives to scale up their sustainable and digital development to support the climate goals.

Adopted on 20 November 2024 in Baku, in a single original copy in the English language.

[Countries adopting the communique]