

Summary of the Panel Discussion on Transportation Issues

Hideo Kayahara, Director General of the Japan Port and Harbor Association and Counselor of ERINA, moderated the exchange of opinions that took place during the Panel Discussion on Transportation Issues, which focused on the theme “signs of life are beginning to appear in the transportation corridors”.

The discussion focused on the Tumen River Transportation Corridor, one of the nine Northeast Asia Transportation Corridors, taking into account the possibility of its connection with its neighbors across the sea: the ROK and Japan. The aim of the discussion was to develop proposals for projects that will not only tackle problems relating to the development of infrastructure, but will also generate flows of people and goods that will use that infrastructure.

The reasons for focusing on the Tumen River Transportation Corridor are as follows: i) over a number of years, initiatives in this region have consistently been undertaken by many countries and institutions, with the UNDP at the helm; ii) all of the six countries of which Northeast Asia consists are involved in initiatives in this region; and iii) specific examples of cargo that would be carried on this route can be envisaged, such as cargo movements arising from the disposal of abandoned chemical weapons (ACW).

Before the discussion began, a representative of ERINA presented a report on the activities of the Transportation Subcommittee, which operates under the auspices of the Northeast Asia Economic Conference Organizing Committee. This was followed by reports by the eight panelists about recent developments in their respective fields, with proposals for ways of getting the corridor up and running being made.

The panelists then outlined the current status of the Tumen River Transportation Corridor. It was reported that activity at the Russian ports of Posiet and Troitsa (Zarubino) has increased sharply of late. Moreover, although the customs checkpoint on the Chinese-Russian border at Hunchun was only open for eight months of the year, due to the effects of the SARS epidemic, cargo volumes remained unchanged in 2003, while the number of travelers increased significantly. These are just two examples demonstrating the intensification of both border trade and cross-border flows in the Tumen River area. Specific developments that were mentioned include the fact that the railway between Hunchun and Kamyshovaya, an issue that had remained unresolved issue for a number of years, has now officially begun to operate.

Yaroslav Semenikhin, President of Russia's Far Eastern Marine Research, Design and Technology Institute, informed those present that the Tumen River Transportation Corridor could generate a significant economic effect, as, in comparison with transport via Dalian

Port, the distance traveled by cargo transported from Northeastern China via this corridor is 1.3 times shorter in the case of cargo bound for the west coast of the USA, 3.5 times shorter in the case of that bound for the west coast of Japan and 4 times shorter in the case of that bound for the ROK.

With regard to the discontinuous section of the Tumen River Transportation Corridor between Eastern Mongolia and the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region in China, Tsengel, State Secretary at Mongolia's Ministry of Infrastructure, reported that a pre-feasibility study of the bridge spanning the border had been carried out. The foundations for a new border crossing are beginning to be put in place. In addition, he stated that the Mongolian government was planning to build a trunk road crossing the country from east to west, as part of its Millennium Road project. As a result of this, the Mongolian capital Ulaanbaatar will be connected to the Tumen River Transportation Corridor. It will be necessary to discuss revisions to this point in the future.

Byung-Min Ahn, Director of the Policy and Market Analysis Division at the Korea Transportation Institute provided an overview of the current situation with regard to the railway linking the two halves of the Korean Peninsula. He reported that the ROK is undertaking cooperation, providing the DPRK with resources and equipment, and is striving to ensure that the project aimed at linking the railways of the two countries comes to fruition. The Tumen River Transportation Corridor would acquire even greater significance if the ports in the Tumen River area were linked to the DPRK and the ROK by means of a railway.

Reflecting the fact that developments in the countries involved have intensified, Min Fang, Director of the Tumen River Area Development Administration in the People's Government of Jilin Province, and Shengjin Wang, Vice-President of Jilin University, provided an overview of the vision for creating a cross-border economic collaboration zone. Rather than being an economic collaboration zone of the type that has hitherto been planned independently by each country, this is a collaboration zone that will be jointly planned and developed on the premise of functions being allocated on the basis of each party's particular characteristics. If this vision for a new inter-regional cooperative project is translated into reality, it will become a mini common market.

Guanghan Qiao, Assistant Director of Heilongjiang Province's Department of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation, reported on developments concerning the Suifenhe Transportation Corridor, which runs parallel to the Tumen River Transportation Corridor. He informed those present that infrastructure development at Suifenhe customs checkpoint is progressing and that its functions are being consolidated with a view to opening the area further to the outside world. In addition, progress is being made with regard to a plan for establishing a collaboration zone that will span the Chinese-Russian border in this region as

well. Heilongjiang's trade with Russia is increasing sharply and it is hoped that it will accelerate further in accordance with the national strategy of upgrading infrastructure and developing the northeastern region.

Marohito Hanada, former ambassador of Japan to Mongolia, and Tsogtsaikhan, Deputy Director of the UNDP's Tumen Secretariat, both emphasized the significance of transportation corridors. Mr. Hanada clarified the role of the *Vision for the Northeast Asia Transportation Corridors*, highlighting the importance of energy, communications, transport and other infrastructure in achieving a desirable pattern of self-sustaining economic development, and noting that Northeast Asia will begin moving towards regional integration only once this infrastructure has been put in place. Moreover, he proposed the Eurasian Gate Bazaar (EGB) and ACW disposal projects as projects that will not only be a catalyst for infrastructure development, but also generate flows of people and goods.

With regard to the future activities of the Transportation Subcommittee, Tsogtsaikhan asserted that it is necessary to focus on the practical aspects, selecting one route and preparing a detailed action plan for that route. In addition, he stated that the establishment of institutions and organizations that will play a coordinating role is required in order to implement this action plan.

There are two conceivable ways of realizing the *Vision for the Northeast Asia Transportation Corridors*: i) urging the relevant countries and international institutions to reflect it in their plans; and ii) promoting use of the routes by informing users of their current status. In this sense, this panel can be considered a part of such efforts.

Based on these discussions, it is planned that the Transportation Subcommittee will formally select the Tumen River Transportation Corridor to be the focus of its future activities, establish a Working Group consisting of Subcommittee members and a broad range of other experts, and provide strong backing for the realization of the *Vision*. Furthermore, this will be undertaken as a case study that will be of use in planning and implementing the realization of the other Northeast Asia Transportation Corridors.