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“Rail Transport Connecting Continents” Market Place Seminar successfully organised in Istanbul.

(Paris, 26.10.2009). On 22-23 October UIC and FIATA jointly organised **Market Place Seminar – Rail Transport Connecting Continents** in Istanbul. Almost 100 participants from 15 countries attended the event in order to learn more about the current and future rail situation in South Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

The market place seminar was organised with substantial support from Turkish Railways (TCDD) and UTIKAD (Freight Forwarders & Logistics Service Providers Association in Turkey). The event attracted high level attention among customers, freight forwarders and railway undertakings. Heiner Rogge, FIATA General Secretary and Oliver Sellnick, UIC Freight and Passenger Director, stated, *“we are really pleased with the outcome of the seminar. Honest and creative discussions took place between the participants and we believe that this event facilitates the communication between the parties with the aim to generate more rail business”*.

The conclusions from the sessions were that Turkey, ideally located between Europe, Asia and Middle East, has the potential to become a major rail logistic hub. The market is constantly expanding and their trade balance with Central Europe has nearly been equalised, which enables the development of efficient railway products involving goods in both directions of traffic.

Discussions between participants at the seminar addressed openly all areas of improvements. It became obvious that railways' competitiveness and service level must be improved before Turkey can reach its potential. Ford Otosan and BSH, participating in the seminar as customers, stressed that the rail can even play a more important role in their future logistics supply chain. However, several barriers hinder railways' opportunity to expand.

These are the absence of liberalisation in some countries, and the infrastructure bottlenecks. Market liberalisation allow competition which in turn facilitates the development of more attractive railway products, and enables service providers to assume responsibility for the transportation chain throughout the whole itinerary. Thus, current infrastructure needs to provide competitive conditions throughout the whole transport corridor.

TCDD, which was represented by Mr. Veysi Kurt, Deputy Director General, stated that they were aware of the market potential in the region as well as the current bottlenecks. For this reason they had initiated several railway projects aiming to enhance rail traffic in the region (e.g. the railway tunnel under the Bosphorus which would enable seamless rail services between Europe and Asia). Moreover, Mr. Kurt also stressed that they are working towards a more liberalized market regime in Turkey.

Finally, participants expressed their interest in a continuation of this activity. For this reason UIC and FIATA will work towards organising a Market Place Seminar in 2010.

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