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**17th Meeting of the UIC Regional Assembly Middle-East (RAME) was successfully held at the headquarters of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) in Istanbul**

***Mr. Isa Apaydin, President and Director General of TCDD, succeeds Mr. Yildiz as Chairman of the UIC Middle-East Region***

***An updated version of the "Vision and Strategic Action Plan 2016-2020" for Middle-East Railways was circulated to Members***

***An important challenge for this UIC Regional Assembly, to maintain and develop unity and solidarity among all railways from the Middle-East in a period marked by international tensions and instability***

(Paris, 6 June 2016) The 17th Meeting of the UIC Regional Assembly for the Middle East (RAME) was successfully held on 3 June at the premises of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) in Istanbul at the kind invitation of HE Ambassador Michael Christides, Secretary General of the Organization of BSEC.

The Meeting was chaired by Mr. Isa Apaydin, recently appointed new President of the Board and Director General of Turkish State Railways (TCDD), who also succeeded Mr. Ömer Yildiz as the new Chairman of the UIC Middle-East Region.

The meeting was also attended by the UIC RAME 1st Vice Chairman, Dr. Mohsen Pour Seyed Aghaie, Vice Minister for Road and Urban Development, President of the Railways of the Islamic Republic of Iran (RAI).

UIC was represented by Director General Mr. Jean-Pierre Loubinoux assisted by Mr. Paul Véron, Director, UIC Coordinator for the Middle-East.

The UIC Regional Office for the Middle-East was represented by Mr. Abbas Nazari, Director General International Affairs of RAI, Director of the UIC Office in Tehran.

ECO, the intergovernmental Economic Cooperation Organization bringing together 10 Member States with its Secretariat based in Tehran was represented by Mrs. Zukhra Abisheva, Programme Officer of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO).

In opening the 17th RAME Meeting, HE Ambassador Michael Chistides, Secretary General of the Organization of BSEC warmly welcomed all participants at the premises of its intergovernmental organization which is composed of 12 Member States from the Black Sea Region.

Ambassador Christides underlined that this meeting could be considered as the first step of the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that was signed on 3 March between both organisations BSEC and UIC, with the common objective to meet the economic, social and environmental needs of the people of the Black Sea Region. The general purpose of the MoU signed by BSEC and UIC is to develop transport connections, increase the effectiveness of international railway transportation, attract foreign and domestic trade cargo to the railways, and implement innovative transport solutions to enhance transport efficiency in the Black Sea Region.

UIC Director General emphasised how important it was to hold this 17th RAME Meeting in this period, thanks to the kind invitation of Turkish State Railways in Istanbul.

On the one hand, the Middle-East is currently one of the regions with the most ambitious rail development plans and the most promising perspectives for rail (he mentioned the high speed rail developments in Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the improvement of freight lines and multimodal services in the entire region, the railway plans of the Gulf countries (rail projects of the GCC) and projects of long distance corridors e.g. along the new Silk Road.

But on the other hand, the region is marked more than ever by divisions, crisis, international tensions and instability.

In this context, the UIC Regional Assembly Middle-East has an essential role to play with the objective of maintaining a genuine unity and further developing strong solidarity between railway men and women from the entire region at professional level (according to the three UIC values of Unity, Solidarity, Universality). Through the implementation of its RAME Action Plan, UIC wants to support all members in their efforts to improve their effectiveness and competitiveness and successfully cope with current and future challenges of efficiency, safety and security, digitalisation, sustainability, standardisation and interoperability particularly in view of international corridors.

Dr. Mohsen Pour Seyed Aghaie, President of Iranian Railways (RA, presented the wide-ranging railway development plans currently being implemented or completed in the I.R. of Iran with a focus on high speed rail development, new line constructions, connections with ports, modernisation and electrification, connections with neighbouring countries in the framework of international freight corridors (North-South as well as East-West corridors).

Mrs Zukhra Abisheva, representing ECO, gave an overview of the international activities of the Economic Cooperation Organization (10 Member States) aiming to foster rail and intermodal services along long-distances corridors.

### **Report on UIC RAME activities and 2016-2017 Action Plan**

Mr. Abbas Nazari, Director of the UIC Middle East Office in Tehran, gave a comprehensive overview of the activities achieved or coordinated by the Region Office in the last six months.

One important result is the update of the "Vision and Strategic Action Plan for Middle-East Railways" which describes the external economic context and resulting challenges for Middle-Eastern railways in the years to come.

This updated 2016-2020 Strategic Action Plan was circulated during the meeting and is now available.

Mr. Abbas Nazari reported on the success of the 1st international *"Oil, Rail & Ports Conference"* that was jointly organised by UIC (and UIC Regional Office), ITE and RAI in conjunction with RAILEXPO on 15-16 May in Tehran. This first conference organised under the patronage of several Ministers from the I.R. of Iran, was attended by a high level international audience representing the Iranian authorities, international organisations, railways, shipping lines, ports, intermodal and logistics companies, representatives of the oil and gas industry.

Among important railway events planned in the Middle-East or neighbouring Central Asia, let us mention:

- an international UIC/ITE Conference on the *"New Rail Silk Roads"* in Almaty, Kazakhstan (4-6 October 2016)

- the International Railway History Conference organised by IRHA (International Railway History Association), UIC and TCDD in Istanbul under the theme *"Rail Routes from Baghdad Railway to New Silk Roads - 19th to 21st Centuries"* (2-5 November 2016)

- the 10th UIC World Congress on High Speed Rail, *"UIC HIGHSPEED"*, organised with TCDD and CMS Project in Ankara (11-13 July 2017)

- an *"International Business Forum"* targeted at all stakeholders (including all financial institutions) investing in the Middle-Eastern and Asian regions (autumn 2017).

Finally, in the field of culture and communication, UIC presented the projects of two books currently in preparation, about *"the New Silk Roads by Train"* and *'Railway Stations around the World'* respectively. RAME Members have shown great interest in these editions that will strongly focus

on history, culture, arts, architectural, economic and geographical aspects as well as on railway and transport aspects. For details about pre-orders please contact Mr. Paul Véron, UIC Coordinator for the Middle-East.

## CONTACTS

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