UIC Middle-East Regional Assembly (RAME) held its 20th Meeting in Paris. This meeting marked 10 years of regional cooperation

-Focus on high speed development, international rail corridors, optimisation of railway operations costs

(Paris, 11 December 2017) The 20th Meeting of the UIC Regional Assembly for the Middle-East (RAME) was held on 6 December at UIC headquarters in Paris, prior to the 91st General Assembly of the world railway organisation on 7 December.

The Chairman of this UIC Region is Mr Isa Apaydin, President of the Board and Director General of Turkish State Railways (TCDD), UIC Vice Chairman.

The delegation of the Railways of the I.R. of Iran (RAI) which hold the 1st Vice Chair of the Middle-Eastern Region was led by Mr Ahmad Khodaei, Acting President of RAI. Mr Abbas Nazari, Director of the UIC Regional Office, also attended.

This 20th Meeting marked 10 years of development of a fruitful cooperation within this UIC Region which currently brings together 15 members. The first RAME meeting took place in 2007 in Esfahan, I.R. of Iran.

In his opening address, Mr Jean-Pierre Loubinoux, Director General of UIC, paid “a tribute to Turkish Railways TCDD and their successive Presidents, at the beginning Mr Süleyman Karaman, now Mr Isa Apaydin, who ensured a continuous leadership in the region and successfully steered the activities and working programmes for the benefit of the region” He also “warmly thanked RAI from Iran for their permanent involvement and strong support to the activities of the region, in particular through the effective work of the team of the UIC Middle-East Regional Office in Tehran, led by Mr Abbas Nazari”. The gratitude of UIC “also goes to members who were particularly committed to contributing to the works in this region over the last 10 years, such as the railways of Jordan, Aqaba Railway Corporation (ARC) and Jordan Hejaz Railway (JHR), who hosted a large number of RAME meetings and workshops”.

Mr Loubinoux summarised the most important achievements in the Middle-East Region during this 10-year period:
- "the consolidation of the railway community, I would say the railway family, in the Middle-East Region despite international tensions and geopolitical instability,
- the creation of a strong cooperation spirit and of a network of railway men and women committed to the development of railways in the region,
- the regular extension of the geographical scope of this UIC region (to be continued),
- the definition, for a first time, of a “Strategic Vision (Action Plan 2016-2020) for the development of railways in the Middle-East”, shared by all members and communicated to the governments and international organisations as a commonly shared objective,
- the identification of technical issues with a high degree of priority in the Middle-East, and the organisation of seminars, workshops, training programmes on these issues with the support of UIC’s and members’ expertise”.

**Future challenges for the Middle-East Region**

Among new challenges and priorities for the Middle-East (RAME Region) Mr Loubinoux mentioned:

- the further consolidation of the RAME community and stronger individual commitment of the members, by their participation in the works and in the funding of the projects. The RAME community must also maintain strong professional links with the railways located in countries currently characterised by instable conditions or situations of war.

- the development of interoperability and railway harmonisation in close liaison with UIC for the technical and operational interoperability as well as with other international organisations such as OTIF, CIT, ECO, UN bodies, for legal and administrative aspects.

In this context, the Memorandum of Understanding signed on 1 December in Paris between UIC, the Secretariat General of GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council), UNIFE (the European Rail industry) and ERA (European Union Agency for Railways) in presence of the European Commission, marked an important milestone towards the development of an integrated, competitive and interoperable rail transportation system for the entire Middle-East.

- the development of Euro-Asian rail freight corridors, including the New Rail Silk Roads linking China to Europe, will open up great opportunities for long distance rail and logistics services. These works must be coordinated with activities of the UIC Freight Forum and Freight department on Euro-Asian corridors (recent study by Roland Berger on Euro-Asian corridors, presented in September 2017, Stakeholders Forum on the Euro-Asian and the New Silk Roads organised on 22 November with railways, shippers, operators, forwarders, ports, shipping lines...). New services along the Silk Roads are no more a dream but definitively become reality.
- the development of High Speed Rail has become another strategic issue for the Middle-East (with fast development and ambitious projects in Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran...). The 10th UIC World Congress on High Speed Rail organised with Turkish Railways (TCDD) and CMS Project, from 8 – 11 May 2018 in Ankara, will provided a unique opportunity for all Middle-Eastern members to share experience and best practice on all issues connected to high speed rail development and operations (with the motto “Sharing Knowledge for Sustainable and Competitive Operations”).

TCDD and Mr Loubinoux warmly invite all members from the Middle-East Region to attend this world congress entirely dedicated to High Speed Rail.

- other challenges for the region are the strategic issues of Digitalisation, Security, Asset Management and a strong focus will also be put on Education, Transmission of Knowledge, Training (with the support of the Training Centre of Turkish Railways TCDD in Ankara). Specific workshops or training programmes will be defined for the region.

Report from the UIC Middle-East Regional Office
Mr Abbas Nazari, Director General International Affairs of RAI, Director of the UIC Middle-East Regional Office in Tehran, reported on activities carried out since the 19th RAME Meeting in May in Tehran.

From 2 – 3 May 2017, a seminar was held in Tehran, with the objective to present all activities and projects of the Rail System Forum of UIC, with the presence of experts and responsible from UIC.

One of the important achievements is the preparation by the Regional Office of the draft document “Rail International Corridors passing through Middle-East, connecting Asia to Europe”. This draft was elaborated in close cooperation with members and will constitute an important reference document for all activities relating to the promotion of the New Rail Silk Roads.
This document represents a continuity with other reports or documents previously published by the Tehran Regional Office, in particular the “Strategic Action Plan for UIC Middle-East – 2016-2020” (update Feb. 2016) and “Regional and Supra-Regional Railway Linkages in the Middle-East” (2013).

Mr Nazari informed the meeting about other achievements of the Regional Office during this period, including the redesign of the website of the UIC Middle-East region (in English, Persian and Arabic).

Action Plan 2018-2019
Paul Véron, UIC Coordinator for the Middle-East (until this 20th meeting), presented the updated Action Plan for the Region for 2018-2019 and in particular reminded the meeting of the leading events in which all members from the Middle-East should participate:
1st UIC Global Conference on Signalling – ‘The Evolution of ERTMS’ with FS, on 26 – 28 March 2018, Milan, Italy
10th UIC World Congress on High Speed Rail with TCDD and CMS Project on 8 – 11 May 2018 in Ankara, Turkey
6th UIC Global Rail Freight Conference, ‘GRFC 2018’ with FS on 27 – 29 June 2018 in Genoa, Italy
7th International UIC Conference on Railway Stations, ‘Next Station 2019’ with RAI, in Yazd, I.R. of Iran, in 2019 (date tbc).

Coordination of the Region
During this meeting, UIC Director General Mr Loubinoux reminded the meeting that the Coordination for the Middle-East Region at UIC Headquarters which was conducted by Paul Véron since the creation of this UIC Region in 2007, would be conducted from now by Mr Jerzy Wisniewski, Director of Fundamental Values at UIC, who was previously taking care of the African region. Jerzy Wisniewski has a long experience of international cooperation and UIC’s life and is currently coordinating a large domain in UIC including Safety, Security, Sustainable Development, Research, Training and Education.

Paul Véron was warmly thanked for his action during these 10 years in a close and fruitful cooperation with the Chair Railway TCDD, with RAI and the Regional Office in Tehran and all members from the region, and for his continuous support to the development of this regional body of UIC.

The UIC Regional Assembly for Middle-East will welcome a new member from Turkey: TCDD Tasimacilik, the Railway Passenger and Freight operator, a subsidiary from TCDD. This company will first be admitted as a new UIC Member at the General Assembly on 7 December.

The 21st Meeting of the UIC Regional Assembly for the Middle-East (RAME) will be held in May 2018 in Ankara, Turkey, on the occasion of the 10th UIC World Congress on High Speed Rail organised by TCDD. That will optimise possibilities for all Middle-Eastern members to attend this important event of the international railway agenda.

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