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**Statement**

**by**

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**of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe**

**at**

**High Level Conference to mark the adoption of the new EU Strategy for Central Asia  
“Connectivity for sustainable development”**

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Excellencies, Distinguished Guests,

I thank the Government of Romania for inviting me here today. Central Asia is of great importance for the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). Together with the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, UNECE supports the UN Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA), to enhance economic integration and promote sustainable development in the subregion. Therefore, I am very happy to bring a UN perspective to your discussions.

Turkmenistan chairs SPECA this year. The annual SPECA Forum will be on *Connectivity: Sustainable Transport and Trade Facilitation in the Subregion*, on 20-21 November in Ashgabat. The goal is to help make the subregion a hub for trade facilitation, transit and sustainable transport at the centre of Eurasia, using UN and UNECE conventions, standards, and best practice recommendations. We invite all to attend and cooperate with us on this initiative.

UNECE has collaborated with the EU in Central Asia – for example, we have been the implementing partner, with OECD, of the EU Water Initiative, running National Policy Dialogues for Integrated Water Resources Management.

Landlocked countries such as the Central Asian States face double the trade costs of coastal countries, and long distances from major trading markets. UN Member States recognized this when they adopted the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for 2014-2024. UNECE supports the connectivity, competitiveness, trade and transport facilitation pillars of this Programme. UNECE's bread and butter is the development of regulatory frameworks, standards and norms that facilitate, simplify and harmonize cross-border interaction in many domains. We have found this approach beneficial also for connectivity.

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Let me give a few examples.

Inefficiencies at borders cost twice the amount spent on tariffs, duties, import taxes and fees, and block access to markets. Thanks to international customs guarantees, UNECE's TIR Convention enormously reduces the transit time and costs for trucks. Central Asian countries are Parties and China joined recently, so truck transport between those important trading partners is now much quicker. Our Harmonization Convention, meanwhile, increases efficiencies and revenues by ensuring simple and speedy treatment of cargo at borders.

Land routes through Eurasia have a significant and greatly under-utilized transit capacity. UNECE helps to develop this transport infrastructure via the EuroAsian Transport Links project. Since 2002, it has resulted in the identification of 9 road and 9 rail international routes for development. We continue to work towards operationalizing these corridors, eliminating non-physical obstacles, and making inland transport a major contributor to economic growth and trade facilitation in the region.

Also on infrastructure, our UN Framework Classification of Resources (UNFC) enhances the management of energy and mineral resources, to improve productivity and value-addition and strengthen partnerships between countries. The use of an internationally recognized classification system also increases investor confidence. We have a project in Central Asia on the application of UNFC.

Cumbersome trade procedures are still prevalent in the region. UNECE hosts the UN Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT). It has some 40 Policy recommendations, 600 standards, and guidelines, used by countries and companies worldwide to boost competitiveness, optimize business processes, and access global markets. One important example is the Single Window Recommendations which establish a single-entry point for all for all

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import-export documents. We have helped establish national Single Windows and trade facilitation committees in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. This also supports implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement and the advancement of paperless trade. Moreover, to assist these countries in using our standards and alleviating bureaucracy, we completed studies on regulatory and procedural barriers to trade and conducted a survey on sustainable and digital trade facilitation. Similar studies called Innovation Performance Reviews were done to strengthen innovation policies, and thus increase value-added and competitiveness.

Another key tool is our UNECE agricultural quality standards. These help agricultural products become more attractive to international trade. A supermarket in Switzerland can call Uzbekistan and order “Class I” dried apricots, and it will know exactly what it will receive, without traveling to Uzbekistan to inspect the shipment - trade facilitation at its finest!

Economically-, socially- and environmentally-sustainable infrastructure is vital for the subregion’s connectivity. We must improve environmental governance by enhancing the capacity of public authorities to ensure effective planning and implementation. UNECE’s five key multilateral environmental agreements, such as the Aarhus, Espoo and Water Conventions, can help – both to achieve the 2030 Agenda and promote progressive approximation to EU legislation.

I hope I have been able to illustrate how strong legal and regulatory frameworks can contribute to sustainable development in Central Asia. UNECE is ready to cooperate with governments, the EU and other relevant stakeholders in these efforts.

Thank you.

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