

Statement by the Executive Secretary
Thematic Forum on “Green Silk Road”
2nd Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation and Plenary Session of BRI
International Green Development Coalition
Beijing, 25 April 2019

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, dear friends,

The Belt and Road Initiative, launched by the People's Republic of China in partnership with many countries, represents a great opportunity for economic development, prosperity and enhanced cooperation among countries. The significant investments in infrastructure that are foreseen will tremendously improve connectivity between the East and the West.

However, such a big project can have unwanted impacts on the environment and on human health if we are not careful. In 2017, the Chinese government drafted a "Guidance on promoting green belt and road". This is an important step in the right direction.

The Guidance aims at making the belt and road resource efficient and environmentally friendly. It wants environmental protection to be incorporated in all phases of the construction of the belt and road. It promotes environmental protection as an opportunity for international cooperation. The Guidance also aims at conducting integrated environment impact assessments, and wants to safeguard water, air, soil and bio-diversity. To do so, it suggests coordinating and fully utilizing existing bilateral and multilateral international cooperation mechanisms for environmental protection.

And this is where the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) can offer its support.

It is in the mandate of UNECE to promote transboundary cooperation on environmental issues. We do this via multilateral environmental agreements.

The UNECE region covers Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Nearly 30 countries from the UNECE region will be directly involved in the BRI - including land-locked countries with economies in transition. A number of these countries have asked us for help on capacity-building, technical assistance and advisory services. The goal is to promote wider application of the UNECE multilateral environmental agreements, thereby enhancing their environmental governance - in particular in the context of BRI.

All five UNECE environmental conventions and their Protocols are relevant tools for greening the belt and road. Perhaps the most relevant in this context is the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). It was adopted in 2003 and entered into force in 2010 to complement and strengthen the Espoo Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment. The SEA Protocol now has 32 Parties, and any Member State of the United Nations may accede, including China.

The SEA Protocol applies to public plans & programmes at national level or with likely transboundary impacts. It is a tool for green growth which contributes to preventing or minimizing likely adverse impacts of economic development planning on the environment and human health. So, there is a perfect match to use the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment in the building of the belt and road. UNECE stands ready to offer support to accession and implementation of this Protocol for all countries involved in the BRI.

I will not go into more detail on the other instruments, suffice to say that they pertain to transboundary water cooperation, access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters, environmental impact assessment in a transboundary context, and industrial

accidents. Once again, we stand ready to share our experience and provide assistance, as appropriate, to member States involved in the BRI.

At UNECE, we are following with great interest China's efforts regarding sustainable energy, including in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative. UNECE has a mandate for discussion on a wide range of energy topics, and also collaborates with the private sector. Related UNECE outputs in the countries of the Belt and Road initiative would have a significant impact on greening its approach – this includes our framework guidelines on energy efficiency standards in buildings, and recommendations for carbon capture and storage, the UN Framework Classification for Resources which helps with sustainable resource management, and others. We likewise stand ready to share experience and assist as appropriate.

Thank you.