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Statement

by

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at

Regional Dialogue

**“Strengthening transport connectivity in the SPECA region and beyond
in the era of COVID-19”**

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Your Excellencies, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of UNECE, welcome, and thank you for taking an active role in this Regional Dialogue.

In the last two decades, globalization has brought trade and transport facilitation into the forefront of national development strategies. Better integration necessitates a reduction in the cost and complexity of bringing goods to international markets. Reliable and efficient transport infrastructure and services are a key ingredient for economic development. In the past decades, we have seen strong progress in the SPECA region: Countries have invested significantly in better, more efficient transport infrastructure. They have improved legislative and institutional frameworks. The results are apparent: These efforts have made their economies more competitive and improved access to the international market.

Unfortunately, decades of diligent work were challenged in the last months by the restrictions and blockages that the governments imposed as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In my statement, I will emphasize only two important factors which should be constantly on our mind while thinking about the development of sustainable transport systems: Connectivity, and cooperation.

Global production patterns shifted to Asia over the last two decades. Thus, connectivity is a topic of paramount importance for SPECA countries and all others along the Euro-Asian transport corridors. To enhance connectivity and ensure the sustainable and efficient functioning of international transport corridors, especially during emergency situations, there are number of steps countries could take:

- Harmonizing conditions for national and international service along transport corridors: This should provide efficient, safe

and environmentally friendly transport. This is a place where the UN transport-related conventions and agreements playing a key role. These enhance efficiency and help eliminate physical and non-physical barriers. There are 59 UN legal instruments administered by UNECE, which regulate road, rail and inland waterways transport. They are excellent tools to enhance regional transport connectivity and minimize supply-chains disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Road and rail transport routes and infrastructure standards should be a starting point for the development of an inland transport system, particularly in times of fierce competition with maritime transport on Euro-Asian transport corridors. Countries in the region invested a lot in transport infrastructure improvements. However, harmonized infrastructure standards, bottlenecks and missing links remain important issues. We need to resolve them in the years to come.

- Once transport infrastructure is in place, the operations of road and rail networks and the performance of major transport corridors must be considered. Environmentally friendly, integrated intermodal transport (rail, road and IWW), especially on long Euro-Asian routes, will significantly contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals. UNECE also has digital border crossings facilitation tools, such as e-CMR and e-TIR. These minimize human contact, and lower transport and trade costs and wait times at border crossings, thus giving a significant boost to the economies of transit landlocked countries. Inland transport is proven as a complementary alternative to maritime transport. An alternative which we believe should be implemented as soon as possible.

Changes in global manufacturing and supply chains have brought SPECA countries to the heart of developments:

- All SPECA members are transit countries on inland transport Euro-Asian corridors,
- They provide transport operations to Europe-Asia supply chains, and

- Some of the countries are struggling to utilize their favourable position and get a role as a global production site.

It goes without saying that regional cooperation is crucial to materialize such a favourable position on Euro-Asian corridors.

Most of the UN transport-related legal instruments have a global character and the potential to be applied on a world-wide scale. Thus, regional cooperation towards efficient implementation would increase the possibility of achieving wider legal harmonization and interoperability. It would also diminish duplication and inefficiencies.

One of the fora for cooperation on regional transport connectivity is the SPECA Working Group on Sustainable Transport, Transit and Connectivity. Its work is recognized as an important element for efficient, safe and environmentally friendly development of the SPECA regional transport system. The main motto of the Group should be "cooperate and get tangible results". And I will put a special emphasis on tangible results. Cooperation should bear results not only through meetings, but through preparation and implementation of a new SPECA Regional Connectivity Strategy, various projects, workshops, and seminars. In that sense, once fully operational, the SPECA Fund will support the development of inland transport projects, as well as horizontal measures aimed at better regional transport connectivity.

Several stakeholders are implicated when we talk about cooperation: the SPECA countries but also Georgia, UN Regional Commissions and Offices, the UN Development System, and Multi Development Banks. This Regional Dialogue is an excellent example of how cooperation between these actors can identify the most urgent fields of action to enhance connectivity in the SPECA region and beyond, especially at times of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Your Excellencies, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank all national representatives, members of United Nations system, international organizations/Multi Development Banks for recognizing the need to discuss and implement measures to enhance transport connectivity. I also thank the Government of Turkmenistan for co-hosting the Regional Dialogue and to the UN Regional Coordinator's Office in Turkmenistan (and Ms. Panova) for substantive and technical support.

And last but not the least, I use this opportunity to invite you to the 83rd session of the Inland Transport Committee which will take place in Geneva on 23-26 February 2021.

I wish you all a successful Regional Dialogue, and a very fruitful meeting.