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**Statement**

**by**

**Ms. Olga Algayerova**

**United Nations Under-Secretary-General**

**Executive Secretary**

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

**at**

**1st Caspian Economic Forum**

**Thematic session: “Perspectives of transport cooperation in the Caspian Sea”**

**Turkmenbashi, Turkmenistan, 12 August 2019**

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests,

It is my great pleasure to be here today and to contribute a UN perspective to this discussion on transport cooperation. Thank you for inviting me here.

The UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) is one of the five Regional Commissions of the United Nations. Its membership covers North America, the countries of the Europe, Turkey, Israel, and all the countries of the former Soviet Union. UNECE is a technical organization which develops standards, norms, guidelines and best practices in various fields related to sustainable development, including transport. UNECE's Inland Transport Committee (ITC) is the only body in the United Nations focused on inland transport, namely road, railway, inland waterway and intermodal transport. For 72 years, the ITC has provided an intergovernmental forum where UN Member States come together to forge tools for economic cooperation and negotiate and adopt international conventions on inland transport. These 59 conventions are considered indispensable for developing safe, efficient and sustainable inland transport systems. Examples of these instruments include the well-known TIR Convention which enormously reduces transit time for trucks crossing borders, the Vienna Convention on Road Traffic and the International Convention on the Harmonization of Frontier Controls of Goods for safe and efficient international transport. 148 UN Member States around the world have acceded to at least one of the 59 Conventions.

Accession to these conventions improves mobility, transit and connectivity. It also has several other benefits such as preserving the environment, enhancing trade facilitation, reducing poverty and decreasing the number of deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents. Therefore, these Conventions are key for the implementation of multiple SDGs.

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Among these is SDG target 3.6, which calls for halving global deaths from road traffic accidents. Many of these legal instruments address road safety directly. UNECE also hosts the secretariat to the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Road Safety and the secretariat to the recently-established UN Road Safety Trust Fund. We encourage all member States to work with us within this context. Road traffic accidents kill 1.35 million people per year. We can change this.

All five Caspian States are Contracting Parties to the UN transport Conventions administered by UNECE – some to 7 of them and some to 33! They all actively participate in UNECE activities. UNECE works systematically with these member States for capacity building and to facilitate accession and implementation of the UN Conventions.

Let me give a few examples of how strong legal frameworks, such as the UN Transport Conventions administered by UNECE, can enhance connectivity, trade and the integration of transport infrastructure across countries.

Landlocked countries such as the Central Asian States face double the trade costs of coastal countries, and long distances from major trading markets. 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. All Caspian littoral States are Parties and China has announced full application of TIR throughout its territory, so truck transport between these important trading partners will become much quicker. We are also working on full digitalization of customs transit operations via e-TIR. In fact, the Islamic Republic of Iran, along with Turkey, was the host of the first ever pilot project on the e-TIR, and 2019 sees the launch of another e-TIR pilot between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Azerbaijan.

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Our work does not stop at conventions but also includes projects in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. 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 consensus on 9 road and 9 rail international routes for development covering the Caspian Sea. 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 two regions.

UNECE is also working on regulatory issues related to road safety and transport infrastructure. In the past few years, this has expanded to cover Intelligent Transport Systems, to facilitate a safe deployment of these technologies and enhance their contribution to improving road safety, employment, urban development and environmental protection and reducing emissions. The UNECE World Forum for Harmonization of Vehicles Regulations (WP. 29) brings governments, vehicle manufacturers, ICT industries, insurances, consumers and academia together, to shape the technical regulations for conventional and automated/autonomous/connected vehicles and ensure the safe introduction of future AI and ML technologies. We also host the Global Forum for Road Traffic Safety (WP.1), which helps develop traffic rules to regulate the use of vehicles, including automated vehicles.

I hope I have been able to illustrate how strong legal and regulatory frameworks can contribute to sustainable transport and the integration of transport infrastructure within the Caspian region and between the region and other countries. UNECE is ready to cooperate with governments and other relevant stakeholders in these efforts.

Thank you.

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