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Opening Statement by Mrs. Brigita Schmögnerová
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at the
Regional Symposium on Mainstreaming Gender into Economic Policies
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I would like to warmly welcome Heads and representatives of the national gender machineries from over 35 UNECE member countries. It is a particular pleasure to welcome the representatives of line ministries dealing with economic and social matters including the ministries of finance, as they rarely participate in gender mainstreaming discussions. I am strongly convinced that close contacts and regular exchange of experiences between line ministries and national gender machineries are essential for achieving progress in mainstreaming gender into economic policies.

The Symposium is jointly organized by UN ECE, the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues (OSAGI) and the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW). Let me express my thanks to Ms. Angela King, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues, and to Ms. Carolyn Hannan, Director of DAW, for their advice, support and excellent cooperation with us on the preparation of this event.

The event is the UNECE contribution to the 10-year review of the implementation of the Beijing commitments which will take place in 2005. The Symposium aims at supporting efforts of our member States to implement the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and the recommendations of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (Beijing+5) in the area of economy in the context of the UNECE region.

Region-specific priorities were agreed at the Regional Meeting on the 5-year Review of the Beijing Platform for Action (2000). They clearly point out at the necessity to address four major challenges in the area of women and economy: (i) eliminating discrimination against women in the labour market; (ii) increasing employment opportunities; (iii) promoting gender equality in social protection, and (iv) empowering women through access and control of assets (E/ECE/RW.2/2000/7).

From the perspective of the last 10 years it must be said that progress in implementing these commitments has been very uneven within the UNECE region, both by country and by area. In a number of UNECE countries, particularly EU Member States, the situation

of women in the economy has improved. Many EU members progressed in a number of areas such as women's employability, childcare provisions, engendering budgetary policies and pension systems. This has been due to national efforts undertaken by selected Governments and civil society but also EU legislative framework, provided by the *acquis communautaire* and the European Employment Strategy and policies, including directives of the European Commission. Although this progress has to be measured against the scope of existing inequalities and gaps, it certainly represents a step forward.

The same cannot be said for the situation in other UNECE member countries, especially in a number of countries in Eastern Europe and the CIS, where there has been a setback in women's position in the economy. Women have taken a large share of the costs of systemic changes while their access to opportunities has remained lower than for men. Only a tiny fraction of privatized assets went to women in all countries in eastern Europe and the CIS. This limited their opportunities as entrepreneurs in the emerging private sector. A UNECE publication on women's entrepreneurship points out that in eastern Europe and CIS countries for which there are data, men become self-employed twice as often as women. In the Czech Republic, for example, only 9% are self-employed, compared to an 18% share for men.

In all countries budgetary constraints, erosion of the welfare system of the past and cuts in public expenditure on public health, education and family-related benefits substantially increased demands on women's caring functions. At the same time the policy debate on the shape of a market-based system of social protection has remained largely gender neutral, because of a lack of political will, resurgence of traditional views on women's role in society, and the lack of data and analysis.

In these countries, women have been more affected than men by job cuts and the decline in labour force than men, especially in the first phase of the transition process. Although these negative trends have been reversed in a number of countries, the quality of women's jobs and pay gaps remain a serious issue. According to the *Economic Survey of Europe (2003)* sectoral changes in women's employment, especially within the service sector, indicate that women have moved away from better paid jobs in market-related services, such as banking, to low paid public service jobs.

More gender perspective in economic policies to ensure gender equality is an important priority for all countries in the UNECE region from the point of view of the implementation of the Beijing commitments as well as those embodied in other United Nations global Conferences, particularly the Millennium Declaration. It should be underlined, however, that this is also the condition for ensuring economic growth in these countries, where women are well educated and make a substantive input to GDP and job creation.

Since 2000 the UNECE has increased its gender related activities. The UNECE gender activities are based on its comparative advantage and its role as a regional arm of the United Nations with a mandate to coordinate regional activities related to the Beijing and other UN global Conferences. These activities focus on economic aspects of gender equality and include promotion of regional dialogue, exchange of good practices and policy recommendations and improvement of gender data and methodologies. They cover the five following areas: gender aspects of employment, ageing, women's entrepreneurship, ICT, and statistics.

The differentiated situation of women and men on the labour market in transition economies was for the first time addressed at the intergovernmental level by the Commission at its 2002 session, based on UNECE analytical work in this area. One of the conclusions of the debate was that gender aspects of employment need more attention at policy level, particularly in order to promote those policies and measures which would increase employability of women in transition economies.

The UNECE work in the area of demographic trends have a strong gender component and is directly linked to the follow-up to the Ministerial Conference on Ageing (Berlin, September 2002). The *Berlin Ministerial Declaration* as well as the *Regional Implementation Strategy for the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing* call for mainstreaming a gender perspective in all ageing policies in the context of ensuring gender equality of access to social protection, particularly pensions, and for addressing the gender inequalities in health over the life course. UNECE will facilitate the review and implementation of the commitments made at the Conference, including those directly related to the gender dimension of ageing.

The Second Forum of Women Entrepreneurs (Geneva, March 2003) addressed financing of self-employed women through non-discriminatory access to bank loans and the development of innovative financing schemes for women entrepreneurs; and women's access to E-technology, through the promotion of ICT training and the use of E-business. The UNECE paper on women's self-employment prepared for the Symposium provides an overview of issues, good practices and policy options in the area of self-employment. The publication on women's entrepreneurship in the UNECE region is also available.

UNECE is also mainstreaming gender into ICT policies in the region, in particular through the preparatory process for WSIS. ICT is considered as a tool for advancing gender equality in relation to increasing women's employability. E-networking among NGOs addressing gender issues, E-learning and women's political participation through E-governance, are other innovative approaches to gender equality.

The UNECE Regional Gender Statistics website has been made available to the public since April 2002. It provides an overview of gender issues and policy initiatives in UNECE member countries in a selected number of key policy areas. For each of these areas, a list of statistical indicators is provided to allow the situation of women and men to be monitored. The next steps will be to organize an exchange of experiences among regional commissions and other UN entities on methodological issues in key statistical areas and on ways to introduce the gender dimension unto the MDG indicators. It is also planned to bring together the producers and users of statistics for selected policy debates, which would be organized jointly with UNDP at the regional and national levels.

UNECE gender activities have been developed in collaboration with United Nations organizations, sub-regional organizations and international organizations. I would like to thank especially UNDP, UNIFEM with which we have a MoU agreement, and the ILO for their excellent cooperation with UNECE based on the comparative advantage of each organization. In preparation for this Symposium the assistance of the UNDP Regional Office in Bratislava and national offices in CIS countries were essential in identifying some participants from line ministries and logistical support.

UNECE activities are thus very much in line with the main themes of today's Symposium as we will review and discuss the gender aspects of economic policies, based on what has been done so far to engender macroeconomics, and taking into account commitments made in this respect.

The Symposium will address four main themes. Theme I will address gender aspects of access to resources and financing. Theme II --support to women's employability (especially training and retraining schemes, access to self-employment and ICT, and measures for making work and family responsibilities compatible). Theme III -- gender mainstreaming in budgets at central and local levels (especially fiscal policies and selected types of public expenditures such as proactive employment, health and housing) and Theme IV – social security and pensions.

The participants in the Symposium will also discuss roles, responsibilities and accountability of the various actors involved in the mainstreaming process (Governments, parliamentarians, local authorities, the private sector, NGOs, academic community) as well as the institutional mechanisms which can best ensure continuing dialogue among these actors and ensuing effective decision-making. The role of regional cooperation among UN agencies and international organizations will be also discussed.

I hope that the Symposium will be a good contribution to further strengthening the process of mainstreaming gender into economic policies through exchange of experiences, but also through building partnership and a platform for dialogue between gender machineries and line ministries in the area of economics at national and regional levels.

Thank you