

63rd Session of the UNECE

30 March – 1 April 2009

Statement of the Executive Secretary – Opening Segment

Mr. Chairman,

Mr. Director General,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to welcome you to this biennial Session of the Commission. It is my first session since assuming my duties as the 11th Executive Secretary of the UNECE at the end of January so you will understand why it is so important to me and why I am so keen to listen to its substantive debates.

These debates will notably put the work of the UNECE in a broader context and provide guidance for the future, while also improving its visibility. They are also important because the relevance of the UNECE's mandate, namely to facilitate greater economic integration, cohesion and cooperation among its fifty-six member States and to promote their sustainable development and prosperity, is even higher during these troubled times of economic and financial crisis.

Our role therefore at this Session, as we speak about the region's economic development and the challenges of climate change, our two main substantive themes, is to look at the work being carried out by the UNECE and to ask ourselves, as the Chairman has just said, what more can be done, or done differently so that the ECE can be even more relevant and effective in helping its member States in its areas of recognised competence.

I would also like to emphasize that the UNECE's work is an integral part of the United Nations' wider efforts to promote peace, prosperity and progress. Thus the UNECE, as other UN regional Commissions has a responsibility to help bring the global agenda and commitments to the region and to play a catalytic role in their regional follow-up and implementation. It also has a responsibility to bring our region's views into the global debate.

And indeed, the deliberations of this Session will be fed into the global debate on the economic and financial crisis that, after the report of the Commission of Experts on Reforms of the International Monetary and Financial system, led by Mr. Stiglitz and through the forthcoming London G20 Summit will lead up to the High-level meeting

on the crisis in New York on 1-3 June. Our Commission Session will thus be our regional contribution to these efforts.

There is indeed a role for the UN in working with others to combat this crisis. Only the UN can provide the legitimacy and global ownership to measures that will be necessary. The UN is also called upon to represent the less privileged, developing parts of the global international community of nations and people. Because, after all, this is about ensuring the well-being of all people. And if we are unable to help our and other countries achieve sustainable economic development and avoid long-term social recession and regress, we risk potential widespread political, social and security crises and indeed conflicts.

That is the reason, why the UN SG's agenda for the forthcoming meetings contain i.a. several imperative requirements, namely that:

- stimulus packages should address the needs of developing countries;
- a strong warning against protectionism and a request to revive the Doha round trade negotiations;
- a call for the Green New Deal, focusing on green investment as a part of stimulus packages; and

- a need to reform the global monetary and financial system, rules and institutions.

And let's not forget, that among our ECE member states we have 18 ODA-eligible countries, some of them in reality in a situation of LDCs. We also have a number of economies of transition. And we have a number of countries, that have already asked for IMF support and others might follow, including using the newly created IMF "flexible credit line facility", on top of other funds, provided by ECB or EU.

The UNECE will thus continue to do its work as a part of the UN system. But let no one misinterpret this statement. Obviously the majority of the tasks, outlined by the SG will be dealt with by others. The UNECE will on its part continue producing practical results in many rather technical areas of its competence. It will continue bringing solutions to problems that transcend national borders: reducing barriers to trade and investment by harmonizing policy, legal and regulatory frameworks; and promoting a policy, financial and regulatory environment conducive to economic growth and knowledge-based development. It will nevertheless do it with full understanding of the new parameters and indeed paradigms of the new post-crisis

world that will emerge, where the development will more depend on domestic resources and savings rather than freely available foreign financing, on enhanced sub-regional co-operation and where the most valuable capital will be human capital, able to manage innovative knowledge-based economy with environment-friendly policies as growth multipliers as the basis for countries' competitiveness.

In short, the UNECE practical, pragmatic work and approach will contribute to enhancing ECE countries' economic potential and to putting them in a better position to operate in the new economic and social realities, which will appear as the consequence of the current crisis.

That is why, in agreeing on the agenda for this Session with you, our member States, it was always emphasized that during the panel discussions we will try to link the broader topics to our own ECE activities so as to be able to subsequently consider if adjustments are needed to enable us to become more responsive to the needs of our member States and their peoples. Using our limited resources in the most efficient and result-oriented way is of vital importance.

The quality of panellists is a clear demonstration of the importance attached to the subjects by member States, our partner organizations, businesses, research and think-tank centres and I would like to take this opportunity to welcome and thank all of you.

Let me add just a word about our partners. We value them. We realise that no one organisation can do it alone and that the UNECE, with its expertise, is well positioned and wants to join forces with others to face and address the various developmental challenges in wider Europe. Indeed, it is only by teaming up effectively with others that our work and expertise is fully exploited and has most impact.

In conclusion, I would like to state that although I have only been in the UNECE for a very short time, I have already come to appreciate what it does. Because it is practical, pragmatic and rather technical the UNECE is less well known at the political level of governments. But anything that serves to promote the economic well-being of countries also contributes to the overall stability and security of the region. We in the ECE Secretariat will therefore work to increase the UNECE's visibility and I count on your support and partnership.

And this leads me to my final point, the trust and partnership that exist between the Secretariat and member States, notably as a result of the ECE reform, spearheaded by member states and of the work of my predecessor, Mr.Belka to implement it. But I also know that trust is a fragile commodity and one that depends on mutual respect of each other's roles and on a true commitment on both sides to work together. I therefore pledge to do all I can to maintain and indeed develop it further.

Thank you for your attention.