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Statement

by

**Mr. Sven Alkalaj
United Nations Under-Secretary-General
Executive Secretary of the United Nations
Economic Commission for Europe**

at

**the 65th Commission session
9 April 2013/Geneva**

Mr. Chairman,

Mr. Director General,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to welcome you to this biennial Session of the Commission.

Let me in particular welcome the keynote speakers and panellists. They represent our member States, our partner organizations, business, research and think-tank centres. We are very interested in your ideas and we thank you for joining us.

The biennial sessions provide a unique opportunity to consider the work of the UNECE in its wider global context, reconfirm our commitment or propose changes in light of new priorities. No institution can remain relevant if it does not adjust its mandate to changing conditions. In this regard I feel the UNECE has proven quite adept as we underwent a major reform in 2005 and will later this week adopt on some additional reform proposals that have been negotiated by our member States over the last year.

I would like to acknowledge the outstanding contribution of the chairman of our Commission, Ambassador Ugljesa Zvekic of Serbia, and two Vice-Chairs, Ambassador Ciobanu from Romania and Ambassador Manor from Israel, in guiding this process and thank them

for their strong leadership and commitment to our organization. I am looking forward to working with the new Bureau members who will be elected on the last day of this session.

The UNECE remains a highly relevant institution. Our mandate, which at the most general level, is to facilitate greater economic integration, cohesion and cooperation among its fifty-six member States and to promote their sustainable development and prosperity, remains more important than ever. The increasing globalization creates even stronger needs for multilateralism and intergovernmental cooperation. In fact, if we look at some of the major economic problems that have arisen lately (the global financial crisis of 2008 followed by the sluggish

recoveries and the economic crisis in the eurozone), we see in particular one underlying cause: the failure to have in place an appropriate set of international or regional intergovernmental institutions that can oversee an economic system that knows no national boundaries.

As the process of globalization continues, as I am sure it will, the need for regional and global oversight will only increase, and it is my belief that the UNECE will continue to play a substantive role in this regard. In our debates over the next two days we need to focus on the question of what more can be done, or done differently, so that the UNECE can become even more relevant in helping its member States in its areas of recognized competence. Using our limited resources in the most efficient and

result-oriented way is of vital importance to us, and it is what our member States want us to do.

This year, the discussions in our high-level segment focus on two main themes that are of fundamental importance for our region. These are: (i) the need to make our economic systems more environmentally and socially sustainable and (ii) the need to foster innovation and create more dynamic economies. The region's success in addressing these two challenges will have an immense impact on the living standards of future generations.

Our economies are responsible for a disproportional amount of what is viewed as environmentally unsustainable development, be it carbon emissions, waste, or exhaustion of natural resources and ecosystems. Thus,

this region has a special responsibility for altering its production and consumption patterns so as to make them more sustainable. Our region also accounts for a large amount of the world's innovative activity, a very important component of its economic growth.

As I have emphasized, the two themes we have chosen this year are especially important for this region, but they are also important globally, as there are a number of ongoing processes in the United Nations system that focus on them. The UNECE, like the 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.

I therefore hope that our discussions can contribute to these global discussions concerning sustainability and innovation. More specifically, at the Rio+20 Conference the international community has committed to a number of important actions and processes to create more environmentally and socially sustainable economies. UN member States have agreed to develop a set of sustainable development goals as an important component of one global post-2015 development agenda. The discussions that we will have today under Item 2 of our agenda are also intended to provide views from our region about what should be included in this post-2015 agenda.

The role of innovation is the substantive theme for this year's session of the ECOSOC. Innovation is central to raising living standards and will play a crucial role in addressing fundamental challenges such as those incorporated in the Millennium Development Goals, namely reducing poverty, conserving natural resources, and promoting food, water and energy access and security. I am particularly pleased that tomorrow, under Item 3 of the agenda, we will be able to hear the views of H.E. Ambassador Nestor Osorio, the President of ECOSOC, on the importance of innovation. Our deliberations on this issue will constitute the region's input to the ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review, and they are also relevant for

the global debates on the post-2015 agenda and the role of technology in promoting development.

Let me emphasize the importance of our partner organizations. We know that no one organisation can do it all. The UNECE, with its expertise, is well positioned and wants to join forces with others to face and address the various developmental challenges in the wider Europe. Indeed, it is only by teaming up effectively with others that our work and expertise can be fully exploited and have the most impact.

Cooperation with the other Regional Commissions and with the other UN agencies in Europe is of particular importance for us. A central component of the latter is the

Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM) which brings together the Directors for Europe and Central Asia of the United Nations' funds, programmes and specialized agencies. Over the last year the UNECE has worked both with the other Regional Commissions and with RCM in producing reports about the possible shape of a post-2015 development agenda. The joint Regional Commissions' report is focussing on the importance of the regional dimension of development, while the RCM inter-agency report which is still under development will attempt to provide a pan-European perspective on the new development agenda.

Because its work is practical, pragmatic but rather technical, the UNECE may be less well known at the

political level of governments, but is highly appreciated by experts in its areas of expertise. Our work serves to promote the economic well-being of countries and also contributes to the overall stability and security of the region. We in the ECE Secretariat will continue to work for the benefit of our member States and I count on your support and partnership.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that any successful partnership depends upon the mutual respect of each other's roles and on the commitment by both sides to work together. I therefore pledge to do my utmost to maintain and indeed further develop this trust and partnership.

Thank you for your attention.

