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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 Economic Forum of the  
Commonwealth of Independent States**

**Moscow, 14 March, 2014**

Distinguished Executive Secretary of the Commonwealth of Independent States  
and Chairman of the Executive Committee,

Distinguished participants of the Economic Forum,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for the UNECE and me personally to participate in this important meeting.

As you know the UNECE region covers 56 member States and stretches from Alaska to Chukotka covering the countries of the CIS, Europe, North America and Israel. Throughout its history the UNECE has provided a forum for considering and finding solutions aimed at the strengthening of Trans-European and Trans-Atlantic economic cooperation and integration. For many years during the “Cold War” it was probably the most important “bridge” for developing cooperation between East and West.

The UNECE has always been a neutral forum, based on UN principles, both for the consideration of general political aspects of economic cooperation among our member States, and for finding mutually beneficial and practical solutions in such areas of cooperation as transport, trade, energy, environment, forests, housing and statistics. Our work focuses on harmonization of the normative and legislative bases for advancing economic cooperation and solving cross-border and sub-regional problems.

Our mission is to improve the daily lives of people, simplify business operations and promote partnerships - both among countries and between countries and various stakeholders, including civil society and the private sector.

In spite of the fact that over the past years a number of new international organizations have emerged at the Pan-European and Eurasian level, our work continues to be recognized as highly relevant and important, as was just recently reconfirmed by our member States in the outcome of the Review of the 2005 reform of UNECE.

Our strengths lie in the availability of highly qualified experts combined with the knowledge and experience of a large number of national specialists who are

actively integrated in our expert networks; together they make an invaluable contribution to our joint work. Many of these specialists come from CIS countries.

In 2008 the Council of Heads of State of CIS invited the UNECE to contribute to the elaboration and implementation of the Economic Development Strategy of the CIS up to 2020. This Strategy outlines ambitious goals towards strengthening collaboration within the CIS with a view to speeding up the economic development of its member countries, improving the competitiveness and dynamism of their economies, and raising the prosperity of their peoples. Many of the provisions of the Strategy are directly related to the mandate and areas of work of UNECE.

These include the development of Euro-Asian transport corridors and of normative-legislative support for cooperation in the field of transport; harmonization and facilitation of procedures in international trade and customs transit; energy efficiency; protection of the environment, standardization and technical regulation (where we already cooperate with CIS Bureau of Standards), standards of quality of agricultural products; competitiveness and innovation policies, effective public-private partnerships for infrastructure development; as well as statistics (where, again, we have close cooperation with CIS Statistical Committee).

The CIS Strategy has become an important broad framework for strengthening our cooperation with the CIS countries in the past years.

Since the adoption of the CIS Strategy some important developments have taken place in UNECE region. Just to mention the two most significant ones:

- The creation of the Customs Union and the Eurasian Economic Commission, with whom UNECE recently signed an MoU, and ongoing steps towards the creation of the common economic space involving several CIS countries
- The European Union has been undergoing almost continuous reform with the Lisbon Treaty rendering decision-making more effective and democratic by increasing the role of the European Parliament and of qualified majority voting in the Council of Ministers. The eurozone crisis has resulted in a further round of institutional reform.

Although enhancing regional integration is important, it should not come at the expense of broader global integration and the UNECE has been active in that area as well. The recently concluded Trade Facilitation Agreement of the WTO which was part of the “Bali Package” highlighted the importance of UNECE activities in this area. Trade facilitation aims to create a coordinated, transparent and predictable environment for trade activities by using internationally recognized standards and practices regarding formalities and procedures, infrastructure, standardization of equipment, and coordination of a variety of applicable laws. The UNECE will provide its full support to help countries implement the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement and we will place all our trade facilitation instruments and tools at the disposal of all UN Member States.

More generally, for us the main task here is to support economic cooperation and integration in the UNECE region and beyond, taking into account corresponding international experience and best practice along with fundamental principles and rules of international cooperation. As a UN body, we operate beyond economic blocks and groupings, while fully respecting their legitimate needs and priorities.

Our work aims at avoiding the appearance of any new dividing lines in our vast region that could hamper economic cooperation in this age of globalization and at creating an enabling environment that will promote the economic development of all countries and peoples. By doing so we, in cooperation with the other partners in the UN family, strive to promote the implementation of the United Nations development agenda in the UNECE region, including the outcomes of the 2012 World Summit on Sustainable Development captured in its final document “The Future We Want”.

Yesterday, here in Moscow Mr. Sergei Lebedev, Chairman of the CIS Executive Committee and the Executive Secretary of the CIS and myself, signed a Statement on Cooperation of the Executive Committee of CIS and the Secretariat of the UNECE.

This Statement is yet another confirmation of the commitment of our two organizations to develop business relations and constructive cooperation in the areas of common interest. I am looking forward to the successful implementation of its provisions.

Finally, I would like to express once again my sincere gratitude for your invitation to take part in the CIS Economic Forum and reiterate our willingness and readiness to develop our cooperation with the CIS.

Thank you for your attention.