Mr. Chairperson,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my honour and pleasure to address a welcoming speech to all of you who share interests in facilitating trade in a secure environment. I would like to begin expressing my sincere appreciation to Ms. Schmögnerová and her UNECE team for taking this initiative and kindly hosting the meeting. My special thanks also go to Ambassador Georgiev for accepting to chair this meeting, which will be of precious value to us with his expertise in international law and trade arena.

This conference is intended to give a snapshot of what measures are already available or being developed in this area which is still at an evolutionary stage. At the same time, it will explore a way how best to move forward this timely and important issue in a cooperative manner among various actors. We will be privileged to hear from a range of experts working in this field, including representatives of Customs, international organizations and the private sector.

This platform of discussion is a logical follow-up to the UNECE’s International Forum on Trade Facilitation in May this year, in leading up to the WTO Ministerial Conference in Cancun. Regardless of what has happened in Cancun, the WCO is determined to continue its efforts in trade facilitation, in close cooperation with the WTO and UN agencies. Indeed, as a conclusion of the UNECE’s Forum in May, Ambassador Wasescha of Switzerland, in the capacity as chairperson, urged a full implementation of trade facilitation measures and that all efforts should be made to ratify the WCO revised Kyoto Convention on simplification and harmonization of customs procedures.

One of the highlights in the May Forum was trade facilitation policy and new security initiatives. Ambassador Wasescha concluded that the WCO work in this area should be the basis for further efforts to realize maximum security and facilitation, with due account of suggestions for security applications, a holistic approach and recognition of UNECE standards and recommendations. He also noted an extraordinary networking among trade facilitation specialists, interlinking policy and expert levels from governments, intergovernmental and private sectors. In line with this conclusion, the WCO Task Force has made a good progress in developing a package of measures, with a full participation of relevant stakeholders and incorporating UNECE standards.

I also agree with Ambassador Wasescha’s suggestion that this avenue towards a better coherence among numerous actors should be further pursued. And I do hope that this will be the guiding spirit in this two-day discussion as well,
under the stewardship of Ambassador Georgiev. Actually, most speakers for the coming two days have excellent records of making valid contribution to the WCO Task Force. And I am happy to share their expertise with trade and transport experts in Geneva. I very much expect to hear some new ideas from Geneva and receive a constructive feed-back from all of you.

Needless to say, most challenging part is the implementation of security and facilitation measures. Capacity building for economies in transition, developing and least developed countries is of particular importance in this respect. This is precisely the area of concern to the WCO with its 162 Member administrations. It is my wish that this forum will also take into account of this aspect to avoid another possible marginalization for those countries.

In conclusion, I wish you all the best for maximizing the benefit of this meeting.

Thank you very much for your attention.