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**FIRST INTERREGIONAL WORKSHOP
On Policy, Infrastructure and Management of Ports in ECE and ECA region**

(Barcelona, 4-5 October 2007)

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour and a pleasure for me, on behalf of UNECE, to welcome you to the inter-regional seminar of port experts in ECE and ECA region, jointly organized by the 2 UN regional Commissions under the United Nations Development Account capacity - building Project on Developing Interregional Transport Links.

I should like to express my gratitude to the Government of Spain and to the Barcelona Port Authority for hosting this workshop here in the beautiful city of Barcelona in such a good conditions and organizing the visit to Barcelona Port and to Barcelona Freight Village.

I should also like to thank you all for your participation, and in particular our distinguished experts from both Europe and Africa, who kindly accepted our invitation and are here with us to share their experience on ports Policy, Infrastructure and Management.

Development of transport links is a key pre-requisite for socio-economic development of countries and for their integration in the regional and global economy. For historical and economic reasons, however, transport links and infrastructure capacity in many countries are insufficiently developed. In addition, non-physical bottlenecks, including various national legislation, different and arbitrary taxes and

charges, and cumbersome and time-consuming border procedures are common in many parts of the world.

A weak or missing link in one country can make a whole route economically unviable for international transport. The same is true for seaports, railway stations, container terminals, and other modal interchange points. This situation could make exports uncompetitive in international markets, increases the prices of imported goods and prevents country's effective participation in international trade.

The ECE has been a pioneering organization in promoting cooperation of all European countries in the area of transport. Since its creation in 1947, ECE has facilitated transport in Europe and at the same time improved its safety and reduced its impacts on the environment.

The outcome of the quite, unspectacular, but efficient and useful work is reflected in a set of international Agreements and Conventions, which are legally binding for the countries that become Parties to them. Constantly updated and broadly in line with the relevant EU legislation these ECE legal instruments provide common legal and technical platform for the harmonization of transport legislation, development of transport infrastructures and border-crossing facilitation.

Already in 1995, the ECE started to address the interregional transport linkages between Europe and Asia. In 2000 and 2002 the ECE road and rail infrastructure agreements were extended to incorporate the Caucasus and Central Asian links. In 2000, ECE and ESCAP put forward their "Common Strategic Vision for Euro-Asian transport links" at the second International Euro-Asian Conference on Transport, held in St Petersburg in 2000.

The greatest progress however has been achieved since 2003, when the five UN regional commissions joined their efforts under a UN Development Account Project to promote interregional transport linkages in a global scale. In 6 Expert Group meetings organized under the project, Government representatives from participating countries identified the main road, rail, and road/rail/sea routes connecting Europe-Asia-Middle East and Africa to be considered for priority

development as well as the main transshipment points and ports of interregional importance.

Maritime transport issues as well as those related to seaports have not been on the agenda of ECE Inland Transport Committee until very recently. Globalization of the world economy, manifested through increased trade flows and growing need for reliable, safe and secure transport have made the ECE member Governments aware of the fact that seaports have become the most important modal interchange points, and that their links with hinterland transport infrastructures could become major obstacle to uninterrupted trade flows and seamless transport connections so many of our Governments are so eager to achieve.

In 2006, under the ECE Working Party on Transport Trends, Governments experts, international organizations and other international actors dealing with seaports, met in Geneva, in order to consider ways and means that ECE could contribute. The meeting came up with a number of recommendations to the Governments which were taken up at the annual session of the Working Party just a few weeks ago.

Consequently, these considerations led the ECE Governments to decide to recommend to the ECE Inland Transport Committee to initiate the work on various aspects of hinterland connections of seaports, an area that falls well within the competencies of ECE in the field of transport. You will here more details about our plans and course of actions during the Workshop today.

Following the organization of national workshops in many countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East, this specialised gathering here in Barcelona on seaports, offers an excellent opportunity for a review of some of the most important challenges related to policy, infrastructure and management of seaports in ECE and ECA region.

Through presentations, discussions and sharing of experiences amongst experts on the most important of these challenges, we will try to assess the ways in which ECE and ECA could better assist their member

Governments and further strengthen national capacities that would enable national authorities to continue introducing and implementing, cost-effective and efficient seaports operations and simplified procedures.

The outcome of this workshop, together with the results and experiences gained from the implementation of this important global UNDA project in all UN regions, would be further discussed in three weeks from now, in Abu Dhabi.

In that meeting, which will be the last under the project, designated National Focal Points from involved countries from Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East will summarize the best practices in each region, identify lessons learnt from the project and consider ways and means to continue and further strengthening interregional cooperation in the field of transport.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I can assure you of the readiness and commitment of the ECE secretariat to work, in close cooperation with its colleagues from ECA and other UN regional commissions, to help countries achieve efficient, safe and secure international, regional and interregional transport links.

I wish every success to our Workshop and thank you for your attention.