

Mr. Chair, colleagues,

“Technological progress will never be as slow as today”

As analysed in our 50 anniversary Review of Maritime Transport, technology has become a crucial element of international transport. Digitalization increasingly transforms and revolutionizes transport operations. Many technological advances, including autonomous ships and vehicles, hold promise for the increased efficiency of operations and reduced costs and emissions.

Mr. Chair,

in this context, allow me to highlight three concrete aspects concerning digitalization in international freight transport based on our recent and ongoing work.

- First, to fully benefit from digitalization, we need to facilitate the **interoperability** of transport operations, including the exchange of data.

There are many potential benefits from digitalization. For example, by optimizing the arrival of vessels or trucks – i.e. arriving on time, rather than in time – we can make significant fuel savings, reducing costs and emissions. Such optimization requires the exchange of data along the transport chain. And such exchange of data poses challenges as regards cybersecurity, and the protection of personal and commercially sensitive data.

- Second, we need to avoid **anti-competitive** behaviour.

There is a challenge with respect to technological innovation and potential anticompetitive behaviour. Platforms could concentrate and use data in a manner that influences markets. A complex and fascinating topic that merits careful analysis.

- Third, technological advances in freight transport can contribute to the realisation of **many SDGs and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**.

Technology allows for optimising the use of existing infrastructure and equipment. Autonomous ships and vehicles have the potential to provide enhanced safety and cost savings by gradually removing the human element from certain operations. At the same time, automation may give rise to cybersecurity risks and poses complex legal challenges.

As digitalization in transport advances, the competitiveness of developing countries depends ever more crucially on their human, technological and institutional capacities to participate in international trade and in transport markets.

Accordingly, at UNCTAD, we undertake research and provide extensive capacity building programmes in ports, trade facilitation, transit, Customs automation, corridors, sustainable and resilient freight transport, and e-commerce.

We help to ensure that digitalization in transport leads to prosperity for all.

Thank you very much.

Geneva, 19 February 2019. Jan Hoffmann, Chief, Trade Logistics Branch, DTL, UNCTAD

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