



Statement by Mr. Paolo Garonna

**Deputy Executive Secretary
United Nations Economic Commission for Europe**

**Delivered at the Opening of the Seminar on the UNECE Role in the Development of
Pan-European Transport, organized for the Greek Transport Delegation Visiting the
UNECE Transport Division.**

Geneva, 16 October 2008

Sal XXV

Your Excellency Ambassador Verros,

Dear President Mr. Spanoudakis

Dear Presidents and Representatives of the Greek Chambers of Commerce and Industry as well as of Greek Transport Associations and Businesses

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great honour and pleasure for me to welcome you all to the Palais des Nations and to the Seminar on the UNECE Role in the Development of Pan-European Transport, organized for your Delegation visiting the Transport Division.

I am particularly pleased that such high level business representatives are with us today in an effort to learn more about our work and contribution in the field of transport and possibly make more use of it in their daily work.

As you may be aware, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) was set up in 1947. Its major aim is to promote pan-European economic integration. During the cold war UNECE has provided the East-West forum for inter-country cooperation in a number of economic issues.

Nowadays this role has been further extended. UNECE has become Stakeholders' forum for cooperation between EU and non-EU countries and between governments and businesses: a new type of Public Private Partnership (e.g. NGOs participate in our Working Parties. Your visit here is another good example of such a partnership).

To this end, it provides analysis, policy advice and assistance to governments, it gives focus to the United Nations global mandates in

the economic field, in cooperation with other global players and key stakeholders, notably the business community.

The UNECE also sets out norms, standards and conventions to facilitate international cooperation within and outside the region. The area of expertise of the UNECE covers such sectors as: economic cooperation and integration, energy, environment, housing and land management, population, statistics, timber, trade, and transport.

UNECE work has to be seen also as an important contribution in support of the economic development efforts and should be seen as part of the development agenda in many aspects. Often UNECE is looked upon as a body dealing with very technical issues – and indeed this is true: the technical work of UNECE is part of global public goods (e.g. transport)

However it should also be born in mind that UNECE plays a role to address key global issues, like global warming and environment protection at large, trade and transport facilitation, the support through capacity building activities to land-locked developing countries, MDG statistics etc.

It is widely accepted that a well functioning transport system is **essential for the growth and competitiveness of economies**. Indeed, national economies depend on transport more than ever before, just as they depend increasingly on international trade.

But, as you all know, achieving efficient international transport is not an easy task. It requires not only political commitment, but also very precise technical norms and regulations that ensure a high level of efficiency, safety and environmental protection and which are harmonized from one country to another.

In this respect, the UNECE and its Inland Transport Committee **fulfils a real need that is not performed by any other international organization**. Indeed, the Committee provides the pan-European framework within which a large number of transport norms and

regulations are agreed internationally with the participation of its members. Many of these norms and regulations have been developed into Agreements and Conventions that are legally binding for countries that adhere to them, thus reflecting their importance.

To name just a few, the **transport infrastructure Agreements** have given Europe coherent pan-European road, rail, inland water and combined transport networks, the “**E**” networks. The **Vienna Conventions and European Agreements supplementing them** provide an international code of road traffic rules, signs and signals, which have reduced substantially the number of accidents and victims on European roads. The **TIR Convention** has established a transit guarantee scheme and provides for simplified, efficient and secure border crossing procedures. And the UNECE’s **global work on the construction of vehicles and the transport of dangerous goods** has assisted our member countries to produce safe and clean road vehicles and reduce the risk of accidents with dangerous goods and hazardous materials.

Transport plays a particularly important role in the UNECE work: we are the world centre for transport regulations in land transport

Greece has been an important partner of the UNECE work. Is one of the UNECE member countries that have acceded to all most important UNECE Conventions and Agreements in the field of transport. Experts from competent authorities of your country are participating in our work. Greece participates actively in the Euro-Asian Transport Linkages Project, as well as in regional cooperation such as the Black Sea Economic Cooperation and various South-Eastern European activities. Our cooperation with your Government and the Greek Mission in Geneva and personally with Ambassador Verros and his staff has been very close and successful.

Greece has been the host of a number of important events in the course of the last years.

It is therefore, my pleasure to use this opportunity to express once more, my deep appreciation to the Government of Greece and to H.E. Ambassador Verros for the overall support.

I should also like to thank the Greek government, H.E. Verros, the Greek Chambers of Commerce for their support to the *UNECE Conference: on the Role of Seaports as a Link between Inland and Maritime Transport*”, in Piraeus, this September.

I look forward to continuing and further strengthening our cooperation with the Greek Government and with the Hellenic Chambers Transport Association in the field of Transport, as well as in other fields of the UNECE work, and wish you a successful and fruitful Seminar.

Thank you.

-----00000-----