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(Brussels, 24 April 2003)
Statement by Mrs. Brigita Schmögnerová,
Executive Secretary

Madam Chairman, Ministers, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me, as Executive Secretary of the UNECE, to take part in this historic session of the ECMT Council of Ministers. As many other speakers have done, I wish to warmly congratulate the ECMT on its 50th Anniversary. I also wish to express my gratitude to you, Madam Chairman, and through you to the Belgian Government, for hosting this session here in Brussels, the town where the ECMT was born a half a century ago.

A 50th Anniversary is an excellent opportunity, not only to pay tribute to past achievements, but also to look into the future and prepare for the challenges ahead. In 1997, at its own 50th Anniversary, the UNECE also reviewed its strategic directions, restructured its activities and improved its working methods in order to be more efficient, more flexible and more focused.

I am pleased to see that the ECMT has similarly taken such a healthy initiative. I wish to warmly congratulate the United Kingdom Government, in particular Mr. John Stevens, the Chairman of the Review Group, on the high quality work that he has carried out and on the excellent document he has prepared as a basis for the review.

Indeed, the report addresses the main issues and the key challenges. I welcome, particularly, the emphasis placed on cooperation with other organizations, including the UNECE and its Inland Transport Committee.

We realize that the ECMT and the UNECE have similar memberships. We both provide competent and efficient forums where all member countries, whatever their size or their level of development, can take part in discussions and decision-making on an equal footing. We also share the same goals: we both strive to establish the framework condition for ensuring efficient mobility of persons and goods, avoiding congestion, preventing and reducing pollution, diminishing the risk of road accidents, developing infrastructure and facilitating border crossings. While dealing with these issues, the ECMT and UNECE complement each other. Our secretariats participate in each other's meetings and maintain excellent working relations.

While this situation is already more than satisfactory, we must always try to do more. I therefore fully share your aspiration to further strengthen our cooperation and I am ready to contribute thereto. As you know, the UNECE has provided to the Council every year since 1997 updated information on UNECE activities in the area of transport. More recently, we have proposed the organization as from 2004 or 2005 of joint ECMT-UNECE meetings on specific issues, such as Rail or Combined Transport. In this way, we will not only reduce the number of meetings, but will also more effectively promote rail and combined transport, thereby contributing to sustainable transport and sustainable development.

Furthermore, in order to address the issues and challenges of post-enlargement Europe, rather than each organization addressing them separately, we have also proposed that the Seminar on Main Issues in the Development and Planning of Pan-European Transport Infrastructure, originally scheduled by ECMT to be held in November this year, be jointly organized by ECMT and UNECE. I hope that the European Commission will not only play a leading role in this Seminar, but will also consider it as a part of and a major step in its "Wider Europe" process. I also believe that, in addition to pan-European issues, this Seminar should also address Euro-Asian transport links.

Finally, I would like to recall that the UNECE is cooperating with WHO in the framework of the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme. I would like to invite ECMT to play a major role in this inter-sectoral initiative, aimed also at achieving sustainable transport and sustainable development.

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The development of an integrated efficient, safe and sustainable transport system in non-acceding countries in Eastern and South-eastern Europe as well as in the Caucasus and Central Asia, as a key factor for sustainable development of these countries and for their integration in the European and global economy, will be a major challenge for our organizations in the coming years. Taking up this challenge successfully requires the close cooperation of all concerned, Governments, the EU and international organizations like ECMT and UNECE. I would like to assure you that the UNECE is ready and willing to play its part.

Madam Chairman, Ministers, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, let me conclude by wishing the ECMT another 50 years of useful work to the benefit of its member countries.