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Opening Statement of Mrs. Brigita Schmögnerová,
Executive Secretary

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to welcome you all to the 8th session of the SPECA Project Working Group on Transport and Border Crossing Facilitation.

I should like to express my sincere gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan for hosting this meeting in Baku and to his Excellency Mr. Vilayat Guliyev, Minister for Foreign Affairs, for his kind invitation. For reasons beyond my control I am not able to be present here today.

I should also like to congratulate Azerbaijan for becoming a new member of SPECA. I believe this expansion will strengthen the SPECA Programme and enhance its regional dimension and effectiveness.

I would also like to express my deep gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan for its work and commitment with the SPECA Programme and in particular to Mr. Djakupov, First Vice-Minister of Transport, for the excellent work he is doing in his capacity as Chairman of the SPECA Working Group on Transport and Border Crossing Facilitation.

The UNECE has, for more than half a century, contributed to the development and improvement of the transport sector. Its contribution includes Agreements and Conventions on the development of networks, norms and standards on road traffic safety, vehicle regulations, simplification of customs procedures and norms on the transport of dangerous goods, as well as special Projects and programmes such as TEM/TER, SPECA and others. Much of this work contributes to the implementation of the Millennium Declaration and Millennium Development Goals.

By providing an indispensable basis for the development of economic activities, for the production and distribution of goods, as well as for trade, transport contributes to development and poverty eradication. UNECE legal instruments on transport, by combating transnational crime, including trafficking and smuggling, contribute to peace and security. Through the improvement of safety and environmental performance of transport, it contributes to protecting our environment. UNECE, recognizing the special development needs and problems of landlocked countries and other countries with economies in transition, called for in the Millennium Declaration, attaches the greatest interest to this group of countries and try to help, inter alia, with actions and initiatives for the improvement of their transport systems and encouragement of intercountry cooperation.

The SPECA Project represents an important element for the promotion of these goals. UNECE, in close cooperation with ESCAP and other international organizations and institutions, is constantly supporting the activities of the project.

The Pan-European Transport Corridors and the Euro-Asian transport links are considered to be of strategic importance for the economic growth and prosperity of UNECE member countries and for their integration into the European and global economy. SPECA countries are an integral part of the Euro-Asian transport links, representing natural West-East and North-South crossroads. The Central Asian and the Caucasus countries will acquire an ever-increasing importance in the UNECE work programme in the coming years.

As you know, on the proposal of the five United Nations regional commissions, the General Assembly approved the United Nations Development Account Project on Capacity Building for the Development of Interregional Transport Linkages. In implementing this project, UNECE and ESCAP will focus mainly on Euro-Asian Transport Links, including through SPECA countries. The Executive Secretary of ESCAP and myself have signed a joint letter to a number of UNECE and ESCAP member countries, inviting them to participate in the Project and to nominate a Focal Point. I look forward to the active participation of all the countries represented in this meeting which are among the beneficiaries of this project.

At its meeting in February 2003, the UNECE Inland Transport Committee called for the further elaboration of the UNECE/ESCAP Strategic Vision through the establishment of a task force under UNECE/ESCAP leadership.

The Inland Transport Committee also approved a proposal to raise funds with a view to facilitating participation of Central Asian and Caucasus countries in meetings of the Committee and selected

Subsidiary Bodies.

The work of the SPECA Project Working Group on Border Crossing Facilitation is recognized as very important for the achievement of an efficient and well-balanced, safe and sustainable transport system in the Central Asia region.

I would like to assure you that UNECE, in close cooperation with our colleagues of ESCAP, will spare no efforts to provide you with the assistance needed to reach your objectives.

I wish you every success in your work.

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