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Statement

by

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at

Panel Discussion on “Efficient Growth and Sustainable Development of BRI”

The 4th Belt and Road Davos Forum

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Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

The Belt and Road Initiative, launched by the People's Republic of China in partnership with many countries, represents a great opportunity for economic development, prosperity and enhanced cooperation among countries. The significant investments in infrastructure that are foreseen will tremendously improve connectivity between the East and the West.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) was founded in 1947 to promote economic integration in the pan-European region. We have 56 member States stretching from Canada and the United States to all of Europe as well as Turkey, Israel and the countries of the former Soviet Union. Most of our member States have strong ties with China, therefore the BRI is a topic that we follow with great interest. UNECE's core business is the development of regulatory frameworks, standards and norms in various fields pertaining to sustainable development. Many of these technical products can be applied globally. In this context we have strong cooperation with China as well, including with Tsinghua University and the International Cooperation Center under the National Development and Reform Commission who have thankfully organized this event today, along with our UN partner UNITAR. We have worked together for a long time with both Tsinghua University and the ICC on the topic of public-private partnerships, among others. We value our joint work on "People-first PPPs," which aim to broaden the traditional PPP model to support high-quality infrastructure projects that have people's needs and sustainable development at the core. It's only by keeping sustainability concerns forefront that we can create the maximum benefits for the planet and its people.

The UN's Sustainable Development Goals provide the best blueprint for achieving this.

I had the pleasure of attending the Second Belt and Road Forum in Beijing in April 2018 and was delighted to hear President Xi's emphasis on sustainable development and alignment with the UN in his speech. When we talk about the future of the BRI, in my opinion, a green and sustainable BRI is absolutely key.

Such a big project can have unwanted impacts on the environment and on human health if we are not careful. In 2017, the Chinese government drafted a "Guidance on promoting green belt and road". This is an important step in the right direction.

The Guidance aims at making the Belt and Road resource efficient and environmentally friendly. It strives to incorporate environmental protection in all phases of the construction of the belt and road initiative. It promotes environmental protection as an opportunity for international cooperation. The Guidance also aims at conducting integrated environment impact assessments, and seeks to safeguard water, air, soil and bio-diversity. To do so, it recommends to coordinate and fully utilize existing bilateral and multilateral international cooperation mechanisms for environmental protection.

And this is where the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) can offer its support.

It is in the mandate of UNECE to promote transboundary cooperation on environmental issues. We do this via multilateral environmental agreements.

Nearly 30 countries from the UNECE region will be directly involved in the BRI - including land-locked countries with economies in transition. A number of these countries have asked us for help on capacity-building, technical assistance and advisory services. The goal is to promote wider application of the UNECE multilateral environmental agreements, thereby enhancing their environmental governance - in particular in the context of BRI.

All five UNECE environmental conventions and their Protocols are strong tools for greening the belt and road. Perhaps the most relevant in this context is the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). It currently has 32 Parties, and any UN Member State may accede, including China.

The SEA Protocol applies to public plans & programmes at national level or with likely transboundary impacts. It is a tool for green growth which contributes to preventing or minimizing likely adverse impacts of economic development planning on the environment and human health. So, there is a perfect match to use the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment in the building of the Belt and Road. UNECE stands ready to offer support to accession and implementation of this Protocol for all countries involved in the BRI.

I will not go into more detail on the other instruments, suffice it to say that they pertain to transboundary water cooperation, access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters, environmental impact assessment in a transboundary context, and industrial

accidents. Once again, we stand ready to share our experience and provide assistance, as appropriate, to member States involved in the BRI.

To wrap up, I would like to recall that in September 2019, the UN SecretaryGeneral called on all sectors of society to mobilize for a decade of action to deliver the SDGs. Unless we step up our actions and commitments, we will fall very short of reaching the ambitious targets set in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Therefore I call on all stakeholders focus their efforts to that end, starting with the BRI.

Thank you.
