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Statement

by

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United Nations Under-Secretary-General

Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

at

the Seventh session of the SPECA Project Working Group on Trade

Bangkok, 26 November 2012

Excellences,

Distinguished participants,

Let me begin by expressing my sincere thanks to our hosts from UNESCAP for their excellent organization of this meeting. I would also like to express my gratitude to all the participants from SPECA countries for their ongoing collaboration within the SPECA Project Working Group on Trade.

UNECE brings together 56 countries from North America, Europe, and Central Asia. Its mission is to facilitate economic development and cooperation among its member States. We work closely with Governments, the business and academic communities, as well as with all other relevant stakeholders in member States, to help them address the challenges posed by globalization, including the successful development of trade and investment links. Therefore, we view today's session of the SPECA Project Working Group on Trade as an important milestone in implementing UNECE's mandate.

The importance that we place on your work is also reflected in the support that UNECE and UNESCAP have been providing to the SPECA Project Working Group over the last seven years.

Since the establishment of the Project Working Group in 2005, interest from your countries has risen significantly, in particular in areas such as trade facilitation, including the Single Window; the SPECA Aid-for-Trade Initiative; regulatory cooperation; trade and investment and various other trade policy activities. As a result, the work on trade facilitation in Central Asia has moved to a new stage. Thanks to the interest expressed by your Governments, various regional and international agencies are developing now projects based on the concepts promoted by the Project Working Group. For example, projects to establish national trade and transport cooperation mechanisms and Single Window projects have been launched in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The UNECE has been also working with your countries on harmonizing regional and interregional data exchange flows with international standards. We are very pleased that this work is bearing fruit in Central Asia.

Another example is a project that we have developed jointly with UNCTAD for simplified customs transit data exchange between Afghanistan and its northern neighbours. This project has received much attention in Tajikistan and from development partners. It has potential both to increase the efficiency of transit trade and to significantly improve the security of international trade flows in the region.

We are also very pleased that the SPECA Aid-for-Trade Initiative has taken root, although we believe that there is still much to be done. Thanks to this Initiative, it is now

widely understood that the needs of the countries in Central Asia must be considered seriously under the World Trade Organization Aid-for-Trade programme, even though most of the region's countries are still not members of WTO. The results of the SPECA Aid-for-Trade Initiative are regularly reported at the WTO Aid-for-Trade review sessions. From the outset, this Initiative has been driven by SPECA countries, notably Azerbaijan, which organized the Ministerial Conference on Aid-for-Trade in December 2010, and Kyrgyzstan.

In the coming year, and with your assistance, UNECE hopes to make significant progress on Aid for Trade in the region. We have received funding to help countries to develop Aid-for-Trade projects, and we will be working with you to identify project proposals. Then, in conjunction with the next Project Working Group for Trade in the autumn of 2013, we plan to hold a workshop on country experiences in developing these projects. In the first half of the year, we will be also organizing a conference which will look at food supply chains and food security in Central Asia, within the context of Aid for Trade. In order to support this work, we will need your help, in particular, by appointing focal points to the SPECA Aid for Trade Monitoring and Implementation Council and by reviewing and endorsing the matrices for Aid-for-Trade priorities that were sent to your Ministries earlier.

In addition to supporting Aid for Trade in Central Asia, UNECE as the custodian of key international norms and standards in the area of trade, transport, energy efficiency, agriculture and statistics, provides technical assistance on their implementation. Implementing these norms and standards is a key practical step towards the facilitation of trade and investment links with other countries.

The SPECA Aid-for-Trade Ministerial Conference in 2010 sent the unequivocal message that Central Asia has become a more attractive business and investment partner as a region. Through stronger regional cooperation, Central Asia could turn into a busy trade hub between Europe and Asia, thus creating more favourable conditions for rapid and stable economic development in all the countries of the region. Many traditional tariff barriers have been successfully removed from mutual trade. However, trade facilitation, the reduction of procedural and regulatory barriers to trade among your countries, remains a central focus for future work on regional trade development.

In conclusion, I would like to wish you fruitful discussions at this session of the Project Working Group as you continue to search for efficient and practical solutions for trade and development.
