OPENING STATEMENT BY Ms Martine-Sophie FOUVEZ, Regional Adviser, TRANSPORT DIVISION, UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE, AT THE 19TH SESSION OF THE SPECA PROJECT WORKING GROUP ON TRANSPORT AND BORDER CROSSING (PWG-TBC)

(Almaty, Kazakhstan, 18 June 2014)

Your Excellency, Vice-Minister of Transport and Communications of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Mr Azat Bekturov, Excellences, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour to address this 19th session of the SPECA Project Working Group on Transport and Border Crossing and to convey greetings on behalf of Mr. Michael Møller, Acting Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva and Acting Executive Secretary of the UNECE as April 2014, and Ms. Eva Molnar, Director of the UNECE Transport Division.

I should first like to express on their behalf our sincere gratitude to the Government of Kazakhstan for hosting this meeting in Almaty, and for its continuing support of the SPECA Programme. This gratitude is in particular addressed to you, Mr Bekturov, for your long lasting commitment to turn the sessions of the SPECA PWG TBC into success.
Transport is a basic element and one of its most strategic for the economic development of any country. In the general process of globalization of the economy, countries are more and more depending on an efficient transport system to ensure their development. The dynamics of globalization have indeed brought trade and transport facilitation into the forefront of national development strategies as well as international efforts aimed at reducing the costs and the complexity of bringing goods to markets.

The efficiency, which is looked for by us all, is however hampered by many obstacles: low standard infrastructures, political and administrative procedures which, instead of facilitating a free flow of goods and persons are as many obstacles for border crossing facilitation.

I would like to inform you that, at the last 76th session of the UNECE Inland Transport Committee, held in Geneva on 25 February this year, the policy segment was about “Innovations for sustainable inland transport and mobility”. Indeed 2014 is a unique crossroads in making decisions on the future directions of Sustainable Development that are being negotiated globally. The position of Sustainable Transport in the final framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) remains to be determined.

In 2012, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) galvanized global political commitment for sustainable development and launched the post-2015 consultation process for the Sustainable Development Goals. In this context, we need to remember that transport was not explicitly mentioned in the Millennium Declaration. Nor was it included in the Millennium Development Goals. We can all see the
consequences. This time, however, world leaders in Rio made sure that the outcome document of the Rio+20 Conference included references to the importance of transport. And indeed, how would it be possible to embark on sustainable development without changing the ways we move around? It is our joint responsibility to raise awareness about the need for change and about the links between transport and sustainable development.

Promoting the sustainable development agenda is not simply a political manifesto, it is a responsibility we all share. As a consequence, UNECE promotes cross-sectoral cooperation on the critical issues of the nexus of transport, environment and health:

This includes the impact on human health of transport-related air pollution emissions – in this regard I would like to draw your attention to a recent UNECE paper on “Diesel Engines Exhaust: Myths and Realities”;

Secondly, the risk to human health and morbidity posed by extreme weather events like storms, floods and heat waves needs to be urgently addressed. The impact of global warming will increasingly shape our national and regional policies on transport, environment and health, in terms of both mitigation and adaptation. The UNECE region – consisting of 56 countries of Europe, Central Asia and North America - has the world’s largest ecological footprint and is struggling to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and halt the loss of biodiversity. Therefore, I am particularly proud that UNECE has developed a policy support tool to mitigate CO2 emissions by inland modes of transport. The name of this project is “For Future Inland Transport Systems” and its results can be consulted on the UNECE web-site. It’s also worth noting, that the UNECE Expert group on Climate Change Adaptation in transport has completed its analysis and their report is now available.
In paving the way forward, there is also an important role and need for closer cooperation and synergy among United Nations Regional Commissions. The UNECE’s excellent reputation in developing international legal instruments could be further supported by other Regional Commissions whose contribution in advocating already existing legal instruments would be invaluable. Since most of the UNECE legal instruments have a global character and the potential to be applied on a world-wide scale, such support and collaboration would increase the possibility of achieving wider legal harmonization and interoperability, and diminish the danger of duplication and inefficiencies. Moreover, synergies are also necessary between various international organizations which have global and regional roles in connecting continents. Knowledge sharing should be enhanced and promoted through seminars and workshops organized jointly within their individual areas of competence.

I would not however close this address without mentioning another concern related to our work and which until now does not seem to ring a sensitive bell in the SPECA region, I mean road traffic safety.

Improving global road safety by setting regional and national road traffic casualty reduction targets and by subscribing to the decade of action that has just been launched on a worldwide basis is a must for any SPECA country. We shall have an opportunity to detail possible actions under item 4.7 of the draft agenda.

I hope we have enough time today and tomorrow morning for me to address you with a specific topic at the end of the agenda, namely UNECE
technical assistance activities and how you all could better benefit from them.

Dear Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen,

SPECA Working Group on Transport and Border Crossing Facilitation is an important element for the promotion of inter-country cooperation and for the improvements of the transport systems in the region. Its work is recognized.

The UNECE, in close cooperation with UNESCAP and other interregional organizations and institutions, is constantly supporting the activities of the SPECA project and will continue doing so in the years ahead. I will be delighted to discuss with you how best our work can be more focused, productive and so efficient, during the course of these two days.

I wish us every success in our work and thank you for your attention.