



Statement by Mr. Marek Belka

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**Delivered at the Opening of the Seventieth Session of the Inland Transport and
the Meeting of Ministers of Transport of Countries in the Euro-Asian Region**

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Dear Ministers, Excellencies, Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour and pleasure for me to welcome you all to the **70th session of the Inland Transport Committee** and to the **Meeting of Ministers of Transport of Countries in the Euro-Asian Region**.

I am particularly **pleased** that so many Ministers from countries in the Euro-Asian region are represented here today at the Ministerial Meeting, which is the **first of its kind in the history of the ECE** transport-related work. I am also very pleased to see such a **large and high level participation** from other UNECE member Governments, as well as from international and non-governmental organizations.

It is widely accepted that a well functioning transport system is **essential for the growth and competitiveness of economies**. Indeed, national economies depend on transport more than ever before, just as they depend increasingly on international trade.

But, as you all know, achieving efficient international transport is not an easy task. It requires not only political commitment, but also very precise technical norms and regulations that ensure a high level of efficiency, safety and environmental protection and which are harmonized from one country to another.

In this respect, the **Inland Transport Committee fulfils a real need that is not performed by any other international organization**. Indeed, the Committee provides the pan-European framework within which a large number of transport norms and regulations are agreed internationally with the participation of its members. Many of these norms and regulations have been developed into Agreements and Conventions that are legally binding for countries that adhere to them, thus reflecting their importance. It is thus not a surprise that the UNECE Governments in the framework of the **reform identified transport as a top priority area**.

I believe the Inland Transport Committee has every reason to be proud of its results. In the two years that I have been with the UNECE, I have been able to appreciate these results. To name just a few, the **transport infrastructure Agreements** have given Europe coherent pan-European road, rail, inland water and combined transport networks, the “**E**” networks. The **Vienna Conventions and European Agreements supplementing them** provide an international code of road traffic rules, signs and signals, which have reduced substantially the number of accidents and victims on European roads. The **TIR Convention** has established a transit guarantee scheme and provides for simplified, efficient and secure border crossing procedures. And the UNECE’s **global work on the construction of vehicles and the transport of dangerous goods** has assisted our member countries to produce safe and clean road vehicles and reduce the risk of accidents with dangerous goods and hazardous materials.

There is another dimension of our work that is of increasing importance – the development of Euro-Asian inland transport links. Globalization of the economies and trade is generating a continuous increase in the transport of goods between Europe and Asia. At present, goods between Europe and Asia are mostly carried by maritime transport. However, given the continued growth of trade and resulting congestion of main ports and their hinterland routes, the development of Euro-Asian inland transport links, **in addition to providing an important extension of the existing transport capacity, is of outmost importance for socio-economic development of countries in the region, including landlocked countries, and for their integration into the global economy**.

As most of you may know, UNECE and UNESCAP, together with **designated national focal points from eighteen countries in the Euro-Asian region**, have been closely cooperating over the last five years to implement the United Nations Development Account funded project on developing Euro-Asian transport links.

This joint work **has achieved tangible results**, identifying main Euro-Asian inland transport routes, prioritizing infrastructure investment projects, developing a Geographic Information System (GIS) database, analysing non-physical obstacles and organizing a number of national capacity-building workshops on transport facilitation. The publication of the joint UNECE-UNESCAP study, **which is presented for the first time today on the occasion of the Ministerial Meeting**, reflects the results and conclusions of the work as well as recommendations for participating governments.

The development of this project **has been a unique undertaking**. It has been made possible thanks to the commitment, skills, and determination of designated national focal points from the countries in the Euro-Asian region.

I take this opportunity to **thank all those who contributed to the successful outcomes** of the joint UNECE-UNESCAP project and **encourage them to continue and further intensify their efforts** for effective implementation of the priority investments identified and the **creation of harmonized regulations** that would be conducive to sustainable development of Euro-Asian transport links.

Such outcomes, however, cannot be taken for granted. Development of Euro-Asian transport links will be a **long-term process** that requires first and foremost strong political will and commitment of the countries concerned as well as careful use of scarce financial resources. This makes it a complex exercise, requiring governments **to strike a balance with other national priorities**, weigh national versus international interests, ascertain the economic, social and environmental net benefits, **coordinate programmes and timetables in close cooperation with neighbouring countries**, determine the degree of new development and maintenance of their already existing infrastructure, as well as of private versus public participation and factor in security considerations. And indeed alleviate cumbersome and time-consuming **border crossing and transit bottlenecks**, which are common obstacles to international transport along the Euro-Asian routes.

We recognize that there are several agencies that have been implementing their development assistance programs in most of the countries along the Euro-Asian routes. Some can bring financial aid, others can give credit that are so crucial to execute the investment plans. On behalf of the UN, we wish to **create partnerships, supplement the on-going work, improve the effectiveness of the development assistance rendered** to the low- and middle income transition economies and contribute in ensuring **that the interests of all countries in our regions are adequately and properly taken into account. In short, the task before all of us is so massive that we – fist of all you, the countries, but also UNECE and UNESCAP, the EU and OSCE - should join forces and work together to be able to get tangible results in an accelerated way.**

In this connection, allow me to recall that at the 60th anniversary session of the Commission in April of last year, the panel on Secure Transport Development, underlined, with regard to the development Euro-Asian transport links, the usefulness of the inter-country cooperation

promoted by ECE, jointly with ESCAP, which has also led to the identification of priority Euro-Asian routes as well as the evaluation and prioritization of a large number of projects. It agreed that the work on Euro-Asian links has been instrumental in focusing attention and promoting the development of transport links in the subregion and that both the countries concerned **and the European Union and International Financial Institutions could benefit from the results. The Panel also agreed to invite the European Commission and the European Investment Bank to consider incorporating the results of the Euro-Asian Transport Links Project into their future work and supporting their implementation, in close cooperation with ECE, for the benefit of all ECE member countries.**

Let me conclude by emphasizing that your presence at this important gathering and your readiness to adopt a Joint Statement on the future development of Euro-Asian transport links demonstrates your **political commitment and will** to continue cooperation **under the United Nations auspices aimed at developing efficient, safe and secure Euro-Asian transport links.**

I can assure you, that the development of the Euro-Asian transport links is a priority of the UNECE and will acquire an ever-increasing importance in our work programme in the coming years. As a UN regional commission we are mandated to facilitate economic growth and regional cooperation. We therefore **intend to use all our powers and competences to fulfil our tasks and in this particular case to accelerate the development of the Euro-Asian transport connections both in terms of improved infrastructure and improved services.** By linking our efforts to those of our sister organization ESCAP, as well as with all our other partners, including the European Commission, the OSCE, regional integration initiatives such as BSEC, and other governmental and non-governmental organisations such as the International Road Transport Union (IRU) and the International Union of Railways (UIC), I am convinced that we can make progress in developing these crucial transport links.

Thank you.

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