It is a great honour and privilege for me to be with you today and open this 16th meeting of the MARS Group.

As a consumer and a manager myself, I am well aware of the challenges that you, as the market surveillance authorities of our region, are facing every single day to ensure that consumer products and equipment on the workplace are safe and comply with regulations in force.

Enforcement authorities are all at once confronted with booming online sales, ever more complex appliances, and a growing number of regulatory requirements. At the same time, the proportion of products that are “made in the world” grows in our everyday consumption basket compounding the difficulties of bringing to justice those who do not respect the law.

All of this happens within the context of smaller budgets and resources within government authorities across all sectors, all over the world.

This is the context in which the work of the MARS group is set. It makes the purpose of the Group – enhancing cooperation among market surveillance authorities – ever more important. Of course, there are established channels of cooperation among market surveillance authorities of EU countries. The meetings of this MARS Group represent then an important opportunity to reach out to the countries outside of the EU and to discuss cooperation in a setting that is at the same time informal and hands on, resulting in very practical recommendations and guidance.

For those that are joining for the first time, I would like to recall that these activities take place under the umbrella of the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies, or WP.6. The WP.6 works to lower costs, facilitate trade and improve access to critical technologies, while protecting the health, safety of consumers, workers, and preserving our natural environment.

It has a mandate to support regulatory cooperation in specific sectors that have a critical impact on sustainability and on resilience to natural and man-made hazards. It also contributes:

• To promote the use of standards by policy-makers and business as a tool for reducing technical barriers to trade, promote increased resilience to disasters, foster innovation and good governance.

• To promote the use of standards in the implementation of UN-wide goals, including the implementation of the Agenda 2030 and the Sendai framework for action.
The Working Party started work on market surveillance issues in 2002, with high level events which led to the establishment of the MARS Group in 2003. The Group held yearly meetings in Slovakia from 2003 to 2012. This is the second meeting taking place in Geneva while two meetings have been hosted by the Czech Republic, one in Serbia, and one – last year – in Sweden.

The Secretariat looks forward to an increased rotation of meetings internationally among the Member States. For this reason, I would like to invite delegations who would be willing to host the 2019 or 2020 meeting of the MARS Group to be in touch with Lorenza early on.

As those of you who have been involved in the work of the MARS Group for many years know well, the activities of this Group have been very fruitful. I would like to recall the major outputs of its work, as follows:

- A Recommendation on the use of market surveillance to fight the proliferation of counterfeit goods;

- A Recommendation on “Good Market Surveillance Policies and Practices” which guides authorities in the set up and administration of a market surveillance system;

- A Recommendation on applying Risk Management Tools for Market Surveillance which sets out a practical method to identify and remove from the market high risk and non-compliant goods;

- The publication of a “Glossary of Market Surveillance Terms” in English, French and Russian which will be the subject of a proposed revision at the present meeting;

- The creation of a database of Market surveillance authorities which includes not only the UNECE region but also Brazil, and China, among others.

- A mapping of market surveillance networks in the UNECE region and beyond.

I am pleased to report that these deliverables have been extensively promoted through different awareness raising and capacity building activities by the Secretariat during the year to date.

First, in March 2018, the UNECE convened the “Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region” to review the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the UNECE region.

The Forum featured an exchange of experiences among members about the role of the Circular Economy in the transition towards sustainable consumption and production. An important input in that discussion was a presentation about the Nordsyn Project of the Nordic cooperation council. You will have an opportunity to learn more about that later today.

Additionally, in the context of a Technical Assistance Project for the benefit of Kyrgyzstan the secretariat prepared a large amount of capacity-building materials, including online materials, on risk management in regulatory systems, conformity assessment and market surveillance. You will also learn about these activities later today.
I do hope that you will take advantage of the next two days in order to advance towards new deliverables on topics within the mandate of the Group.

I also would like to encourage you to support the Secretariat in the delivery of its awareness raising and capacity building activities with your own expertise and knowledge in the year to come.

We look forward to working even more closely with you both in advancing our work on Recommendations and best practice and in the awareness raising and capacity building activities we carry out.

With this, I’d like to conclude, wishing you the best for the coming two days of work.