

Opening address by Ms. Maria Ceccarelli, Officer in Charge, Economic Cooperation and Trade Division

Thank you, Madame Chair.

It is also my great pleasure to welcome you today to the Annual session of the “Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies” on behalf of the Executive Secretary who is travelling on mission today. I would like to express particular appreciation to those of you who have travelled from afar to be with us, and to all who had to work longer hours, to prepare their interventions or finalize documents or proposal during the last year that will be discussed in the next couple of days.

I would like to devote this address to saying a few words about the UNECE work in the area of trade and standardization, especially for those of you who are joining these meetings for the first time.

As you are certainly aware, UNECE is itself a standards and normative body. UNECE develops standards, for example, in the area of the automotive industry where UNECE promotes the harmonization of vehicles regulations. Likewise, in the field of trade, UNECE – and particularly the body for which I am responsible, UN/CEFACT - develops standards for facilitating cross-border trade, supply chain management, transport and logistics among other fields.

Like the other standards organizations present here today, UN/CEFACT is, itself, is in the process of transforming its standards-making to make it more relevant to the Global Goals. Let me illustrate this by briefly mentioning two standards that were recently developed and that have a direct impact on two of the SDGs.

One such tool is the Standard on the Transboundary Movements of Waste which helps track and monitor movements of waste across borders, so as to that ensure that waste will be disposed of in an environmentally compatible manner using up-to-date technology.

Another example is the Standard “FLUX” on the exchange of fishery messages for the sustainable management of fisheries, which allows Fishery Management Organisations to automate the collection and dissemination of the fishery catch and to detect and combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. And of course, I could give you many more such examples.

In addition to hosting standardization bodies, UNECE also hosts a unique body, the WP. 6. which has since 1970 helped connect standards makers with policy makers. The WP. 6 has a large mandate including standards, the harmonization of technical regulations, and support to quality infrastructure institutions.

In all the areas of its mandate, WP. 6 recommends that authorities base their regulations and policies on available international standards. When regulations are developed on this basis, technical barriers to trade are prevented or eliminated, the transparency and accountability of legislative and regulatory work is enhanced, while innovation and transfer of technology are strengthened.

The second pillar of the WP. 6 approach is the proportionality between risks and regulatory or policy action at all levels. In other words, the WP. 6 recommends that public decisions be based on carefully balancing the costs of regulatory interventions – in terms for example of red tape – with the expected advantages in term of preserving society and the natural environment from risks.

After the adoption of the 2030 the Working Party has gained a prominent role as a neutral platform for developing best practice on how policymakers can use voluntary standards as a tool for the realization of the SDGs.

Going forward, the WP. 6 will continue to work towards the uptake of risk-based, standards based regulatory systems that are fit for purpose for sustainability, resilience and gender equality.

In the next couple of days, we will discuss a number of important proposals and recommendations that many of the experts in this room have been busy preparing in the last year. In different ways, all of these tools contribute to realize the full potential of standards to translate high level goals into action on the ground.

Participation in the meetings of the UNECE WP. 6 are open to all UN Member States, not only those from the UNECE region. Representatives of standardization bodies, academia, the business community, test bodies, laboratories, NGOs and other interested parties are also welcome to our meetings.

The meetings of the WP. 6 aim to be inclusive and participatory, so I encourage you all to not hesitate to take the floor and actively engage with the speakers at all times.

This meeting is forward looking, and we will be asking you to take decisions for the future direction of work of the WP. 6. But at the same time as we look forward, we will also look back at some of the many achievements of the WP. 6. In particular this afternoon we will review the activities of the WP. 6 on “Standard for the SDGs”, which were carried out with contributions by many standards

With this, Madame Chairperson, I am pleased to hand you back the floor and wish you all the best for the discussions ahead.