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Opening statement

By

Ms. Olga Algayerova

Executive Secretary, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

at the event

“Promoting Circularity in Transition Economies:

The Role of Trade and Economic Cooperation”

World Circular Economy Forum

Geneva, Switzerland, 8 December 2020

H.E. Mr. Kreshnik Bekteshi, Minister of Economy, North Macedonia

H.E. Ms. Nino Tandilashvili, Deputy Minister of Environment Protection and Agriculture, Georgia

Distinguished experts and panelists from Kazakhstan, Serbia and the Institute for European Environmental Policy,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to open this session of the World Circular Economy Forum entitled “Promoting Circularity in Transition Economies: The Role of Trade and Economic Cooperation”. My special appreciation goes to the Geneva Trade Platform for partnering with us to make this event a reality, and to the SITRA Fund for providing a global platform to discuss circularity matters.

The world is growing fast, but not sustainably! The World Bank estimates that by 2050, the world will have to tackle serious challenges. These range from feeding 9 billion people, to providing access to affordable energy, while managing global greenhouse gas emissions. COVID-19 has exacerbated these issues and exposed the flaws in our current economic model. It revealed the need for building back better while ensuring resilience to external shocks, fostering inclusiveness and promoting sustainability.

We must find effective ways to meet current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own. Transitioning to a

circular economy is key in this process. We need to change how we manage our resources, how we make and use products, and what we do with them after we use them. This would not only bring us closer to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, but it would also promote a thriving economy that benefits everyone.

For this reason, no one should be left behind in the discussions. To ensure inclusiveness, we need effective economic cooperation among countries with the support of intergovernmental organizations. At UNECE, we stand ready to advance circularity principles within the spirit of cooperation and inclusiveness. This is why our 69th Commission Session will be held next April under the theme: “Promoting circular economy and sustainable use of natural resources in the UNECE region”.

At the UNECE Secretariat, this theme is embedded in all our work streams, offering numerous tools, recommendations and norms.

In our Energy Division, we host a unique tool called the United Nations Framework Classification for Resources (UNFC), which is now being expanded to the United Nations Resource Management System (UNRMS). Together, UNFC and UNRMS provide a unified, comparable, interoperable and harmonized approach to resource assessment and management that can be used for governmental, statistical, social, corporate and financial purposes. They provide a robust set of standards, guidelines, protocols and best practices for putting attainment of the 2030 Agenda at the core of sustainable resource management. In terms of circular economy, they also apply to anthropogenic resources, which are generally classified as waste.

Anthropogenic resources can provide useful benefits through the provision of secondary raw materials and energy used in the economic activity.

Our Transport Division develops regulations for cleaner and safer vehicles – but also pertaining to their recyclability, which greatly reduces the need for raw materials in vehicle construction.

In our Statistics Division, we help to measure it all by supporting national statistical systems meet the relevant data needs.

It is also important to recognize that the circular economy concept is not one dimensional. Besides central governments, cities can also drive the circular economy agenda forward. In fact, local authorities are key actors for SDG implementation. UNECE's Housing and Land Management Division works with cities across the region to support their efforts in becoming smart, sustainable and circular, providing guidelines, best practices and indicators to measure progress.

Beyond the national level, international cooperation and trade are also major pillars of a circular transition.

In our Trade and Economic Cooperation Division, we work towards improving the traceability and transparency of value chains. This is a key step towards fostering circular supply chains. With these efforts, we aim to make sustainable consumption and production choices easier, both for consumers and for companies.

Other trade and circular economy-related UNECE tools aim at ensuring sustainable procurement; harnessing the power of innovation, including by fostering the platform economy; and managing and reducing waste, in areas of food loss and promoting Waste-to-Energy Projects through People-first Public-Private-Partnerships.

You can see that UNECE has a rich portfolio of solutions to offer, spanning both, normative instruments as well as innovative solutions, powered by new technologies, blockchain and the like.

In doing our work, we understand that there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Countries have a unique set of needs and challenges that should be taken into account. At UNECE, we cater to the needs of 17 programme countries that are transition economies. These are countries that are not traditionally at the forefront of discussions related to circularity. This is why today's event is important. It provides us with an opportunity to hear about the circular pathways of transition economies and identify where we can support them.

This brings me to the importance of capacity building. For a country to endorse sustainable policies, it needs to be equipped with the right tools and knowledge to make decisions that do not compromise development objectives. Capacity building, through experience sharing, is key in this process. Today's event for example is a good starting point. It provides an opportunity to share best-practices and lessons learned that could guide the way forward in the global circularity journey.

I am pleased to inform you that next year, we will be implementing a United Nations Development Account Project in support of a transition to a more circular economy. Today's event will also help us shape the concrete outcomes and deliverables for our forthcoming capacity building.

I look forward to a great discussion among our distinguished panelists today.

Thank you!