

# 69<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE COMMISSION

## PROMOTING CIRCULAR ECONOMY AND SUSTAINABLE USE OF NATURAL RESOURCES IN THE UNECE REGION

20-21 APRIL 2021 | ROOM XVII | PALAIS DES NATIONS | GENEVA

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### **Opening statement**

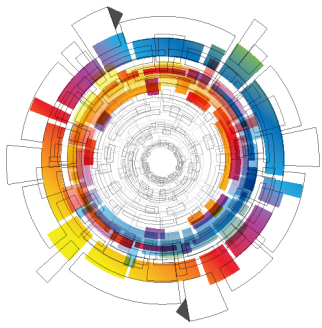
by

**Ms. Olga Algayerova**

**Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Europe**

at

**69<sup>th</sup> session of the UN Economic Commission for Europe  
20 April 2021, Geneva**



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Excellencies, Colleagues, Ladies and gentleman,

Allow me start our Commission Session in a not very traditional way. I have 2 reasons for doing so: 1. As you know, we will be moving soon to our new building and by cleaning the cupboards and archiving the files these documents came to my hands and I wanted to share at least few with you 2. Today we have the 69th Commission Session, and although it is not an anniversary, I believe that in order to know where we go we need to understand also where we came from.

At the first slide you can see the Resolution from 28 March 1947 by which the ECE established

‘Forging Common Solutions since 1947 – Cooperation today is as vital as ever’

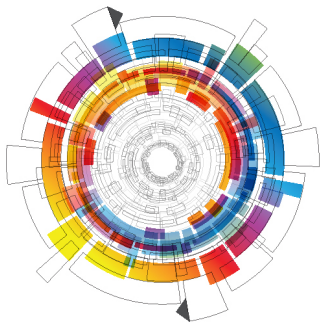
Report of the Working Group for Europe and Africa

ECOSOC 15/03/1947 -Rules and Procedures

Minutes of the First Commission Session of 02/05/1947

Our existing development, production and consumption patterns remain unsustainable. While we are certainly becoming more efficient in the use of resources, the overall material footprint of our region continues to grow. Globally, the demand for resources largely exceeds nature’s regenerative capacity: In 2020, Earth Overshoot Day was on 22 August 2020, some 130 days prior to the end of the year. Natural capital, such as clean air and water or forests, is being degraded dramatically.

We have to find a new balance between unsustainable ‘so called prosperity’ or economic growth and sustainable environment and virgin resources preservation that is well reflected in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Shifting to a more circular economy can decouple economic growth from resource use. New business opportunities, new jobs, increased competitiveness, and



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enhanced resilience are further benefits, all the more in the context of the COVID-19 crisis.

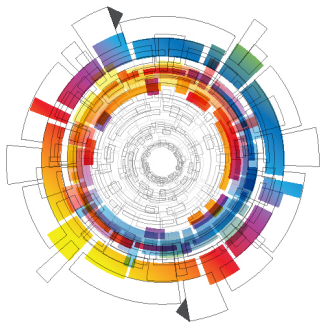
As we will hear today, UNECE member States are actively pursuing national policies that promote a shift towards a more circular economy and address questions related to the sustainable use of natural resources. And they make voluntary commitments to move implementation forward with very concrete and measurable action. Given the weight of the UNECE region in global trade and resource use, further progress here can serve as catalyst to greater circularity worldwide. We have a long way to go, as currently only 8.6 percent of economic activity around the globe is circular.

We must step up our ambitions. And we must do more than merely correcting damaging effects that economic activities have on the environment. Real progress will require a deep rethinking of the way in which societies produce and consume. All sectors will be affected, and patterns of behaviour will need to change.

But how can we accelerate such a far-reaching transformation? And how can the Economic Commission for Europe support its membership on this path?

Norms and standards help to incorporate circularity principles into products and supply chains. UNECE is a strong partner with longstanding expertise in normative production in multiple sectors and across national borders. Vehicle regulations, waste, forest certification, resource classification and traceability in supply chains are just a few of the areas where UNECE is already contributing to greater circularity.

Our Commission provides a strong platform to support inclusive dialogue through multiple intergovernmental and expert groups. We



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can use this convening power, we can build on the know-how and the good practices available in our region. Our combined experience is a fertile ground for mutual learning to inform policy development and identify areas for collective action.

As the world seeks to overcome the COVID-19 crisis, there is an opportunity to “recover better” and shape a more resilient, prosperous, sustainable, and circular future for all. I look forward to hearing your plans to build this future. UNECE stands ready to bring its expertise to bear for this critical work.

I wish us all fruitful discussion and hope that our deliberations here will send a signal to the region that the transition is underway. Let us demonstrate that we are promoting a circular economy and sustainable use of natural resources and take very concrete and impactful actions – now.