

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure and an honour for me to address you today with a few words about cooperation. For more than 75 years now, UNECE has proved to be an extraordinary platform for cooperation among countries in the European region and beyond. It is through discussion on important issues like transport, environment and energy, that we have been able to progressively facilitate economic development and integration. The European Union as a whole, and the European Commission in particular, remain strongly committed to engage constructively with our partners in UNECE to work towards the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda.

Peace and security are prerequisites for sustainable development. Today, the Russian aggression against Ukraine casts a dark shadow on the work done by UNECE and its different bodies, where cooperation among its members and respect for the UN Charter has to be key. The EU and its Member States therefore once more strongly condemn Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, including its attacks on the Ukrainian people and infrastructure, and we reiterate that we will stand by Ukraine for as long as it takes.

The theme chosen for this ECE session is the green and digital transformations. These are very much at the heart of the work of the European Commission and DG GROW, the Directorate General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs. On 16 March, the Commission proposed the Net-Zero Industry Act to scale up manufacturing of clean technologies in the EU and make sure the Union is well-equipped for the clean-energy transition. At the same time, a comprehensive set of actions was defined to ensure the EU's access to a secure, diversified, affordable and sustainable supply of critical raw materials, which are indispensable for a green and digital future.

In order to succeed in these transformations, we need to build reliable and resilient partnerships, based on transparency, trust and mutual interest. The standards, regulations and common principles and policies developed jointly in the framework of UNECE are fundamental in this regard.

I would also like to underline the importance of involving businesses in the UNECE process, given their role in the implementation of intergovernmental agreements. As SME coordinator in DG GROW, I would like to draw particular attention to the needs of small and medium-sized companies.

Finally, on a practical note, I would like to argue for exploring the continuation of hybrid meetings in UNECE. We have seen in the past two years that online cooperation is feasible. Hybrid meetings are indispensable to safeguard a broad participation of government officials, in particular in those areas of ECE that are of global relevance. It would be a practical step and a relevant signal for ECE to walk the talk, by using digital technologies for climate benefits.

Thank you.