

Opening remarks by

Ms Tatiana Molcean

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Time: Wednesday, 01 November 2023 (10-10.30 a.m.)

Venue: Salle XVII

Madame Chair,

Distinguished delegates,

colleagues, partners, ladies, and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to Geneva to the 28th Session of the Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP).

While this is my first time at a CEP meeting since joining UNECE a few months ago, I am quite familiar with your work: As a national representative, I dealt with several of the topics that this esteemed Committee is working on. And this is why I appreciate the importance of your work for regional and global cooperation on our shared environment also from the perspective of a beneficiary country. Today, as the head of UNECE, I am proud to say that this work remains as valid as it was 52 years ago when the predecessor to this Committee was established.

The Committee's hard work continues to pay off – for 52 years and counting. The 9th Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe”, which took place in Nicosia a year ago is proof of this.

Nevertheless: In its long history, this Committee has rarely met in times as difficult as these. Unsustainable consumption and production patterns are fuelling the triple planetary crisis of climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste. Accelerated efforts are needed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. We know this because SDG indicators, including environmental indicators, allow us to measure and track progress at the global, national, and local levels.

And of course, the problems we face are not limited to environmental crises only. Our region is suffering from political polarization and military devastation at a scale unprecedented since World War II. In this context, it is all the more vital to maintain platforms for dialogue and cooperation. This Committee is one of them.

Let me mention some of the issues you will discuss throughout your busy agenda here:

- Beginning of the next cycle of the EfE process and preparation of the mid-term review to be held in 2025;
- Outcomes of the seventieth session of the UNECE, which addressed digital and green transformations for sustainable development in the region;
- Environmental monitoring, assessment and reporting;
- Cross-sectoral activities, including:
 - Education for sustainable development;
 - Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme; and
 - European Environment and Health Process and the recent Budapest Ministerial Conference – and in this connection let me warmly welcome Ms. Francesca Racioppi, the Head of the European Centre for Environment and Health of the WHO Regional Office for Europe in Bonn.

You will also discuss the ongoing work on Environmental Performance Reviews. With their scope adjusted to the present needs, these Reviews continue to be in high demand by countries. This week you will peer review the environmental performance of Kyrgyzstan and Mauritania.

Our flagship multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) remain as relevant as ever. On that note, I would like to welcome the members of the governing bodies of these agreements who are here today.

You will also exchange views on the upcoming sixth session of the UN Environment Assembly, which will take place in Nairobi from 26 February to 1 March 2024). In this regard I would like to stress the excellent cooperation with our colleagues from the UN Environment on several directions, and it's my pleasure to welcome to this meeting Mr. Arnold Kreilhuber, Director of the UNEP Regional Office for Europe.

I take a moment to also thank our partner organizations - UNEP, WHO, EEA, OECD, OSCE, UNESCO, UNWTO, UNDP, other international and civil society organizations. Partnerships are crucial to addressing the challenges we face.

One of the positive examples of this is the existing cooperation between UNECE, UNEP and EEA (European Environment Agency) on environmental monitoring, reporting and assessment. At the Nicosia Conference, ministers commended the establishment of the Shared Environmental Information System across the region to support a regular process of environmental assessment. This process that has been supported by our three organizations over the past decade.

Ministers also acknowledged the importance of regular, indicator-based environmental assessments and noted the key findings of the seventh pan-European assessment, produced by UNECE and UNEP and using information from the latest EEA outlook report. On that note let me also thank UNEP and EEA for the longstanding partnership.

The UNECE secretariat, as always, strives to ensure the highest quality of work. However, you may notice some energy and resource conservation measures in these spaces - a sign that our organization is also experiencing significant resource constraints. I would like to emphasize that we are grateful for the support of our donors and, as always, we look forward to this support in the future to maintain the level of service that we provide to you.

I wish you a fruitful meeting and a successful continuation of your work.

Thank you for your attention.