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Statement

by

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at

**the 9th session of the Meetings of the Parties to the Espoo
Convention and the 5th session of the Meeting of the Parties to the
Protocol on SEA,
(Item 1. Opening of the sessions)**

12 December 2023

[Excellencies],
Distinguished colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased and honoured to address you today. I speak on behalf of our Executive Secretary, Ms. Tatiana Molcean, who, unfortunately, had to delegate these opening remarks at the last minute. She will be happy to come to the high-level event.

Over the past decades, the Espoo Convention and the Protocol on SEA have proven to be key tools for sustainable development.

They have been handy in successfully safeguarding the environment and human health, improving environmental governance and international cooperation.

In the history of both treaties, the Parties have rarely met in times as turbulent as these today. The UNECE region is suffering from political polarization and military devastation at a scale unprecedented since World War II.

COVID-19 pandemic, the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and environmental pollution, as well as persistent economic uncertainty have further aggravated the prospects for sustainable development.

The political declaration of the UN SDG Summit in September underlined the need to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals.

Less than a year ahead of the UN Summit of the Future in 2024, it is time to also strengthen the application of the Espoo Convention and its Protocol considering their role and potential for stepping up progress towards achieving the SDGs.

It is also remarkable that we embark on the first day of the MoPs just when the COP28 in Dubai is ending today. This is yet another opportunity to highlight the contribution of the two treaties to combating climate change, promoting carbon neutrality and ensuring climate proofing of projects, plans and programmes.

This week, some 50 countries, international organizations, civil society and other stakeholders are represented here in Geneva to discuss how to strengthen the treaties' role in accelerating energy transition, promoting circular economy, and enabling the uptake of green financing.

This and other agenda items touch upon global or interregional challenges that require cooperative action, not only in the UNECE region, but also within and in-between the other regions of the globe.

Already back in 2001, your Governments decided to amend the Convention to turn it into a global instrument.

I again urge those four Parties that have still not ratified that amendment, to do so as soon as possible, to finally allow accession by all UN member States.

Subregional initiatives to promote the effective application of the Convention and the Protocol driven by UNECE with funding from Italy have already started to engage countries outside the UNECE region, particularly for the protection of the Mediterranean Sea and its coastal zones, in cooperation with the Barcelona Convention.

I understand that cooperation with 5 other regional sea conventions and bodies is also planned.

This year marks the twentieth anniversary of the Protocol's adoption in 2003, as a global instrument.

Along with the Convention, it continues to gain ground as a key sustainability tool, acquiring additional applications and Parties.

I welcome the plans of countries in Central Asia to accede to it.

Just as one example, SEA is being actively and usefully applied to maritime spatial planning where a multitude of strategic interests, environmental goals and multi-sector issues intersect, involving, for instance, exploration and exploitation of hydrocarbons, pipelines, offshore wind energy and other renewable energies infrastructures.

The Protocol and the Convention are also expected to have an essential role to play in greening Ukraine's post-war reconstruction and its preparation.

I note the significant range of technical assistance and capacity building activities delivered by UNECE in support of countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia thanks to funding from EU4Environment programme, Switzerland and Germany and in cooperation with the OSCE in the past three years.

Unfortunately, the expected further increase in the treaties' use, stand in stark contrast to a continuous and critical scarcity of resources for them.

The future of your treaties depends on your support. While increased pledges by some Parties are a welcome step in the right direction, the overall amount of pledges is still largely insufficient to fund the proposed workplan and the required secretariat support.

I am grateful to Italy and France for co-funding a JPO to assist the secretariat temporarily.

However, until the resources are strengthened long-term, the meetings and activities that require secretariat support must be scaled down.

I can only again urge all Parties and partners to identify funding solutions for sustaining and strengthening these two key instruments and our services to them.

To conclude, I wish to congratulate the Implementation Committee on its professionalism in delivering on its extensive mandate under the treaties' review of compliance procedure, despite reduced secretariat support during the period.

I also thank Parties for their efforts to facilitate consensus in the run-up to the meeting.

I hope that the spirit of cooperation and the respect for the Committee's work will inspire discussions during the general segment and outcomes during the high-level part.

I wish you success in your deliberations this week.