

**Opening remarks
for the 43rd session of the Executive Body to the Convention on Long-range
Transboundary Air Pollution**

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Monday, 11 December 2023, 15:00, Salle III

Distinguished delegates,
Dear colleagues,

A warm welcome to the forty-third session of the UNECE Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution.

This is the first session of the Executive Body I am attending in my new capacity, and I am extremely pleased to open it, as UNECE's work on environmental protection is a priority for me. The work conducted under the Convention is an inspiring example. It shows that efforts under a multilateral environmental agreement can lead to continuous progress, and remain ambitious.

Forty-four years ago, the issue of transboundary air pollution brought together representatives of thirty-two UNECE member states. Since then, not only has the number of Parties to the Convention risen to fifty-one, but eight protocols and several amendments have entered into force. These cover almost all the major air pollutants – sulphur, nitrogen, volatile organic compounds, persistent organic pollutants, heavy metals, ammonia and particulate matter. Thanks to these frameworks, Parties have decreased sulphur, nitrogen and PM_{2.5} emissions throughout the UNECE region. This includes, for example, a reduction of about 82% of sulphur dioxide emissions in the EU, the UK and EFTA countries between 2000 and 2019, and of about 86% in the US between 2005 and 2019.

The Convention has been successful not only in negotiating protocols and amendments that reduced emissions, but also in bringing scientists and policymakers together in an exemplary manner. It provides for a unique system in which science influences policy and can provide policymakers with the necessary assessments.

All this said, air pollution continues to impact health. Particulate matter, for example, still causes respiratory and cardio-vascular diseases and cancer. In 2021 and in the EU alone, PM_{2.5} caused 253,000 premature deaths. Exposure to particulate matter in the whole UNECE region is still high. Furthermore, there are interlinkages between the challenges that need continued attention.

The Convention has already shown its adaptability by introducing a multi-pollutant and multi-effect approach with the Gothenburg Protocol. The 2012 amendments to the Protocol then introduced the first internationally binding commitments for fine particulate matter and introduced black carbon into the scope of the amended Protocol.

In 2022, the Executive Body tasked an expert group with a review of the amended Gothenburg Protocol. Based on this assessment, the Working Group on Strategies and Review has recommended to open negotiations for a revision of the amended Protocol. This decision is tabled for the current session. If adopted, it would allow for an opportunity to make significant progress in mitigating transboundary air pollution. For example, it would help to further reduce ozone precursors, including methane; particulate matter, and nitrogen pollution. This would have benefits for climate and biodiversity, and contribute to fighting the triple planetary crisis.

This session also occurs in a time of conflicts and wars in our region, such as the ongoing war in Ukraine. A war that has cost and is costing thousands of lives, destroying and damaging the futures of so many.

The Executive Body, at its last session, paused the funding of the Meteorological Synthesizing Centre-East, located on the territory of the Russian Federation. It further tasked the EMEP Steering Body with assessing the options for relocating this scientific centre. These options are tabled for decision at this session as well.

Balancing acts like this one have unfortunately become part of our work. Looking at the history of the Air Convention and its community, encourages me to think that you – distinguished delegates – can turn to this history to guide the decisions ahead.

I urge you to look for solutions that allow for further progress in mitigating transboundary air pollution.

Let me assure you of UNECE's continuing support and finish with wishing you success in your negotiations.

Thank you.