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Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentleman, I would like to begin by expressing my deep appreciation to the Government of Kazakhstan for hosting this event, to the people of Kazakhstan for their warm hospitality and to all of those involved in this meeting’s organization.

Developing connections and working together with neighbours is critical to the success of landlocked developing countries – as witnessed by the interconnected economies of successful developed landlocked countries such as Switzerland, Luxembourg, Slovakia and others.

We take this almost for granted and the statement that we live in an, “Interconnected World,” has become overused, trite, and banal to the point of almost soliciting yawns when it is mentioned. At the same time, if you look at global, regional and sub-regional realities, and especially the realities faced by many landlocked countries, I believe it is fair to say that the potential benefits of being interconnected are not being fully realized.

Why do we often fail to take into account the larger, interconnected picture? One reason is that actions have to be implemented at the level of individual persons, individual organizations and individual countries – so we focus on helping and motivating these “individuals” to act.

At the same time, we sometimes forget that this is not enough. In order to be effective, we need to expand our horizons beyond “individual” entities to include the larger frameworks of our neighbourhoods, our regions and the world. Being effective requires us to take the time and, very importantly, to commit the resources needed in order to communicate, to coordinate and to work together.

So, how to be interconnected, not just via e-mail, but in real, concrete ways, in order to achieve results, is, for me, a key issue for implementing the Almaty Programme of Action.

It is also a key issue for all the United Nations Regional Commissions where an integral part of our work is developing and maintaining regional and sub-regional networks in support of concrete goals.
In the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, or UNECE, we are somewhat unique because we support regional and sub-regional cooperation and interconnections in two ways:

- First through the development of norms, standards and conventions that can be used as the basis for bilateral or multilateral cooperation anywhere in the world, and
- Secondly, through implementation projects that are focused on the UNECE region – Which, by the way, has 11 landlocked low and middle-income transition economies, including Kazakhstan.

Tomorrow, during the thematic meeting, I will present the international work that the UNECE in trade facilitation. Today, I would like to take the first 3 priorities under the Almaty Programme of Action and briefly illustrate the importance of being interconnected for their implementation, using activities from the UNECE as examples.

The first priority is transit policy. Transit transport systems, by their very nature, require cooperative arrangements and coordination between countries. In theory, this could be done via multiple bilateral agreements, but this would be costly and inefficient.

To address this issue, the UNECE developed the 1975 TIR transit convention which is open to any interested country. After more than 35 years of implementation, the TIR convention now has 68 contracting parties and supports around 3 million TIR transport operations each year, thus widely contributing to trade in our region and beyond. This makes the TIR convention a successful example of the benefits to be gained from broad, rules-based cooperation in the area of trade procedures.

The second priority is infrastructure development and maintenance. Here, in Almaty, you are 4600 kilometres from Berlin and 3100 kilometres from Moscow. In addition, you are 2240 kilometres from the nearest ocean port in Karachi, Pakistan and 2570 kilometres from the second nearest port at Badar Abbas in Iran – and reaching either of these ports will take you through at least three countries. And, even if you reach a seaport, trade between Asia and Europe via maritime transport now has to cope with increasingly congested sea ports and straits. This illustrates the tremendous importance that regional roads and infrastructure have for the landlocked countries of Central Asia.

The Euro Asian Transport Links (EATL) project began as a joint UNECE and ESCAP project working with 18 countries (this has now grown to 27) across Europe and Asia and it promotes Euro-Asian Transport solutions through coordinated planning, investment and priority setting.

The development of Euro–Asian inland transport solutions is a long-term undertaking that requires strong political will and the commitment of all countries concerned, as well as intensive follow-up work. The results presented in this Study confirm the strong commitment of the participating countries to a global partnership for development and will provide a solid basis for the future.

To highlight the current state of developments, a Euro-Asian Transport Links study will be launched in 6 months during the Ministerial Meeting of the UNECE’s Inland Transport Committee, on 26 February 2013.

The main result of this Study is the updated EATL Investment Plan that can be used by countries as the basis for more detailed national investment strategies. This Investment Plan includes 311 priority transport infrastructure projects along the main Euro–Asian routes for a total cost of US$ 215 billion. The study also includes the analysis of non-physical obstacles and a comparative study of sea and overland transport options. All these analyses have led to recommendations that can be used as the basis of ambitious trade and transport facilitation programmes.
In addition, the project resulted in the development of an EATL linked Geographic Information System (GIS) database and related Internet applications that provide a twenty-first century tool to support multi-country investment planning in an innovative way.

The Euro Asian Transport Links Project is an outstanding example of partnerships and cooperation both between UN Regional Commissions and between the 27 participating countries as well as of the benefits to be reaped from such cooperation.

The third priority, which I will talk about very briefly, is International Trade and Trade Facilitation. Often we think of trade facilitation as being linked to procedures and regulations within a single country. However, there are a number of areas where cooperation and coordination across countries can significantly increase the impact of trade facilitation.

One is border clearance, where the coordination of procedures by the countries concerned, based upon international best practices and agreements, can significantly reduce waiting and clearance times. UNECE supports cooperation and coordination for border clearance through the UN Convention on Harmonization of Frontier Controls and the joint OSCE and UNECE handbook of best practices at border crossings.

Another is the exchange, between countries, of trade-related data to support transport corridors, expedited clearance, Customs Unions and a range of other trade related activities and arrangements. The UNECE supports this through both its work on trade data standards and its advisory support to member States.

One example of advisory support is work that the UNECE has undertaken with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia where, prior to the break-up of the former Yugoslavia, a shipment from Skopje to Ljubljana (now in Slovenia) took around 7 hours by truck. Today, that same shipment has to pass through several frontiers and can take up to 2 to 3 days. To reduce this time we have been working with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to streamline their national export procedures, and to develop agreements with other countries in Southeast Europe for data sharing based on a commonly agreed data set for transit goods that should eventually allow the exporting country to forward shipment data to all onward border crossing points, in return for expedited clearance.

There are two other important trade areas where I believe that interconnectivity and cooperation play a large role.

The first is Aid for Trade. For landlocked Developing Countries, there is much to be gained in coordinating Aid-for-Trade developments regionally in order to obtain the synergies that I have described earlier and in order to share experiences and support increased regional, south-south (or east-east) trade. This is one of the reasons that UNECE has so strongly supported, together with ESCAP, the SPECA Aid for Trade Initiative in Central Asia.

The second is food security. Ensuring that Landlocked Developing Countries are effectively engaged and represented in the global policy dialogue on this issue, which is of such key importance to their populations, will require stronger political alliances and coordination among landlocked developing countries than what we see today.
The benefits of coordination and working together seem evident and not so difficult – and yet, as I mentioned earlier, we often seem to fail to act in our own self-interest.

Perhaps, in part, because working together is not always easy. Neighbouring countries can be like family – you live with them all the time – and so you see all of their imperfections – and they see all of your imperfections. So how do successful families, full of imperfect people, support one another and move forward? Much, I believe, like successful regions -through common projects and by having neutral places, like the kitchen table, where everyone feels supported and common projects can be identified and discussed.

The United Nations provides a neutral platform, much like the family kitchen table, where countries, with their development partners and other stakeholders, can discuss and develop shared objectives and common projects.

The UN regional commissions provide an institutional framework, at a regional and sub-regional level, for these discussions, interconnections and projects as well as for linking regional realities to the global picture. The strength of the Regional Commissions is that we are in the middle, small enough to be aware of individual countries and big enough to see a larger picture, and that is why I believe that we are well placed to work with Landlocked Developing Countries in order to help you reap the greatest possible benefit from being in an Interconnected World.

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