

**Opening Statement by Mr. Andrey Vasilyev,
Deputy Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
at the Trade Policy Forum and SPECA Thematic Working Group on Trade**

Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, 11-13 May 2016

Your Excellency, Minister Bazarov,
Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mr. Osakwe, colleagues from WTO and other partner organizations,

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe is honoured by the opportunity to work with you in order to support this important Trade Policy and Trade Facilitation Forum as well as the meeting of the SPECA Thematic Working Group on Trade which will take place on Friday.

To begin, let me thank our hosts from Turkmenistan, who have shown, through their hospitality and cooperation, their willingness to contribute to both new and renewed forms of regional and international cooperation.

The contributions of Turkmenistan in such areas as environmental protection, sustainable energy, transport and now trade, already have had a strong impact on regional cooperation in Central Asia.

Since September of 2015, the UN has lived and worked according to the rhythm of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

All UN organizations, agencies and funds as well as many development partners are working with UN member States

- to help them analyze their readiness to implement the Sustainable Development Goals;
- prepare action plans
- and define, where appropriate, the needed technical assistance for achieving the SDGs.

The clock is ticking for the planet, and if we do not take action now to implement the Sustainable Development Goals, tomorrow may be too late.

Unfortunately, there are concrete examples from this region

– take for example the fate of the Aral Sea –

which indicate the huge risks that we will be accepting if we do not take the challenges of sustainable development seriously.

In our responses to these challenges,

- we have to collaborate on regional and multilateral levels,
- with a multitude of partners,
- in order to avoid any worsening of the problems we face

and in order to ensure,

- finally,

that the world we leave our children and grandchildren is a better world than the one in which we live now.

The Sustainable Development Goals in the area of trade contribute to this objective by supporting economic development and, thus, the elimination of extreme poverty.

Building predictable rules into the fabric of the global trading system will not solve all of the world's problems.

But it will make a very concrete and essential contribution to Sustainable Development.

We expect that this Trade Policy Forum, and the SPECA Thematic Working Group meeting of this week, will directly contribute to the achievement of the SDGs and, most specifically, SDG 17.10: "Promote the multilateral rules-based trading system".

Today, the world is finishing one stage in the formation of the multilateral, rules-based trading system, and is entering into another.

The SPECA region is one of the last in the world in which, until very recently, more than half of the countries were not members of the World Trade Organization.

Only now is the balance tilting, when 4 out of the 7 SPECA countries are or will very soon be WTO Members.

We, at the UNECE, are very pleased that we were able to help some of the SPECA countries in the pre- and post-accession reforms, which have been needed in order to meet WTO requirements.

Notably, we are proud of the results of our assistance to the countries in the area of trade facilitation.

Those achievements will now help these countries in their preparations for the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement and, for those who are not yet WTO members, their accession preparations.

We are also particularly pleased to have been able to collaborate with the WTO secretariat on the organization of the meetings this week.

We also greatly appreciate the ambition of Turkmenistan, a country which is not yet a candidate for WTO membership, to host this important regional meeting and to learn more about the WTO and the international trading system.

I strongly encourage all of the SPECA countries to use this occasion and to build on it, in order to establish increased regional collaboration for trade development and in trade negotiations.

Your peoples are very close to one another, sharing history and many aspects of their cultures.

-- Thus, you can understand each-others' problems better than anyone else.

So, you need to look for ways of developing and preserving the cooperation which we are seeking to strengthen this week,

- in the face of WTO negotiations
- as well as implementation of the WTO agreements.

Finally, the United Nations is undergoing now a major reform of the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA).

This Programme supports regional cooperation in Central Asia in several key areas, including water, energy and environment, trade, transport, statistics, knowledge-based development, and gender and economy.

Capacity-building and other forms of technical assistance successfully contribute to progress in these areas.

The Economic Forum and Governing Council of SPECA, which took place in Dushanbe in November 2015, under the chairmanship of Mr. Nazrizoda, First Deputy Minister of Economic Development and Trade of Tajikistan, outlined the main directions for the restructuring of SPECA and the new objectives for the various Thematic Working Groups under SPECA.

These Thematic Working Groups will carry the primary burden of the subregional work in SPECA on the SDGs.

This week's meeting of the SPECA TWG on Trade will be the first Thematic Working Group to meet after the decisions taken on the reform.

We see it as being an important test of the newly defined *modus operandi* of the SPECA working groups which are expected to help us to move forward the process of change and inject a new dynamism into SPECA and its activities.

I am looking forward to a serious and exciting discussion on highly topical issues over the next few days,

and hope that we will be able to conclude our work with concrete, pragmatic recommendations, which will contribute to strengthened regional economic cooperation and integration in Central Asia.

I thank you.