



Opening remarks by Mr. Marek Belka

Executive Secretary
United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

Delivered at the

“Roundtable: Regional Dimension of Transit Co-operation”

as part of

High-level plenary meeting of the UN general Assembly devoted to the
midterm review of the Almaty Programme of Action

3 October 2008
New York City

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Mr. Cheick Sidi Diarra and his office for organizing this roundtable and for inviting the UNECE and other Regional Commissions to participate.

Let me try to complement Mr. Sidi Diarra's opening statement with introductory remarks of my own. In this regard, I wish to say a few words about UN Regional Commissions' contribution to the implementation of the "Almaty Programme of Action" (APA).

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe is one of five UN Regional Commissions which are operational arms of the UN in the area of economic development. They have all been, directly or indirectly, involved in the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action. Not surprisingly, the extent of their involvement has varied depending on the mandate and priorities of each regional commission.

For example, in Asia, UNESCAP focuses on transport infrastructure and trade facilitation; in Africa, ECA merges its work on WTO negotiations and Aid for Trade Initiative with the initiatives related to the Almaty Programme of Action while, in Latin America, at ECLAC, stress is placed on international trade and integration. UNECE takes a holistic approach and has developed facilitation tools in both transport and trade. In a few minutes the panellists will provide us with more details.

You may be surprised to know that almost half of the world's landlocked countries are UNECE member States, of which nine are classified as *developing*. They are all landlocked but different in many respects.

You may think considerable differences between UNECE members are a handicap. It is not so.

The differences among landlocked members are in fact one of the UNECE's institutional strengths. For example, experience of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia has shown that "challenges of landlockedness" can be turned into profitable business. In Kazakhstan, where the "National Transport Strategy until 2015" is being implemented, a broadly similar approach to dealing with the "landlockedness" is pursued. Kazakhstan is zeroing in on its hub location in Central Asia to take advantage of vast opportunities in the transit and service sectors.

The UNECE landlocked members also include a number of former Soviet Union republics as well as the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. These countries are defined as "landlocked *developing* countries". Interestingly, twenty years ago, they were neither landlocked, nor developing nor countries. I am highlighting this to stress the complexities of policies required to lift these countries out of the recently acquired landlocked developing status.

In this complex world, I believe best practices should be shared and disseminated widely. The UN and its Regional Commissions – due to differentiated membership - offer unique fora for landlocked countries to do so. And, as I just explained, some Central European and Central Asian countries are doing it successfully.

Unfavourable geographic factors put landlocked *developing* countries at a distinct economic disadvantage. Export markets are typically far away. Transport infrastructure is often inadequate. Border crossing times – by truck or train – are too long. Transit towards coastal access is cumbersome. At the same time, many landlocked countries in the UNECE region have the costliest documentary trade procedures in the world.

This seemingly lose-lose situation opens up an opportunity for involvement by UN Regional Commissions to promote their work: UN legal instruments, trade facilitation tools and, in general, costs/benefits of integration into global supply chains. I am pleased to inform you that this is being done in all Regional Commissions.

For landlocked *developing* countries, to integrate into the world economy, efficient transport and transit systems – including effective institutions to support them - are essential. To assist in making this happen, considerable efforts have been made throughout the UN system. The UNECE as well as other UN Regional Commissions have provided the necessary support within their mandates and according to their expertise.

The UNECE, for its part, has promoted accession to and effective implementation of its international conventions, agreements and protocols. The UNECE legal instruments are applicable in all modes of inland transport: road, rail, inland waterways and inter-modal transport.

Trade facilitation is also an important element of the Almaty Programme of Action. Trade tools created at the UNECE offer many possibilities to lower the cost of trade. The UNECE tools such as the only global standard for Electronic Data Interchange and 33 trade facilitation recommendations help cope with inefficient trade procedures. I encourage you to take advantage of them.

Other Regional Commissions have also undertaken a number of initiatives to lower the cost of trading. Today's roundtable provides an excellent opportunity to promote the successful and persevering work of UN Regional Commissions which - regrettably - is often not widely known or acknowledged.

In closing, internationally harmonized transport regulations and effective public institutions help make physical transport infrastructure productive, safe and secure. In this regard, the UNECE along with other Regional Commissions stand ready to assist you to use UN legal instruments, recommendations and expertise.