

UN-DESA and UN-ECE
International Conference

“Strengthening Integration of the Economies in Transition into the
World Economy through Economic Diversification”

Welcoming remarks by
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(UN-ECE)
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Delivered by Robert Shelburne

Mr. Belka was unable to be here today, and asked me to make a few remarks on his behalf.

First of all, he wanted to welcome the speakers that have agreed to participate in today’s conference. After looking over the agenda, he mentioned that he knew or had worked with some of you in the past, and was disappointed that he could not greet you here in Geneva.

We also extend the same welcome to those of you in our round tables and those government representatives in the audience; we look forward to your participation in the discussions.

And finally, we welcome our colleagues from DESA in NY and thank them for organizing such an outstanding meeting.

For those of you from out of town, we understand that all the hotels are booked and many of you have ended up staying in inconvenient locations. We apologize, but let me assure you that the situation is even worse for those of us living here and hunting for a place to live.

This event here in Geneva is important to the ECE for several reasons. The theme of this conference, that being strengthening the integration of the transition economies into the world economy, has been one of the central objectives of the ECE since its creation by ECOSOC in 1947. Of course, during the cold war there were really two world economies, and all we could hope for was to promote cooperation between them.

Since 1989, however, much has been achieved in integrating these two worlds, and we can now perhaps see the light at the end of the tunnel. Nevertheless, much remains to be done, especially in diversifying the transition economies and making their growth more sustainable, and I hope this conference will provide important guidance on how to proceed.

Many of the major challenges facing the world such as global warming, terrorism, disarmament, or global pandemics can only be addressed if the transition economies are fully integrated into the world's political and economic systems. Thus the ability of the world to address its most pressing problems is very much dependent on the achieving the objectives set forth in this conference.

This meeting will provide us an updated and detailed examination of the economic situation in the transition economies. It will also focus on many of the major challenges that they face and the policies needed to achieve them.

With the discontinuation of the Economic Analysis Division here at the ECE, we no longer have the same level of in-house expertise, and are therefore thankful that this meeting could be held here, so we could fully benefit from it. That of course does not mean that the ECE has no expertise on many of these matters, and this is shown by the strong presence of ECE staff on the agenda of this meeting.

The outputs of this conference will provide important input into the Secretary-General's Report on the Transition Economies which is being prepared by DESA for the 63rd General Assembly. We look forward to reading that report.

This meeting also will provide some very important input into the ECE's regional report on Financing for Development. As many of you are probably aware, there will be a conference in Doha in November of this year to review the commitments that were made by the world community in Monterrey, Mexico in 2002.

The document that came out of that conference, known as the Monterrey Consensus, spelled out a number of principles focusing on how to get more financial resources committed towards promoting economic development. This includes better utilization of domestic resources and just as importantly, increasing the amount of external financial and

technical assistance available to developing countries. The last General Assembly has asked the regional commissions to hold consultations with their regional financial and development institutions to assess the progress that has been made in achieving what was agreed to in Monterrey.

This conference should be part of consultation process, since it will examine many of the topics that are central to the FfD agenda. This includes trade, capital flows, remittances, infrastructure investment, establishing growth promoting domestic institutions, and discussing what the international organizations can do to promote integration and development.

Therefore, as we analyze these aspects and discuss the policy options for best ensuring that they contribute to sustainable economic development, I want to encourage all the presenters and discussants to consider how these lessons may be reflected in the FfD review document. And for the round tables, we have asked the moderators to address this question as well.

I have placed some copies of the Monterrey Consensus on the table by the door for those of you that have maybe forgotten the specific principles that were agreed to.

Finally let me thank DESA for the format they have chosen for this meeting. Often we go to conferences where there is presentation and then time for one or two quick questions, and that's it. Their plan of having one or two presentations which are then followed by a true round table discussion by government officials or other practitioners, will allow us to understand not just what one person thinks; but instead will allow us to determine on what issues is there general agreement and where there is disagreement, and where academic advice makes sense and where actual policy makers think it does not, or can not be implemented for some reason.

Thus, let me now turn this meeting over to the Director of Development and Policy Analysis at DESA, Robert Vos.