

**Welcoming words by Ms Astrid Schomaker, Director, Global Sustainable Development,
Directorate-General for Environment, European Commission,**

Vice-Minister, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Truly it is a pleasure to address this 10th meeting of the Working Group on Environment and Climate Change and to say a few words for the opening of this occasion.

We are happy to see that our working group has actually become a point of reference in our joint endeavour to address environmental and climate challenges.

We see this Platform as an excellent forum for sharing experiences and best practice and promoting regional dialogue and cooperation. In many ways we hope that today's meeting will further contribute to our common engagement on the green transition, which I believe rightly is the headline of today's meeting.

I don't have to tell you or us that worrying trends that threaten our climate, our nature, biodiversity, and, thus, also our prosperity and well-being, call for an integrated approach and cooperation between all countries and stakeholders in Europe and beyond.

As we face, what the UN Secretary General has termed "triple global crisis" of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, all of which are compounded by unsustainable resource use, our response has to be swift, strong and comprehensive. For us it is clear that business as usual is not an option. We needed a paradigm shift in our approach to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation, and at the same time create new opportunities for green growth. None of us can do that alone. We need cooperation. We need to learn from each other.

And so, when we met in Brussels in February last year, which seems very long ago, we were discussing then what at the time was a very new initiative of the European Commission – the European Green Deal. Now, the implementation of this Green Deal is in full swing. We made a lot of progress in our strategic policy and legislative frameworks on climate change, biodiversity, pollution, climate goals, circular economy, agriculture, food production, and forestry, but also in relation to cross-cutting tools, such as our sustainable finance, private finance towards climate objectives.

And of course, a lot of work is still ahead of us. What is crucial, I think, for us is to say that the Covid-19 crisis has reinforced our determination, because we believe it shows how fragile our economic model is and how the extent of our interference with nature is reducing the resilience of both our economy and societies. And this is why today, the European Green Deal guides our efforts to recover from the pandemic.

From the perspective of the European Union, we are very glad to see today and tomorrow's discussions will to a large extent be structured around the pillars, which are also identified in the European Green Deal as main pillars for action.

We are convinced that what is needed is a global green transition. It is clear that our individual paths may be different. But our ambitions must be the same. And to this end, we intend to work ever more closely with international partners, including and in particular Central Asian countries, in regional fora such as this one, but also on the multilateral level.

In the coming two months we will have two milestone events – CBD COP-15 and climate COP-26.

At CBD COP15, we have a real chance to pull back from the brink of an irreversible biodiversity crisis. This is why we will propose the adoption of an ambitious post-2020 global biodiversity framework that puts nature on a path to recovery by 2030. We count on your support for this initiative.

And second, in the context of climate COP-26, we also count on partners to increase the climate ambition and to deliver on the rules and guidelines for the implementation of the Paris Agreement in a detailed, comprehensive, robust, and operational manner.

So, in conclusion, I believe that this meeting gives us an opportunity to exchange on our ongoing work in response to our common challenges, but also to reaffirm our commitment and to increase ambition both in Europe and across Central Asia to put concrete action for the benefit of our societies and economies.

I wish all of us a lot of success in the coming two days.

Thank you very much for listening.