

Remarks by the Director General
on the occasion of the UNECE Launch of the Sub-Regional Innovation Policy Outlook 2020

Wednesday, 25 November 2020 - 10.00-12.00 CET

Ms. Olga Algayerova, Executive Secretary of United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE),

Ms. Anna Jardfelt, Ambassador of the Permanent Mission of Sweden to the United Nations,

Vice Ministers, Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- I am pleased to participate in the launch of the 2020 Sub-regional Innovation Policy Outlook (IPO). I congratulate the UNECE for this timely report. It will assist policymakers in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus (EESC) to evaluate their national innovation systems.
- More than ever, innovation has become a central driver of economic growth and sustainable development. Irrespective of their levels of development, countries are adopting new or improving existing innovation policy frameworks. This trend has strengthened over the last decade.
- From our work on the WIPO Global Innovation Index (GII), we see that countries are increasingly interested in benchmarking their innovation systems against their peers. It also gives them an impetus to collect innovation metrics to inform future policies. Most countries in the Sub-region have constituted GII task forces to improve their innovation rankings.
- The EESC sub-region has a number of key strengths for building strong innovation ecosystems. These include: high levels of educational attainment, a strong culture of public research and gender balance among knowledge-intensive employees.

- That said, the report makes it clear that each country has specific attributes that shape their innovation ecosystem. It is understandable that countries are keen to identify which policies work and which do not, and how to adapt policies to the requirements of their economies.
- The UNECE report proposes an assessment framework adapted to the economic, political, structural, and institutional factors of the sub-region. It does so by constructively using the GII data we produce. We appreciate this work that complements ours.
- The report will inform us in our own interactions with the region. We intend to place more emphasis on customizing our assistance for specific needs identified in your respective innovation strategies.
- Through our work, we are aware that all the regional countries have potentials to harness IP for development. It could be the technology start-ups and software development hubs. Our plan to support Technoparks in the region is one way to promote them. We also know that the region is strong in traditional and heritage products. We are aware of the success of *Divin*, and we are excited to be a part of the next success story.
- Many of your countries are also putting in place legal and policy frameworks to allow SMEs a bigger role in the national economic landscape. We have to think how to sustain an innovation ecosystem that helps SMEs grow their businesses and bring their products to international markets.
- The Report highlights the limited linkages among actors within the innovation system. One of our priorities is to support knowledge transfer between academia and industry. Expanding the network of Technology and Innovation Support Centers (TISCs) is a good way to connect innovation to market.

- Finally, your report makes references to the stress on national innovation systems and policies due to the COVID-19 crisis. One of the findings of the GII 2020 is that the money to fund innovative ventures is indeed drying up.
- It is therefore important that the pandemic does not slow the innovation policy progress made over the last decade. We also need to capitalize on opportunities created by this unforeseen situation. Some of the promising areas are in health innovation, teleworking, education, e-commerce and mobility.
- In conclusion, I thank Ms. Algayerova and her team for the impressive work that has gone into the report. I hope that the report will trigger further cooperation among countries in the sub-region, leading to innovation policies with more impact.
- I thank you.