Distinguished participants,

- It is indeed a pleasure to participate in the Fourth session of the Ministerial Conference on Transport. Let me first thank the UNESCAP for organizing this timely event. Transport matters as it is a key enabler of economic growth and development. Smoothly functioning transport networks have proved to be of particular significance for maintaining freight flows and most importantly, ensuring supply of essential goods. This online meeting is a wonderful occasion to reflect on past achievements and discuss current challenges and needs as well as opportunities for development of more resilient and sustainable transport systems.

- Georgia with its favourable location between East and West is not only a beneficiary of regional connectivity but also its great contributor. It has long served as a getaway to key markets, especially for landlocked countries of Central Asia. For the development and enhancement of transport links between Europe and Asia we have been closely cooperating with the UNESCAP, TRACECA, CAREC, etc. Georgia is also part of such new routes as Middle Corridor, Lapis Lazuli, Caspian Sea- Black Sea that allow us to further expand our transport connections and boost intra-and-inter regional trade.

- Taking this opportunity, I would like to say a couple of words about Georgia’s efforts in improvement of hard and soft infrastructure. Georgia has significantly enhanced its transport network over the course of past several years. Baku-Tbilisi-Kars new railway line was opened in October 2017 making direct rail transportation between Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey possible. The BTK has already been established as an important segment of the wider Europe-Asia Corridor – the Middle Corridor. Freight volumes transported in a pilot regime via BTK corridor are steadily increasing, (namely, by 89% in 2020 and by over 85.4% in January-April 2021). Further to that, Georgia’s main railway line is being improved under the modernization project which aims to increase the capacity, improve safety and optimize travel time. Railway projects are high importance for us at besides being convenient for freight and passenger transportation it is sustainable for environment. As for road infrastructure, over 250 km of East-West Highway have already been constructed and further works continue in an active manner. Besides, efforts are directed to attract more investments for logistics infrastructure development in Georgia. Some studies and assessments in this direction have already been conducted.
I must also mention the extension of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) to the Eastern Partnership countries which is an important step forward towards the improvement of transport connectivity between the EaP countries and the EU. Notably, 3.4 bln Euro worth of priority transport infrastructure projects of Georgia across all modes of transport (road, rail, port, logistics, aviation) were identified in the TEN-T Investment Action Plan which shall be implemented until 2030.

Significant progress is being made in terms of removing non-physical barriers to transport through legal approximation with European and international norms.

Moreover, Georgia’s achievements in terms of simplifying and streamlining customs procedures are well-noticeable - introduction of integrated Border Management concept, implementation of 100% Risk based customs control, use of the Unified Electronic System of Licenses, Permits and Certificates are just few to mention. Besides, we actively work with neighbouring countries to further facilitate cross-border transportation. Georgia enjoys advance exchange information system with Turkey, Azerbaijan and Ukraine.

Fostering international cooperation is key to enhancing regional transport connectivity. In this regard, let me highlight several issues that we consider to be of particular importance for further development and operationalization of our transport corridors:

- **Increasing safety and Interoperability** through harmonization of standards and elimination of bottlenecks;
- Further development of **multimodal transport** to ensure uninterrupted movement of goods from one mode to another and benefit more from well-integrated transport networks;
- **Corridor digitalization** and wider application of modern technologies to achieve greater efficiency through establishment of paperless environment and further facilitation of data and information exchange.
- We put high importance on **improving black Sea connectivity**. With assistance of EU, for which we are very thankful, next year we will have an updated study which will identify feasible directions for ferry/feeder services on the Black sea.

- Georgia as a transit country had more responsibility to ensure safe and uninterrupted freight transportation through its territory. In close cooperation with our partner countries and international community, we managed to minimize supply chain disruptions. Transport figures also indicate on that. Despite the challenges, international freight volumes transported via rail and road increased in Georgia within January –October 2021 compared to the previous year, more precisely, by 13.0% and 12.2% respectively.
• In closing, let me once again highlight the importance of strengthening transport connectivity and express readiness for closer cooperation to deliver more tangible results in this direction.

• Thank You!