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Report on Cooperation with other Regional Economic Commissions

Note by the secretariat

1. During the last year the UN/ECE has strengthened its collaboration with the other United Nations regional commissions resulting in a more active policy with regard to the introduction and implementation of norms, standards and best practices developed by the UN/ECE in the different regions. In support of this effort, several joint expert group meetings and seminars have been carried out with the other regional commissions.
2. In trade facilitation close collaboration has developed between the UN/ECE and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the UN/ECE has supported an initiative to develop national trade facilitation bodies and to introduce trade facilitation techniques in the region covered by ESCWA. To that end, a member of the secretariat participated in November 1999 in an expert group meeting held in Beirut.
3. In addition, close cooperation on agricultural standards started in 1999 between UN/ECE and the UN/ESCWA secretariat. In support of that cooperation, a member of the secretariat and the Chairman of the Working Party on Standardization of Perishable Produce and Quality Development took part in a seminar on agricultural standards in April 1999 in Beirut. More than 20 UN/ECE standards concerning produce of interest to the region covered by ESCWA have been translated into Arabic and distributed among the countries in the region. In cooperation with the Spanish Government UN/ECE Standards for perishable produce are being translated into Spanish for distribution to South American countries via ECLAC.
4. From 2 to 5 February 1999 a workshop on standardization in Arab countries was organized by ESCWA in Amman. The secretary to the UN/ECE Working Party on Technical Harmonization and Standardization Policies (WP.6) was invited to the meeting and made a presentation on UN/ECE assistance to transition economies on standardization policy issues.

5. Discussions at the meeting revealed a weak institutional structure for standardization and conformity assessment developments in the majority of ESCWA member States. In this context, participants expressed their interest in WP.6 activities, especially those with a regional dimension, namely the UN/ECE recommendations on standardization policies and the preparation of an international agreement on technical harmonization issues.
6. The UN/ECE has also had the opportunity to work closely with the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and it has been agreed to carry out a workshop on trade facilitation at ECA headquarters in Addis Ababa to increase awareness about trade facilitation issues in Africa.
7. ECLAC has for long participated in awareness-raising activities and is disseminating information on UN/CEFACT to many parties implementing trade facilitation measures in the region.
8. The UN/ECE and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) have closely collaborated on selected trade facilitation issues for a number of years leading, for example, to the issuance of training guides on electronic data interchange. Joint seminars have been developed and ESCAP has set up a mirror site of the UN/ECE trade facilitation site TRAFIX (WWW.unicc.org/unece/trafix). The two regional commissions are also actively collaborating on trade facilitation issues under the Special Programme for Central Asian Republics (SPECA), which includes elements on border crossing facilitation as well as trade facilitation.
9. In addition to this broad-based cooperation in trade facilitation UN/ECE is working together with ESCAP on private financing for public infrastructure. The improvement of infrastructure - roads, railways, power, water and waste disposal and telecommunications - is critical for economic development and finding the huge amounts of money needed is a critical challenge for Governments. More and more Governments are experimenting with new techniques to attract private finance for infrastructure projects but, in Asia, many of the results have proved disappointing. To this end, the UN/ECE is cooperating with ESCAP to help the Government of Bangladesh to successfully attract private funding for its infrastructure and to avoid some of the problems that have occurred elsewhere.
10. Under the auspices of ESCAP, the UN/ECE Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) Group has prepared guidelines for the Government of Bangladesh that will help it negotiate concession contracts with foreign investors. The secretariat expects that these guidelines, with minor modifications, will also be useful to many UN/ECE member States. The BOT Group has also undertaken an evaluation of the legal and regulatory framework for public-private partnerships. These issues were discussed at a high-level joint ESCAP-UN/ECE consultative meeting held in Dhaka from 15 to 18 February 2000.