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### ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

#### COMMITTEE ON TRADE, INDUSTRY AND ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

#### AD HOC GROUP OF EXPERTS ON THE CHEMICAL INDUSTRY

Third session, 26-28 April 2000  
(Item 8(a) of the provisional agenda)

### CHEMICAL STATISTICS

#### Discussion note by the secretariat

1. The chemical statistics database is presently maintained by the *Enterprise Development Section* of the Trade Division of ECE. It was created over thirty years ago, during the period when the chemical programme was administered by the Chemical Industry Committee which reported directly to the Commission. In 1990 it was transferred to the newly-created Working Party on the Chemical Industry and administered by the Industry and Technology Division. Upon dissolution of the Working Party in 1997, the responsibility was given to the *ad hoc Group of Experts on the Chemical Industry*.
2. The database is a unique collection of data obtained by direct questionnaires to statistical offices, federations, and ministries. Of the approximately 47 present member States of ECE with any type of chemical activity (including simply imports and exports), responses to the questionnaires during at least the past ten years have always exceeded 90% of possible responses and have occasionally reached 98% (i.e. all but one country responding).

3. Data collected has changed over the years, depending on resources available. It was also significantly modified as a result of a Task Force on Chemical Statistics meeting held in December 1997. At present, the data collected and recorded in the database covers aggregate data for the chemical industry (gross output, value added, gross fixed capital formation, production and price indices, number of employees) as well as production, import and export of basic chemicals (39 items) and final chemical products (41 items) by country in each member State.<sup>1</sup>

4. The questionnaire has been substantially modified and simplified during the past several years, and can now be made available in electronic form. This should permit easier data collection for the responding agency, as well as easier and more reliable data entry for the ECE statisticians. Because of the special nature of the chemical industry, however, a major part of the database maintenance and publishing effort is in the preparation and maintenance of the large number of footnotes which accompany many tables. This has also been greatly simplified during the last two years but still requires significant effort.

5. The database contains information from 1975 onwards in an Excel format; earlier data is available in typewritten or handwritten form by country, much of which is reproduced in the set of *Annual Reviews of the Chemical Industry* published by ECE since 1970. The current Annual Review series is typically published in an advance edition for presentation to the annual sessions of the *ad hoc Group of Experts on the Chemical Industry* in April, and a final printed edition in June or July of each year. The data is reported as a three-year time series.

6. Requests for information from the database come from a very wide variety of questioners, from all parts of the globe. These requests are frequently from universities, as well as from professional organizations and consultants. Responding to a request typically takes approximately one man-hour, but of course can be considerably more extensive. Requests which would be expected to last more than one man-day are rare.

7. Resources made available to the secretariat for maintenance of the database have been greatly reduced during the past three years as a result of the restructuring of ECE. It is not certain that the database can be retained in its present form in the future. Alternative scenarios for its continuity should be raised during the session.

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<sup>1</sup> Member States usually cannot report all data, as some data are company confidential and other data are difficult for the reporting agency in the country to obtain.