



**Economic and Social
Council**

Distr.
GENERAL

TRADE/WP.6/2002/2/Add.3
24 September 2002

ENGLISH ONLY

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

COMMITTEE FOR TRADE, INDUSTRY
AND ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT
Working Party on Technical Harmonization
and Standardization Policies
Twelfth session, 28-30 October 2002
Item 4 of the provisional agenda

**UNECE FORUM ON MARKET SURVEILLANCE
(Geneva, 29 October 2002)**

**Information on the RAPEX (Rapid Alert Information System on
Dangerous Products) for the countries acceding to the EU**

This background paper has been prepared by Mr. István Geri, Deputy Director General, General Inspectorate for Consumer Protection, Hungary.

It is presented for **information** to delegates and is reproduced in the form and language in which it was received by the secretariat.

The free movement of goods, one of the pillars of the European Union, involves tasks for the authorities responsible for market surveillance in the member states. Once they cross the EU's external borders, goods can move freely in the internal space without borders. Unfortunately the same applies to products which, for one reason or another, present a safety hazard threatening consumers' life and health.

This is one of the reasons why the rapid flow of information and cooperation among the authorities of the member states is so important. In practice this takes place in different ways at different levels. From the point of view of product safety the most important information system is the Rapid Alert Information System on Dangerous Products (RAPEX). RAPEX is the European Union's official notification system on hazardous products. Participation is mandatory for all member states. The Brussels Commission is notified of the details of products found to present a risk and therefore banned from the market in any of the member states. The EU Commission then relays this information to all members.

In countries expecting integration into the European Union there is a trend for products appearing in the markets of one country to also reach the markets of other countries. Similarly to the European Union, the same applies to products, which endanger consumers' life and health.

The market surveillance authorities of the Central and Eastern European region have recognised the need for international cooperation. The central market surveillance agencies of Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia created the market surveillance rapid information system for the region on 23 March 1999. An observer at the time, the Slovenian agency is also among the founding members.

The system follows the structure of the Union's RAPEX system, hence its name, Transitional Rapid Information Exchange of Information on Dangerous Products for the countries (TRAPEX). It is in fact a transitory system, as, unlike RAPEX, it is based upon voluntary membership and operates on an informal basis outside the European Union. Implementation of this cooperation was supported by the European Union through the PHARE scheme. The Université catholique de Louvain (Louvain-La-Neuve), Belgium, provided technical assistance.

According to the agreement between members, the Secretariat for Coordination of the system is operated by the central market surveillance agency of Hungary, the General Inspectorate for Consumer Protection (GICP).

In the beginning, members sent the data for the hazardous products they had banned directly to the Secretariat, which in turn relayed the information to all other members. Initial transfer of data by fax was replaced by electronic mail in 2000. A web site was created in 2001 to allow on-line communication.

Membership has also been expanding. The Slovenian market surveillance agency decided in favour of full membership followed by its counterparts in the Czech Republic, Cyprus and Malta. Currently, the notification system pursues its endeavours in the interest of 104 million consumers over an area of 1.1 million square kilometres.

The exchange of information, initially focused only on non-food type products, has also been stepped up to include food products. This meant the incorporation of new authorities from the member countries in the system.

The efficiency of TRAPEX is marked by the fact that participating authorities were alerted to hazardous products on 152 occasions in 2001. In 25 cases the products in the alert were also found in the markets of other countries. This positive experience led to three instances of cooperation with the EU's RAPEX system in 2001.

The technical standards of TRAPEX have been improving.

The Hungarian General Inspectorate for Consumer Protection, acting as systems host and Secretariat of Coordination, has undertaken software development. A new complex system in which data communication via E-mail is replaced by a shared international database was launched in June 2002. Expert staff from the member authorities are able to discuss professional issues on the Internet forum. Data queries and preparation of statistics according to different parameters is possible. Continuous working relations between the TRAPEX and RAPEX systems will become a reality. We are approaching the goal of allowing all TRAPEX participants to inform other member states as well as their own consumers in their national language.

Within the framework of developing the Hungarian market surveillance institutional system – supported by the EU and governmental funds – the Hungarian Central Market Surveillance Information System was set up, which was supplemented by a partner authority communication module during the development project and TRAPEX system was integrated with the internal information system of GICP.

Based on the experience generated so far, TRAPEX is heading for a promising future, thus serving as a good example of efficient international cooperation.

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