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ACTIVITIES DIRECTLY UNDER THE COMMITTEE

Report by the secretariat

Summary

The Committee on Trade, at its first session, requested that its programme of work and that of its subsidiary bodies be reviewed regularly “to ensure coherence of its activities with the overall objectives of the UNECE” (see ECE/TRADE/C/2006/10, para. 3(e)). The present document summarizes the activities that were carried out directly under the Committee (i.e., as opposed to those carried out by its subsidiary bodies) since its second session in October 2007.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. This report covers the following areas of work that are carried out directly under the Committee:

- (a) Trade policy-related work;
- (b) Multiplier Point information dissemination programme;
- (c) CD-ROM on Norms, Standards and Practices for Trade Facilitation and International Business.

II. TRADE POLICY-RELATED WORK

2. To support its trade policy discussions, the Secretariat of the Committee on Trade participated in two different interagency activities:

- (a) The United Nations “Interagency Cluster on Trade and Productive Capacity” of the United Nations Chief Executives Board (CEB);
- (b) The Executive Committee of Economic and Social Affairs (ECESA) “Working Group on Trade”.

A. Participation in the activities of the Interagency Cluster on Trade and Productive Capacities

3. The Interagency Cluster, coordinated by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), includes the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Trade Centre (ITC), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and all the United Nations Regional Commissions. The Cluster was formally launched during the UNCTAD XII Conference held in Accra in April 2008. The secretariat of the Committee on Trade actively participated in its launch. It has regularly attended the meetings of the Cluster and relayed information regarding ongoing technical assistance activities in the UNECE region, thus ensuring UNECE participation in the United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAF) projects of its region.

4. The aim of the Interagency Cluster is to:

- (a) contribute to more policy coherence, interagency cooperation and integrated activities on trade and productive sectors within the United Nations system and in particular at the country level;
- (b) contribute to the introduction of trade and productive sectors policy issues and operations, as appropriate in the “One UN Pilots” and in all United Nations-wide country level plans;
- (c) exchange experiences and information among secretariats on United Nations-wide coherence reform.

5. The Interagency Cluster also identified the need to enhance the training of Resident Coordinators and United Nations field staff in sectoral issues related to trade and productive capacity. To this end, the Cluster and the United Nations System Staff College (UNSSC) held a training workshop at the Staff College's campus in Turin, Italy, from 19-22 May 2008. This pilot training workshop, financed by UNDP, was entitled "Making Trade Work for the Millennium Development Goals" and was specifically designed for transition economies. The secretariat of the Committee on Trade acted as resource persons and contributed to the discussion on the concept of the training and follow-up activities.

B. Participation in the activities of the ECESA (Executive Committee of Economic and Social Affairs) Trade Cluster

6. The ECESA Trade Cluster serves as a forum for exchanging information and identifying areas of cooperation among the participating agencies, which are UNCTAD, the Regional Commissions, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The Group shares the common objective of strengthening the contribution of trade to the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, especially the Millennium Development Goals, and promoting the integration of developing countries and countries with economies in transition in the international trading system.

7. To progress towards this goal, the members of the Group review their programmes of work to identify areas of ongoing cooperation and make concrete proposals for further cooperation.

8. In 2008, the Group decided to focus its annual interagency publication on the topic of Aid for Trade. The report highlights the outlook of several United Nations Organizations regarding the role of Aid for Trade in trade and development.

9. The UNECE contribution to this report focuses specifically on the need for technical assistance in the area of technical regulations and standards. With traditional barriers to trade—such as tariffs and quotas—being progressively eliminated, the ability to comply with technical regulations and to use international standards emerge as key factors of success on national and international markets. Currently, the thrust of assistance in the area of trade-related standards is aimed at increasing compliance through the upgrading of relevant infrastructure and human resource development. The UNECE contribution argues for increasing resources for assistance in trade-related standardization matters. In addition, the UNECE emphasizes that resources should be used to envision and implement tailor-made, coherent and integrated strategies that will enable developing countries and countries with economies in transition to participate as full players in the standards development process.

10. The publication entitled "Aid for Trade and Development: Global and Regional Perspectives" was launched during a high-level UNCTAD XII pre-event in April 2008. It was compiled by UNCTAD and the United Nations University Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS) and is available online: <http://www.unctadxii.org/en/Programme/Other-Events/Parallel-and-Side-Events/Aid-for-Trade-perspectives-of-Regional-Commissions-/Documents>. It is also published by the Springer publishing company.

II. INFORMATION DISSEMINATION PROGRAMME: MULTIPLIER POINT NETWORK

11. The UNECE Multiplier Point information dissemination programme is aimed at facilitating trade within the UNECE region. It distributes information (including summaries in Russian) on UNECE activities, particularly those of the Committee on Trade, to enterprises and organizations in the private and public sectors.

12. The purpose of the programme is to reach out to a wider audience, especially in countries in transition, to support and promote practices and methods that help member States diversify and expand trade and investments. The network of Multiplier Points consists of private and governmental organizations, as well as not-for-profit organizations at national, regional and local levels, that specialize in trade and enterprise development. The secretariat sends these organizations information on the Committee's work. The Multiplier Points are expected to translate into local and national languages the UNECE publications, recommendations, norms, guidelines, documents and other sources of information, and distribute them to potential users.

13. The programme continued its close cooperation with UNDP, inviting its local offices to participate in the information dissemination activities in their country and to recommend local organizations as potential new Multiplier Points.

III. PUBLICATION OF THE NEW EDITION OF THE CD-ROM ON "NORMS, STANDARDS AND PRACTICES FOR TRADE FACILITATION AND INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS"

14. The third edition of the CD-ROM "Norms, Standards and Practices for Trade Facilitation and International Business" will be published in February 2009. It is a reference tool for a wide audience from the public and the private sector. The CD-ROM will offer an overview of all the recommendations, norms and standards, as well as related information developed by the Committee on Trade in the following areas:

- (a) Trade promotion and trade finance;
- (b) Trade facilitation recommendations;
- (c) Industry and enterprise development;
- (d) International legal and commercial practice;
- (e) Arbitration;
- (f) Technical harmonization and standardization policy;
- (g) Agricultural standards.

15. The new edition will contain close to 600 documents in English, French and Russian. It will feature a new visual interface that will allow the content of future revisions to be transferred directly to the UNECE website. The CD-ROM is a valuable tool for distributing and promoting the Committee's work and is regularly handed out to participants in capacity-building workshops as resource information.