Why was the CoE created?

The Centre was created to make UNECE’s work in PPP capacity building more effective. Its objectives are:

- Identify international PPP best practice;
- Provide governments with top quality information on best practice projects in PPPs from experiences around the world and to help them implement these practices successfully in better project delivery; and
- Build the national capability to do PPPs, encourage shared learning, especially between countries new to PPPs and those with mature PPP programmes

What is the role of UNECE in the Centre of Excellence? Are there any other organizations taking part in the establishment of the Centre of Excellence?

Well we did establish the Centre, having successfully obtained the approval of the UNECE’s 56 member states.

Going forward, we want to work very closely with our international partners in the CoE. The proposal after all to establish an International Centre of Excellence in PPP came as a result not of UNECE acting alone but rather as a result of cooperation with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and the United Nations Economic and Social and Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

Moreover, as those who participated at PPP Days 2012 last February will have observed, we work very closely with ADB and the WBI. This event was co–hosted by these three organisations. I personally have never experienced such close cooperation between international organisations as for this event. We are continuing this cooperation. For example, on 23 -25 October ADB, UNECE and the Ministry of Health of the Philippines will hold a Conference on PPPs in
health called ‘PPP in Health Manila 2012. At this event the Specialist Centre on PPPs in Health will be launched and ADB will be a close partner in the work of this Centre.

In addition, I would like to further develop cooperation with EPEC. They have built an impressive organisation at EIB in Luxembourg with first class outputs and we can act as a conduit for their materials, helping them to reach the wider international PPP community.

We hope to formalise our cooperation with these above mentioned organisations and others, soon.

What are the short term and long term strategies of the CoE?

In the next six to nine months we want to have 5 Specialist centres fully operational. We want within a year that the first outputs from these centres are made available to the international PPP community. Longer term we want the Centre to become a first point of contact open to any country seeking guidance on PPPs. We do not say that we can assist all the enquirers but we guarantee that if we cannot help ourselves, we will guide them in the right direction, that is to the specialist centres that most meet their needs or to another organisation with more expertise than we have.

Think of us giving guidance and acting us a compass to put Governments on the right road as they take the first steps on the difficult journey of developing their PPP programmes. The first steps and the first projects are crucial. The ECE region has much experience of countries where the early PPPs were unsuccessful and this experience has often tarnished the image of PPPs within the country and amongst the population and continues to have a negative effect many years afterwards.
How will the CoE and its SCs contribute to the national development of PPPs and thus improve the social and economic infrastructure for citizens?

We think by identifying best practice projects in specific sectors and then providing detailed information on these projects, namely the outline business case, the actual contracts and the project finance plans that had been used successfully, that governments can be inspired to replicate such projects in their own countries. It is not a question of just doing PPPs; rather it is to do the very best in PPP. The Specialist centres will be doing a great job if they can identify best practice in specific PPP sectors. I can assure you in many PPP sectors, you will not find good information on projects which have been successful. There are no centres which integrate the knowledge drawing on the experiences of projects around the world, identify best practices from what has worked and what has not worked and based on this knowledge, then disseminate such information to governments.

Of course governments have to be trained to use this information so that they can implement projects. The practices and procedures moreover have to be contextualised to different national and regional situations. Here our approach is ‘learning by doing’.

Our training centres of excellence will, we hope, shun lecture focused learning. Instead they will promote practical training involving representatives of different government agencies with a real incentive to put into practice the information and case studies coming from the specialist centres. Effective training in PPPs concerns people with a real motivation to do actual projects: that is to absorb the information and then go home to put a specific project, be it a hospital, a school, a waste to energy plant, a street lighting scheme and so on, into practice.

We hope that the International Training Centre of CIS will mobilise government officials from all over the countries and regions to discuss together the common challenge of implementing the guides on best practice prepared by the Specialist centres.
Can governments other than those hosting specialist centres benefit from the Centre of Excellence? What are the terms?

A very important goal of the activity is the implementation of best practice through the carrying out by UNECE of PPP readiness assessments. The purpose of these assessments is to determine the suitability of the country’s enabling environment for PPP and whether its proposed PPP pipeline is going to be sufficiently attractive to financiers. Already we have done several readiness assessments. We want to extend these and offer such services to UNECE member States and others, especially those who are getting started or who are running into difficulties in implementing their programmes.

We will be able to provide this service more effectively with the establishment of the CoE and this service will be available to Governments who have not established Specialist Centres. Hosting governments for these readiness assessments are expected to cover local costs and to help with the cost of travel of some experts who do the readiness assessments.

What is the single biggest challenge facing you as you make the CoE operational?

Very simply - communication. We have a vast network but how to communicate with them about our progress and our challenges in making this CoE a success? Since PPP days I have noticed a huge upsurge in the number of emails I receive and it is very important that we communicate what we are doing and even more importantly listen to what our partners and stakeholders want from the CoE.

We need to communicate about the Centre not just to our network but also internally to the UNECE’s senior management - I am happy to report that our UNECE Executive Secretary Mr Sven Alkalaj stands full square behind us on PPP and the International Centre of Excellence. We also must communicate with our sister UN agencies about PPP and the International Centre of Excellence. I also want to improve our communication by setting up a website that can organise debate and discussion on specific sectors. For example, once we have our PPP Centre on PPPs in Health up and running I would like for say one week to have an in depth discussion on the pros and cons of PPP in this specific sector where professionals from all countries around the world can join.