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ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

Capacity-building in trade facilitation and electronic business in the Mediterranean  
(E-Med Business)

Final Report

This document is for information. It contains the final report on the implementation of the E-Med Business project by the three United Nations regional commissions: the Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA).

## I. BACKGROUND

1. Globalization and rapidly advancing transport, telecommunications and information technologies are putting increasing pressure on export-oriented countries on the Mediterranean rim. Among the factors affecting their competitiveness are the costs of goods and the speed at which they respond to market needs. Company costs increase if official procedures are complex, opaque and inefficient and if they are not widely known among the trading community. A quick response to market needs is hampered by not having access to electronic business technologies and a lack of awareness about how such technologies can make business operations more efficient. Such challenges have proved particularly difficult for small and medium-sized enterprises.

2. A number of Governments have understood the importance of modern information technologies for the competitiveness of local companies, and especially in the management of international trade activities. National/bilateral initiatives have been launched, aimed at increasing the access and use by local companies of such technologies.

3. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) have developed various programmes in support of small and medium-sized enterprises in their respective regions. UNECE hosts the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT), has accumulated considerable experience in trade facilitation and electronic business. The project contributed to implement Economic and Social Council resolution 1998/46 which called for closer cooperation, and exchange of best practices between the regional commissions to reinforce synergies and complementarities between their respective programmes of work.

4. This project defines electronic business as the interchange of information and requirements (e.g. legal, procedures, data) within and between enterprises in support of their business activities. As such, it covers business-to-business and business-to-government relations, but does not include the consumer as part of the project domain.

## II. PROJECT SUMMARY

5. The E-Med Business project focused on trade facilitation issues in the non-European Union Mediterranean countries that are members of UNECE, ESCWA and ECA. The project was designed to provide capacity building in trade facilitation and electronic business in the Mediterranean. This was done by promoting and implementing an integrated approach to simplifying trade procedures in the region, using UN/CEFACT recommendations, norms and standards. It included an additional capacity-building component for the implementation of UN/CEFACT recommendations using United Nations electronic trade Documents (UneDocs)<sup>1</sup> – a project that creates a bridge between paper and electronic documents.

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<sup>1</sup> < <http://www.unedocs.org> >.

6. The project was implemented jointly by three of the United Nations regional commissions: UNECE, ESCWA and ECA. Partner organizations were the World Bank Group, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the International Trade Centre (ITC), the Association of the Mediterranean Chamber of Industry ASCAME/CCI Barcelona, and the Centre TIME of the Grenoble Graduate Business School (ESC Grenoble).
7. Following the project, requests for implementation of UNeDocs technical cooperation projects have been received from Bulgaria and Turkey. The UNeDocs project responds to the concerns of UNECE governments and public and private organizations to bridge the digital divide.
8. The launching seminar was held in the United Nations at Geneva in January 2003. The 30 participants included representatives from Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Occupied Palestinian Territory and Syrian Arab Republic (ESCWA region); Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia (ECA region); and Israel, Malta and Turkey (UNECE region). At the seminar, the basic concepts of trade facilitation and e-business were examined, including public-private partnerships, as well as a number of political, technical and technological aspects.
9. Participants to this first seminar recommended that regional trade facilitation (PRO) committees be set up in the ECA and ESCWA regions, similar to the trade facilitation committee (SECIPRO) under the Southeast European Cooperative Initiative (SECI). The Seminar initiated a dynamic process in which the unique needs of each subregion were recognized and incorporated into the project activity plan to build a “lingua franca” for trade facilitation within the region.
10. The following UNECE trade facilitation seminar for Malta, Turkey and Israel identified that “the promotion, by standard-setting organizations, of the implementation of those international norms and standards supported by software applications” was a critical trade facilitation issue.
11. The National Seminar in Turkey focused on strengthening the implementation of UN/CEFACT standards for electronic business. Following the seminar the development of electronic trade documents was integrated into the Turkish national Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Strategy. On the occasion of the UN/CEFACT Forum on paperless trade in 2005 the office of the Undersecretary of Turkish Customs was able to present the first achievements. Under the lead of the Prime Minister a working group had been established to develop a plan for electronic data and document exchange with the EU. A pilot project for electronic trade documents (eDocuments project) had been set up in the Bursa Free Trade Zone (Gemlik). This project provides a national test bed for the simplification of business processes and the application of modern eDocument technologies and standards. This project introduced substantive legislative changes to foster the adoption of electronic business and to ensure data confidentiality and security.
12. The ECA Bureau for North Africa, in cooperation with the UNECE, held three workshops on trade facilitation in Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco. The programme resulted in the endorsement of two UN/CEFACT recommendations for the implementation of modern techniques of risk assessment, and the automated processing of trade related information.

13. In the ESCWA region, following the completion of national audits, workshops were held in each participating country, starting with Jordan and subsequently in Egypt, Lebanon, Occupied Palestinian Territory and Syrian Arab Republic. These workshops were followed by a regional workshop and a regional seminar. In conjunction with the E-Med Business project, ESCWA has for some time been promoting the creation of trade and transport facilitation (TTF) committees in member countries (UN/CEFACT Recommendation 4 on National Trade Facilitation Bodies). To develop an ongoing consultation process and cooperation among public sector agencies involved in the regulation and control of cross border trade and between the public and private sector stakeholders in trade, several participant countries are in the process of establishing TTF committees, which will continue the work initiated through the E-Med Business project. In particular, Jordan established a national trade and transport committee pursuant to a decree issued by the Prime Minister on 20 February 2003, and Syrian Arab Republic established a national committee pursuant to a decree issued by the Prime Minister on 10 November 2004. In the Occupied Palestinian Territory, a national committee was established in December 2002.

14. The ECA Regional Seminar in Morocco brought together the nominated country managers and representatives from the public and private sectors of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia and a trainer from the Ecole Supérieure de Commerce, Grenoble. This Seminar stressed the importance of promoting supply chain management concepts. It sensitized participants to the importance of UN/CEFACT trade facilitation and e-business standards, including through success stories from developing countries. The National Seminars for Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco demonstrated that there is no single fit for all trade facilitation and e-business strategies. The representatives of the government agencies and the private sector requested that ECA and UNECE further explore possibilities for effective technical assistance to the recommended National Trade Facilitation network.

15. Our overall evaluation, based on follow-up activities taken by member States and, as mentioned above, requests for assistance with follow-up activities from Algeria, Morocco and Turkey as well as feedback from the seminars and workshops, has been that this project met the concerns and needs of member States. In so doing, it has created the basis for further raising the competitiveness of small-and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the region based on improved trade process and an increased use of e-business standards and ICT tools.

### **III. REPORTING ON ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

#### **A. Achieving broader application of the United Nations Standards for trade facilitation and electronic business through cooperation between the countries of the region**

16. During the course of the project, all participant countries have acknowledged the relevance and importance of the basic concepts of trade facilitation and e-business, which are at the heart of the E-Med Business project. The project managed to sensitize Governments to the existence of many highly valuable instruments that are already available. Some of these were already in use in participating countries; some have been adopted as a consequence of the E-Med Business project.

17. Examples are good practices and lessons learned that were implemented in initiatives such as the Tunis Single Window, e-Turkey initiative, SECIPRO regional initiatives and Turkish “e-docs and foreign trade” project.

18. Others include efforts by ESCWA to establish National Trade and Transport Facilitation Committees (UN/CEFACT Recommendation 4 on National Trade Facilitation Bodies), and their recommendation to establish a regional one: MEDIPRO. In addition, ECA recommended stronger subregional cooperation under the auspices of UN/CEFACT as a possible way of implementing existing instruments. There is strong support for continued capacity-building and technical assistance to promote and implement the existing UN/CEFACT Standards. The Country Representatives and Regional Focal Points felt that implementing existing UN/CEFACT standards, at country and regional level, would be a major step towards a coordinated approach to trade facilitation in the region.

#### **B. Enhanced regional and sub-regional cooperation on trade facilitation matters**

18. An important outcome of the E-Med Business project was the adoption of a Recommendation by all ECA participating countries at the first of two regional workshops, in Rabat, Morocco in June 2004. This Recommendation reaffirms that these countries’ wish to implement a subregional network to coordinate, circulate and update information on trade facilitation in the different North African countries in order to enhance the development of trade in the subregion. In addition, there was an expression of the countries’ intention to use UN/CEFACT as a coordination point together with subregional trade promotion and facilitation bodies. The meeting requested the Algerian Chamber of Commerce and Industry to act as coordinator in the interest of all operators of the sub-region.

#### **C. Strengthened cooperation among networks of expertise**

19. The project strengthened cooperation between the World Bank Global Facilitation Partnership (GFP) and Regional Focal points, achieving additional funding by potential donors within the current project for specific countries. The latter is of particular importance in the light of the sustainability of the project and its outputs.

20. In addition, the project brought together the network of experts from the E-Med Business project and University representatives from the Ecole Supérieure de Commerce, Grenoble (ESC-Grenoble).<sup>2</sup> In so doing, the project managed to create synergies between the representatives of business and Governments as well as with academic communities in the region. In addition, and again, an important factor for the project’s sustainability, E-Med Business created a link between a United Nations Development Account funded programme and an European Union (EU)- funded programme (via the Euromed and EUMEDIS programmes). The project benefited from the involvement of the Association of the Mediterranean Chambers of Commerce and Industry (ASCAME) through an exchange of information and invitations to attend mutual seminars.

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<sup>2</sup> < <http://www.esc-grenoble.fr/time/time.htm> > .

**D. Enhanced capacity for small and medium-sized enterprises in the region to join the international supply chain**

21. Cooperation with the “Medforist” project of ESC Grenoble, funded by the EU Programme, brought together at the seminars and workshops, the network of Medforist participants and the Regional Focal Points from this United Nations Development Account (UNDA) project. This “training for the trainers” programme promoted the use of United Nations Standards in academic programmes for supply-chain management in the recipient countries. As such, it achieved synergies and complementarities between the SME representatives, universities and research centres and country managers.

**IV. PROJECT OUTPUTS**

**A. Subprogramme 1**

22. Identification of needs and issues regarding barriers to trade in Mediterranean countries that are not members of the EU, as well as the possibility of overcoming them using UNECE trade facilitation and electronic business measures.

**Quantitative Performance**

23. Nine Reports:

(a) Eight National Trade Facilitation Audit reports, based on the World Bank Audit Methodology, were created for Jordan, Lebanon, Syrian Arab Republic, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco.

(b) One summary report was written: “Summary Review of International Trade, and National and Regional Trade Facilitation Projects in the E-Med Region, a national and regional perspective”. The report identifies and describes the trade facilitation initiatives and projects of six countries participating in the E-Med Business project (Turkey, Malta, Israel, Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia). It analyses trade flows and identifies major bottlenecks in supply chains, both from the country and regional perspectives.

24. Seven interactive training workshops were organized:

(a) One workshop on “Gestion de la chaine logistique”<sup>3</sup> in Rabat, Morocco, 11-12 July 2003. The workshop provided a global view of modern supply-chain management strategies. Participants learned how to increase the efficiency of national supply chains and how to use electronic business tools to increase their competitiveness.

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<sup>3</sup> < [http://www.unemed.net/eca\\_step1.htm](http://www.unemed.net/eca_step1.htm) >.

(b) Five National trade facilitation workshops in Jordan (24-25 March 2004), Syrian Arab Republic (25-26 August 2004), and Lebanon (8-9 November 2004). Occupied Palestinian Territory (18 October 2005) and Egypt (14 November 2005). As a result of these workshops, government decrees have been issued authorizing the establishment of national transport and trade facilitation committees in Jordan, Syrian Arab Republic and Egypt, while in Lebanon the Ministries of Finance and Public Works and Transport are actively pursuing the issue.

3. One National Trade Facilitation workshop in Malta (18-20 June 2003) on “Trade and transport facilitation in the supply-chain”<sup>4</sup>. This workshop was supported by the Medforist project of the Ecole de Management (ESC), Grenoble. The workshop highlighted the low level of awareness and implementation of existing trade facilitation measures by the business community, even in advanced countries. The workshop also highlighted that promoting existing measures in the countries of the Mediterranean region would greatly advance their trade facilitation agendas.

## **B. Subprogramme 2**

25. Strengthening the institutional capacity of participating Governments and their public administrations to simplify and harmonize trade procedures throughout the transaction chain and to implement automated processes and information technology for administration.

### **Quantitative Performance**

#### **1. Development of a website to support the project (www.UNeMed.net)<sup>5</sup>**

26. An interregional website was established to support the dissemination of training material as well as to evaluate the requirements for e- learning and XML<sup>6</sup> technology capabilities.

27. The content of the website was continuously developed and improved during the duration of the project. The website includes information on the participating organizations, seminars and training material. In addition, UNECE developed advanced electronic demonstrations of the use of paperless trade in combination with Internet technologies that are available on the website.

#### **2. Two regional workshops**

28. One three-day regional workshop in Rabat (Morocco), 19- 23 June 2004 for the ECA region. One three-day regional workshop in Cairo (Egypt), 13-15 December 2005 for the ESCWA region.

#### **3. Purchase of IT equipment**

29. Acquisition of computer equipment to strengthen existing national systems for collecting, processing and disseminating data and information for regional cooperation. In particular, IT equipment was purchased to strengthen the activities of the national trade and transport facilitation committees in Jordan, Lebanon and Occupied Palestinian Territory.

<sup>4</sup> < <http://www.unemed.net/step2.htm> > .

<sup>5</sup> < <http://www.unemed.net> > .

<sup>6</sup> Extended Mark-up Language.

### C. Subprogramme 3

30. Provide capacity-building so as to increase the competitiveness of companies in the Mediterranean region in regional and global markets through simplifying trade procedures throughout the transaction chain; implement automated processes and information technology for commerce and facilitating the participation of SMEs in electronic business.

#### Quantitative Performance

##### 1. Eleven National workshops were organized:

31. Algeria, 11-13 October 2003; Ankara, Turkey, 19-29 December 2003; Jordan 24-25 March 2004; Tel Aviv, Israel, 7-8 June 2004; Tunisia 10-12 June 2004; Morocco 19-23 June 2004; Syrian Arab Republic, 25-26 August 2004; Lebanon, 8-9 November 2004; Occupied Palestinian Territory, 18 October 2005; Egypt 14 November 2005; Beirut, Lebanon, 18-21 June 2006.

##### 2. Three interactive training tools developed

32. Three training tools were developed to support technical assistance to Governments and traders in the areas of simplification, harmonization and automation of official procedures affecting trade. The tools were used extensively in both the national and the regional level.

##### 2.1. Standards and instruments for trade and transport facilitation<sup>7</sup>

33. It explains at large the standards and instruments for the facilitation of trade and transport. It has been developed in cooperation with the International Trade Centre (ICT) and is based on United Nations Trade Recommendation 18<sup>8</sup> (Facilitation Measures Related to International Trade Procedures).

34. The tool aims to train both government officials and managers from the private sector. It addresses the efficiency of the core supply chain processes (Buy, Ship, Pay) and their interface with Customs administration. It specifies and explains:

- (a) The flow of information, goods and money in the international supply chain as well as important trade procedures that define and/or regulate these procedures
- (b) How exporters and importers can improve their businesses by applying best practice solutions
- (c) How policymakers and Governments can use facilitation instruments to improve their countries trade performance
- (d) Facilitation measures such as standard international sales contracts, the basics of Customs formalities the revised Kyoto Customs convention, and the documentary aspects of international trade, electronic business and export finance.

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<sup>7</sup> < <http://www.unece.org/etrades/UNeMed/CD1/> > .

<sup>8</sup> < <http://www.unece.org/cefact/rec/rec18en.htm> > .

## 2.2. e-Business Strategies for SMEs: Introduction to the eBusiness Self Assessment Tool<sup>9</sup>

35. The tool is based on the *eBusiness Self-Assessment Tool for SMEs* by ESC Grenoble. It has been developed jointly between the UNECE and the CENTRE TIME of the Grenoble Ecole de Management. The self-assessment tool helps managers to analyse their company in the market; to define evolution scenarios, processes and business objectives; and to develop an eBusiness strategy to improve the competitiveness of a company. The tool provides background material, explanations and explanatory videos. It guides managers through the different steps of developing a needs assessment and an e-Business implementation strategy. In filling in the forms in the Self Assessment tool, managers gradually develop an individual e-Business action plan for their company.

## 2.3. Supply-chain management<sup>10</sup>

36. When designing and implementing trade facilitation strategies, decision-makers need a good understanding of the structure and functioning of supply chains. The module familiarizes the participants with the important aspects of the supply-chain concept. It helps participants to understand different types of supply chains and the consequences for sourcing, production, sales, transport and finance. It explains the components of a supply chain and analyses the flows of goods, financial resources and information. It explains the process concept of supply chain and the decisive effect of the export market on the supply-chain structure. Using case studies, the participants can analyse supply chains and develop strategies for Governments and companies that help to improve their trade efficiency. This training tool has been developed in cooperation with the ECS Grenoble.

## V. ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

37. The E-Med Business project made a significant contribution to the promotion and further development of the UNeDocs project. The project increased the awareness of Governments and the private sector of the region on the importance of efficient and automated cross border data exchange. At the UN/CEFACT Plenary 2005 delegates noted the strategic importance of UNeDocs for trade facilitation and transferred the project to UN/CEFACT for development as the future global standard for international trade documents.

38. The project activities provided the basis for the UN/CEFACT Executive Forum on Paperless Trade in International Supply Chains in June 2005 in Geneva, supported by all United Nations regional commissions. This Forum developed *A Roadmap towards Paperless Trade*. The publication was forwarded as a regional input into the World Summit on the Information Society in Tunis 2005.

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<sup>9</sup> < <http://www.unece.org/etradet/UNeMed/CD3/> > .

<sup>10</sup> Training module can be downloaded at: < <http://www.unece.org/etradet/UNeMed/CD2/> > .

## References

### A. Websites

- UN/E-Med Project <http://www.unemed.net/>
- WSIS [http://www.itu.int/wsis/preparatory/events\\_calendar.asp?year=2005&month=0](http://www.itu.int/wsis/preparatory/events_calendar.asp?year=2005&month=0)
- UNCEFACT <http://www.uncefact.org>
- UNeDocs <http://www.unedocs.org>
- UN/CEFACT TBG2 [http://www.unece.org/cefact/forum\\_grps/tbg/tbg2\\_edocs/tbg2\\_edocs.htm](http://www.unece.org/cefact/forum_grps/tbg/tbg2_edocs/tbg2_edocs.htm)

### B. UNECE press releases <sup>1</sup>

- United Nations launches major trade facilitation project for the Mediterranean region, 28 June 2002
- Interregional Seminar “Capacity-building in Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business in the Mediterranean”(E-Med Business), 21 February 2003
- UNECE and SITPRO to develop toolkit of Electronic Trade Documents for world trade community, 13 may 2003
- Digital paper for Trade UNECE Announces the First Release of Electronic Trade Document Set for Pilot Implementation, 2 March 2004
- United Nations Group calls for “Task Force on electronic Documents”, 28 October 2004
- UN/CEFACT releases Roadmap to paperless Trade, 12 July 2005

### C. Reports and publications

- Report on the Interregional Seminar “Capacity-Building in Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business in the Mediterranean” (E-Med Business), 5 March 2003, Trade/2003/20
- Rising to the Digital Challenge, Lessons from Mediterranean Enterprises, Centre TIME, Grenoble Ecole de Management, 2005 (ISBN 9957-8585-1-3)
- UNeMed: List of Keynote Presentations and Documents<sup>2</sup>
- Facilitation du commerce et du transport (E-Med Business Project) ECA document
- Summary review of international trade and national and regional trade facilitation projects in the UNeMed region<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <[http://www.unece.org/press/current\\_press\\_h.htm](http://www.unece.org/press/current_press_h.htm)>.

<sup>2</sup> <<http://www.unemed.net/documents.htm>>.

<sup>3</sup> <<http://www.unece.org/trades/UNeMED/docs/A-Meddraft1.1-27-01-2005.doc>>.

**D. Web Site Statistics – UNeMED.NET (Year 2006)****UNeMED.NET Report**

| Report<br>Summary - <a href="http://www.unemed.net">www.unemed.net</a><br><b>Date Range: 01/01/2006 - 08/10/2006</b> |                   |
|--|-------------------|
| Total Sessions   | 17,930.00         |
| Total Pageviews  | 61,903.00         |
| Total Hits   | <b>106,311.00</b> |
| Total Bytes Transferred  | 739.52 MB         |
| Average Sessions Per Day   | 80.77             |
| Average Pageviews Per Day  | 278.84            |
| Average Hits Per Day   | <b>478.88</b>     |
| Average Bytes Transferred Per Day  | 3.33 MB           |
| Average Pageviews Per Session  | 3.45              |
| Average Hits Per Session   | 5.93              |
| Average Bytes Per Session  | 42.23 KB          |

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