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Item 2 of the provisional agenda

MATTERS ARISING SINCE THE FOURTEENTH SESSION

**Progress report on decisions by the
Executive Committee of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe**

Note by the Chairman

Summary

The Executive Committee (EXCOM) at its 29th meeting on 27 February 2009 adopted a set of decisions in which it set out a list of recommendations concerning to the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) (see document ECE/EX/4).

The UN/CEFACT Bureau accordingly engaged in various consultations and analyses, in close cooperation with the secretariat, towards formulating timely ways to address these recommendations, which are now reflected in the attached annotated progress report. Consultations with EXCOM members were greatly appreciated.

Key advances with active collaboration of the secretariat, include: the preparation of two strategic documents with a specific focus on transition economies (i.e. proposals to enhance their participation and to provide capacity-building) and steps to improve the website (www.uncefact.org).

This document is based on the UN/CEFACT report that was presented at the EXCOM meeting on 13 July 2009. It reflects the comments received from EXCOM, the secretariat and the UN/CEFACT Bureau.

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY OF PROGRESS

1. The Executive Committee (EXCOM), at its 29th meeting, on 27 February 2009, adopted a set of decisions setting out six recommendations to the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) (see document ECE/EX/4).
2. The current note outlines the efforts by the Bureau, with the active support of the secretariat, to formulate timely ways to address these recommendations and shows the status of developments. This information is reflected in a high-level annotated report on progress, which uses as its starting point the original EXCOM note and its list of recommendations.
3. The first EXCOM deadline for UN/CEFACT replies was set for June 2009. It concerned two strategic documents that were to be submitted to EXCOM for consideration, with a specific focus on transition economies, involving proposals to enhance participation (Recommendation D) and to address capacity-building (Recommendation E).
4. In responding to recommendations D and E, the Bureau worked closely with the secretariat, receiving strong support. Outreach to various EXCOM members was initiated. The latter provided guidance and practical insights into questions of scope and relevance of topics to be considered when addressing these strategic matters.
5. UN/CEFACT was also asked to provide an overall progress report on all recommendations in December 2009. The information contained in this document provides an early high-level annotated indication of the current status of all developments concerning the recommendations. Some additional specific information is highlighted below:
 - (a) Initial website upgrade (i.e. project details and Plenary names) (Recommendation A) achieved;
 - (b) Plans for the UN/CEFACT Plenary in November to involve:
 - (i) continuing focus on priority setting by member States and other stakeholders (Recommendation B);
 - (ii) ongoing efforts to organize informal seminars on "policy drivers for trade facilitation instruments" and "the impact of capacity building on trade facilitation implementation", with a special focus on transition economies (Recommendation C);
 - (c) Recommendations concerning transition economies (i.e. strategic plans concerning enhanced participation and capacity-building) recommendations D and E completed;
 - (d) Enhanced cooperation advancing with other institutions, e.g. through invited presentations on UN/CEFACT at the World Trade Organization (WTO) and World Customs Organization (WCO), as well as joint work with WCO on a new data exchange message and alignment of data vocabularies (Recommendation F).

6. The Bureau has welcomed the opportunities presented by EXCOM's recommendations as a way to help address the significant communication and outreach challenges faced by UN/CEFACT and related intergovernmental groups on an ongoing basis. All of these groups should continuously aim to update their constituencies about their activities, to better understand their requirements and to strengthen support for member States and other stakeholders.

7. EXCOM adopted the following at its 29th meeting on 27 February 2009 (ECE/EX/2009/L.5 and ECE/EX/4). For contrast and ease of reading, the replies from UN/CEFACT are presented in bold type. An asterisk (*) indicate that extrabudgetary support might be required.

DECISIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE UNITED NATIONS CENTRE FOR TRADE FACILITATION AND ELECTRONIC BUSINESS

8. The UNECE Executive Committee (EXCOM) held several meetings in 2008 to review the work of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) and provided opportunities for the UN/CEFACT Chairman to present papers and participate in the discussions of the EXCOM, both in informal and formal settings.

9. Throughout these discussions, there was strong agreement that the work of UN/CEFACT was appreciated by member States, that it had a unique market niche in the trade facilitation area, that its outputs were of high value to member States and that this work should continue. The participation of the UN/CEFACT Chair and Vice-Chairs in the above meetings and the various papers prepared by UN/CEFACT for the Committee were also highly appreciated. The EXCOM took note of the electronic Business, Government and Trade (eBGT) initiative of UN/CEFACT, which had already been endorsed by the EXCOM in 2007 and is expected to facilitate the participation of interested stakeholders in the work of UN/CEFACT.

10. Members determined that UN/CEFACT should enhance and advance its work in the areas of information access (in particular, enhancement of the website), governance and transparency, participation of transition economies and capacity building. More specifically, member States indicated their desire to see actions taken in the following areas in order to strengthen UN/CEFACT and facilitate wider involvement in the development and implementation of UN/CEFACT standards and recommendations:

A. Information-sharing and communication to foster broader transparency and participation

Develop, with the support of the secretariat, a more user-friendly website to include the following information:

- (a) Summary details on projects (including such items as project initiator, participants, extrabudgetary resources mobilized, supporters, expected deliverables, timeframe, current status, how newcomers can participate, etc);

Status: initial software upgrade completed in April 2009 makes it easier to access this information on the UN/CEFACT website; project details can now be uploaded and be maintained by expert groups.

Target completion date: September

- (b) Consolidated, summary information about UN/CEFACT procedures and processes;

Status: information available, although not in all three official languages; as documents now subject to possible revision by Plenary decisions that may be taken in November 2009, secretariat preparing for provision of all key documents in French and Russian when revised documents are ready.

Target completion date: to be determined in November

- (c) Simple, clear and concise information on UN/CEFACT policy and decision-making processes, especially related to the identification, selection and development of standards;

Status*: this is part of envisaged efforts to develop a communications strategy, to be guided by Bureau. Initial work in progress by secretariat and UN/CEFACT experts. It involves website and other media (including French and Russian language versions).

Target completion date: December

- (d) Information on UN/CEFACT Heads of Delegation.

Status: secretariat has completed this task.

Target completion date: June

- (e) Provide a registry and tracking system for project proposals.

Status*: initial provision of project proposal information already incorporated in recent website developments and further procedures being developed; planning for additional features being considered as part of "online" standards projects to cover all aspects of ongoing work (prototype registry demonstrated during April 2009 Rome Forum).

Target completion date: November

B. Intergovernmental governance and oversight of the work of UN/CEFACT, including strategy and priority setting and the use of the United Nations label

- (a) Continue to enhance the transparency of the UN/CEFACT policy and management process through which decisions are made on the selection of specific standards for development. In this regard, the proposed standards should respond to a minimum of common interest expressed through support by at least three countries.

Status: timely review in progress of UN/CEFACT Terms of Reference (R.650), including Open Development Process, as well as procedures for implementing the three-country rule.

Target completion date: November

- (b) Encourage meaningful participation of member States in the development of UN/CEFACT standards and recommendations.

Status: on track, this year with special focus on transition economies (involving plans for Plenary seminars and strategic efforts to enhance participation and capacity-building); ongoing steps to engage Member States and stakeholders, e.g. at opening of Plenary, with respect to exchange of views about UN/CEFACT priorities for standards and recommendations.

Target completion date: November

- (c) Ensure that priorities expressed by member States (through UN/CEFACT plenary, Bureau and other channels) are adequately taken up in the UN/CEFACT programme of work and effectively implemented. For this purpose, the UN/CEFACT Plenary should agree upon priorities at each annual session and ask the Bureau to oversee their implementation and to report to the Plenary on their status.

Status: continuing with the established good practice of opening the Plenary sessions with a review of priorities of Member States, following up with impact on programme of work, and monitoring and reporting on status.

Target completion date: November

C. Ensuring balance between UN/CEFACT's work on electronic business standards on the one hand and on recommendations for trade facilitation on the other hand, with due reflection on the budgetary allocation

- (a) To take steps to further strengthen the development of trade facilitation Recommendations and to promote their implementation through promotion

initiatives, such as publications, seminars or workshops, with particular attention to the needs of countries in transition.

Status: ongoing efforts to be advanced, based on the existing UN/CEFACT integrated strategy¹ and programme of work, including special sessions at bi-annual Forums.

Target completion date: November

D. Greater involvement of countries with economies in transition

- (a) Develop a strategic action plan and implement specific actions, in collaboration with the secretariat, to facilitate the participation of transition economies in the work of UN/CEFACT, and especially to enable their experts to contribute substantively to the elaboration of standards.

Status*: initial draft completed and submitted to EXCOM. Awaiting guidance and follow-up with Plenary and programme of work.

Target completion date: June

- (b) Take steps, with the support of the secretariat, for information about all key UN/CEFACT recommendations and standards to be translated into Russian.

Status*: continuing efforts of secretariat and part of communications strategy.

Target completion date: November

E. Capacity-building activities to promote implementation of UN/CEFACT standards and recommendations

- (a) In collaboration with the secretariat, develop an integrated strategic capacity building plan on the use and implementation of UN/CEFACT instruments, and initiate supporting actions, with particular attention to the needs of transition economies. The secretariat should have the key role in implementing this plan and undertaking relevant capacity-building activities.

Status*: submitted to EXCOM, awaiting guidance and follow-up with Plenary and programme of work. Information brochure prepared by the secretariat in English, French and Russian soon to be made available.

Target completion date: June

¹ ECE/TRADE/CEFACT/2006/5: Integrated Strategy for UN/CEFACT.

F. Cooperation with other institutions

- (a) Explore areas for enhanced cooperation between UN/CEFACT and other institutions, especially in the framework of the Trade Facilitation Negotiations of the World Trade Organization.

Status: ongoing effort. Recent developments involving WTO and WCO, update report on progress during Plenary; focused outreach to foster support from heads of delegation will also be explored.

Target completion date: November
