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**THE WORK OF THE GROUP OF EXPERTS
ON THE PROGRAMME OF WORK**

Report by the Chairperson of the Group of Experts

1. Since the fifty-seventh session of the Commission, the Group of Experts on the Programme of Work (GEPW) had to discuss and make recommendations if possible/necessary on the following issues:
 - advisability of organizing the annual session and spring seminar separately; dates of the annual session and spring seminar; possible topics for the next spring seminar and for the policy segment of the annual session;
 - strengthening of the ECE and possible reforms of its activities;
 - operational activities and their effectiveness;
 - programme budget narratives for the biennium 2004-2005.

Annual session and Spring Seminar

2. The GEPW was asked by the Bureau to hold consultations on the advisability of keeping the current tradition in organizing the Spring Seminar with the linkage (both in dates and topic) to the annual session or to organize the Seminar and session in 2003 as separate events. Taking into account that some countries of the region consider the first half of May as an inconvenient time for the annual session and Spring Seminar, the GEPW discussed the alternative proposals for the date of the annual session of 2003.

3. Some experts expressed their concern that splitting the above-mentioned events in time would cause additional financial expenditures for the participation of delegations from the capitals and in that way could affect the participation of some transitional economies in the fora. That is why the GEPW agreed on the advisability of keeping in 2003 the existing practice of organizing the annual session and Spring Seminar within the same week. GEPW recommended the dates of 3-6 March 2003 for organization of these events and also agreed in general on the topics for the policy segment of the fifty-eighth annual session of the UNECE and for the Spring Seminar of 2003.

4. The Chairperson of the GEPW reported on the results of the GEPW discussions to the Ad Hoc Informal Meeting of the Commission and the corresponding decisions concerning the provisional agenda for the fifty-eighth session of the Commission and the programme of the Spring Seminar of 2003 were taken by the Commission.

Strengthening of the ECE

5. According to the results of debates during the fifty-seventh session of the Commission on strengthening the UNECE, the GEPW was mandated to discuss the proposals of the Executive Secretary on the UNECE reform and to report to the Commission.

6. Since the fifty-seventh session of the Commission the GEPW convened several meetings on the issue. The discussion in the GEPW reflected the views shared by the member States in their written comments to the Executive Secretary.

7. The Executive Secretary of the UNECE participated in one of the meetings of the GEPW and informed the experts about the results of debates on United Nations reform which took place in the General Assembly and its implications for UNECE activities.

8. The GEPW asked the secretariat to draft a new version of the proposals on strengthening the UNECE and possible reform of its activities taking into account the written comments of the member States on the CRP.3 "Strengthening the Organization" and the result of debates on United Nations reform and its implications for the UNECE.

9. Further discussions on the issue could be organized in the GEPW after the distribution by the secretariat of the new draft proposals in early 2003. The results of deliberations in the GEPW would be reported to the fifty-eighth session of the Commission.

Operational activities

10. The fifty-seventh session of the UNECE mandated the GEPW to consider the possibilities of increasing the effectiveness of the UNECE operational activities and technical assistance in particular and to make necessary recommendations to the fifty-eighth session of the Commission.

11. The secretariat distributed the background paper for the discussion on operational activities on 27 November 2002. Taking into account the need of experts to communicate with

their capitals, the discussion in the GEPW will be held at the beginning of 2003. The results will be reported to the fifty-eighth session of the Commission.

Programme and budget narratives for the biennium 2004-2005

12. The Group of Experts on the Programme of Work held eight meetings during the months of September to November 2002 to consider the ECE programme budget narratives 2004-2005 formulated by the ECE secretariat. The Group expressed its appreciation to the secretariat for the evident thought and effort which went into the preparation of the proformas and narratives for the budget subprogrammes 1 through 9. Noting that the proposed programme of work for 2004-2005 was broadly in accordance with the priorities set up in the 1997 Plan of Action, the Group reviewed the UNECE proposal and made some conclusions and recommendations which were adopted by the Commission at its Ad Hoc Informal Meeting in December 2002. The Executive Secretary reacted positively to the recommendations of the GEPW and expressed her readiness to take them into account in the programme and budget document to be sent to United Nations Headquarters in New York and in the further work of the secretariat.
