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

Report by the Chairperson of the Group of Experts

1. Since the fifty-ninth session of the Commission, the Group of Experts on the Programme of Work (GEPW) has met on 14 occasions between March and December 2004. It has had to consider a group of issues and to make recommendations for some of them. The issues are the following:

- UNECE reform;
- Cooperation with OSCE;
- Technical cooperation activities;
- Work programme planning procedures;
- Programme specifications 2006-2007.

2. Mr. Edgars Kalniņš, of the Permanent Mission of Latvia, was elected Vice-Chairperson of the Group of Experts.

I. UNECE REFORM

3. The process of strengthening UNECE to improve its capacity for dealing with challenges old and new in a changing environment continued to be a subject of discussion by member States at various levels, including the Group of Experts. At least three complementary initiatives may be noted.

4. First, in terms of strategy, the Commission decided, at its fifty-ninth session, to commission a comprehensive report on the state of UNECE, and gave the Group of Experts responsibility for organizing the implementation of this decision. The report was to develop recommendations to determine what changes to the role, mandate and functions of UNECE are necessary in the light of the changes to the European institutional architecture since UNECE was created almost 60 years ago. The report should be guided by the will of member States to avoid duplication and ensure cooperation, complementarity and efficiencies among intergovernmental organizations. With this in view, the Group of Experts had drawn up the terms of reference of the report, a budget and a short list of possible authors by the end of May. The Commission adopted the terms of reference and requested the Chairman of the Commission, the Chairperson of the Group of Experts and the Executive Secretary to determine jointly, on the basis of the short list, the team of authors who would be responsible for preparing the report. Since the final selection of authors required several detailed discussions and the collection of voluntary contributions ran into problems that were not anticipated given the considerable support that the member States had expressed for the project at the fifty-ninth session of the Commission, it will not be possible to present the final report at the sixtieth session of the Commission. As things stand, it is expected that the authors of the report will begin their work early in 2005.

5. Secondly, the Commission, at its fifty-ninth session, approved recommendation E/ECE/1415/Add.1, submitted by the Group of Experts, to introduce a biennial evaluation system which should be operated by the principal subsidiary bodies. In order to facilitate the implementation by the latter of such a system, the recommendation provides that the secretariat should prepare a basic guide to methods of evaluation on which each principal subsidiary body will be able to base its own evaluation. The guide is currently in preparation and the Group of Experts is ready to support efforts by the secretariat to finalize it.

6. Thirdly, the work of redefining activities in the sphere of economic analysis is also in progress. The secretariat submitted a document containing its views on the subject to the Group of Experts and gathered the preliminary reactions of the member States. The Group of Experts has already dealt with some aspects of this redefinition in the context of the budget process for 2006-2007; other aspects relating to strategy in this area will be dealt with in the comprehensive report on the state of UNECE.

II. COOPERATION WITH OSCE

7. Discussions in the Group of Experts enabled member States to exchange views on cooperation with OSCE and to take part in determining the framework for such cooperation. The Group of Experts welcomed the fact that it had been possible for the OSCE and the Commission secretariats to sign a Memorandum of Understanding on 6 December 2004 on the occasion of the annual session of the OSCE Ministerial Council. It also considered that the discussion on the programming of the activities resulting from this document should continue at the appropriate juncture.

III. TECHNICAL COOPERATION ACTIVITIES

8. In order to facilitate the prioritization of technical cooperation activities, the Commission, at its fifty-ninth session, had approved a new mechanism entrusting the Group of Experts with setting priorities between areas regarded by the principal subsidiary bodies as inadequately

financed, and, on this basis, possibly recommending areas to which funds not specifically earmarked could be allocated. The Group of Experts could also request the secretariat to submit proposals for projects, in consultation with the countries, in areas to which the Group of Experts considers that funds should be allocated. A first meeting on technical cooperation took place during the autumn and enabled the regional advisers to introduce their activities to member States.

IV. WORK PROGRAMME PLANNING PROCEDURES

9. The streamlining of the budget programming process was one of the priorities identified in the report of the President for the fifty-ninth session. The Group of Experts continued the work begun in 2003 on the basis of a draft prepared by the secretariat in order to improve the process of determining the programme specifications and adapting them to the new procedures coming into force in 2004. These procedures included a first phase for identifying the strategic guidelines and the expected outcome (biennial plan) and a second phase to identify the expected products (programme specifications). On the basis of the 2003 work, discussions within the Group enabled adjustments to be made taking the new demands into account; this should make it possible for a recommendation to be submitted to the Commission at its sixtieth annual session.

V. PREPARATION OF THE SPECIFICATIONS FOR THE 2006-2007 PROGRAMME OF THE COMMISSION SECRETARIAT

10. In accordance with the mandate set out in the 1997 Plan of Action, the Group of Experts analysed the programme specifications for the 2006-2007 budget of the Economic Commission for Europe. An intensive dialogue developed with the secretariat, inter alia, taking the form of information additional to the programme specifications and the statements by the directors of divisions responsible for implementing the nine UNECE subprogrammes of work. This enabled the Group of Experts to draw up a set of recommendations, inter alia, concerning the identification of high priority area activities and the resource needs. These recommendations were adopted by the Commission at its ad hoc session in December 2004.

VI. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE ACTIVITY

11. The Chairperson of the Group of Experts notes with satisfaction that the quality of the dialogue between the secretariat and member States has converted the meetings of the Group of Experts into an important factor in communication between States, and between States and the secretariat. At least two of the priorities identified for 2004 will, in his opinion, remain on the agenda for 2005: action on the decisions taken by the Commission at its recent and forthcoming sessions and the continuation of the reform process. More particularly, the support of the authors of the report on the state of UNECE in accordance with the mandate defined in the Terms of reference could be one of the major tasks in the first half of 2005, if the decision to entrust this task to the Group of Experts is maintained.
