



UNECE Weekly

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

Issue N° 166 – 3-7 April 2006

Integration and cooperation: a challenge for the region

Interview with Andrey Vasilyev, Director of the new UNECE Economic Cooperation and Integration Division



Why a new programme on economic cooperation and integration?

In a globalizing world the question of cooperation and integration is becoming more and more significant because countries trade more, people are moving more and economies are becoming increasingly interdependent. Furthermore there is a range of integration processes taking place within the UNECE region and, as mentioned by many delegates during our annual session, there is a need to prevent the emergence of new dividing lines.

the Committee to elaborate its detailed programme of work and decide on the scheduling for consideration of specific issues and themes.

Is the focus going to be only on Central Asia and South-East Europe?

As was agreed, the focus will mainly be on countries with economies in transition. However it should not be organized around one set of countries but more around specific issues. The recommendations would then be adapted to countries or groups of countries, especially as far as our technical cooperation activities are concerned.

The goal is to come up with good quality recommendations based on best available practices, which in turn would provide an additional basis for demand driven practical activities, in particular technical cooperation work.

At the same time the issue of competitiveness is at present very high on the agenda of many countries all over the world, so an exchange of best practices in Western Europe and in North America could be of relevance not only to countries of Eastern Europe, Central Asia and South East Europe but also to many other countries in our region. That is why we hope that our programme will be of interest not only to countries in transition but also to all UNECE member States.

What is the most pressing issue that countries in transition have to deal with?

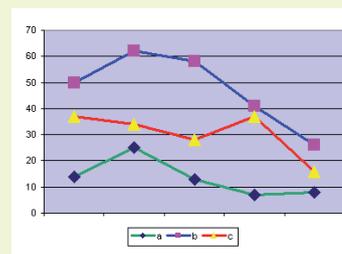
It really depends on the country, but the main economic challenge remains building institutions and the legislative basis that is adequate to the requirements of a well-functioning market economy. Of course, there are many other challenges but I think that this is among the most fundamental ones.

How much will you cooperate with other regional commissions to take advantage of their experience in the area of development?

There is a lot of experience all over the world related to the issue of competitive and innovative development. Our first step would be to see what is done by

Looking for a key to statistical data

Precisely speaking, statistical data are just numbers. When presented to anybody, they would have no meaning without at least a minimum description attached. These descriptions, in other words data about data, are called statistical metadata. There are various kinds of statistical metadata that differ by their function, but what they have in common is to enable the readers to understand the statistics. The minimum set of statistical metadata that should



accompany each table or chart consists of identifiers and descriptors (for example the stub and the header of a table) that form the structural metadata. Moreover the users would like to know more about the contents and quality that are described by the reference metadata. With increasing Internet publishing and on-line databases, there is a growing need for metadata that facilitate navigation and guide the user to data of interest to him/her. This means that statistical metadata represent a real key to statistical data. Without this key the statistics users would not be able to benefit from the data.

On-line database users are particularly interested in cross-country comparisons. Metadata provided by various statistical offices should therefore be harmonized/standardized. There are many initiatives that aim at standardizing metadata from different aspects. Each of them adds value to a particular field of application, but at the same time it is not easy to find and absorb all information about metadata standards. The UNECE

In order to respond to the actual needs expressed by its member States, the Commission established in December 2005 a new subprogramme on economic cooperation and integration, attributed to a new UNECE Committee on Economic Cooperation and Integration. The first session of the Committee is expected to take place in Autumn 2006.

The aim of the programme is not so much to deal with issues related to the internal process of integration within regional groupings, but rather to seek opportunities offered by cooperation between different groupings and individual countries in the framework of the globalized economy.

We have excellent sectoral programmes and it is very important that as a result of the UNECE reform there will be also a subprogramme addressing key aspects of economic development and integration.

Concretely, what is the new Committee going to do?

The reform document identifies a wide range of issues. The Committee's work is expected to focus on promoting a more conducive policy, financial and regulatory environment for economic growth, innovative development and higher competitiveness. It will be up to



various institutions in our region. Some of the issues, or aspects of them, which are expected to be addressed by the Committee are being dealt with by other institutions and organizations as well. We really need to build on their work and adapt it to our needs and at the same time find a niche for the Committee so that it can add value and meet the expectations of member States.

What would be the immediate challenge?

What would be very important is building political constituencies and ensuring that all relevant stakeholders are involved. To achieve this we need not only the full participation of government policymakers and experts, but also of representatives of the private sector, the academic community and other relevant non-governmental actors.

I think that it would be important for countries to set up certain coordinating mechanisms or to use existing ones. If you look at such issues as competitiveness, innovation, support to SMEs, private public partnerships or intellectual property rights it is not obvious that they are dealt with by one single government authority. Hence there may be a need to engage a number of ministries dealing with various issues.

What is being done in preparation for the first meeting of the Committee?

The Committee would have to adopt its programme of work and recommendations on methods of work which, in accordance with the new procedure, would then have to be approved by the Executive Committee.

Coming up ...

April

3-6

Working Group on Environmental Impact Assessment

3-7

Joint UNECE/Eurostat/OECD Work Session on Statistical Metadata

4-7

Working Party on Lighting and Light-signalling

5-7

Working Group of Parties to the Convention on access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters

For further information please contact:

Information Service
UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)
CH - 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

Tel: +41(0)22 917 44 44
Fax: +41(0)22 917 05 05
E-mail: info.ece@unece.org
Website: <http://www.unece.org>

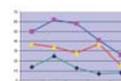
The Division was only officially inaugurated on 1 April but we have already started to prepare a certain number of "building blocks" which in our view would be necessary for the future work of the Committee. These include an inventory of work undertaken by other institutions throughout the region on matters related to the possible undertakings of the Committee so that it can decide on what could be its particular focus, as well as which partners we need to involve in our future work.

We are also preparing something like a conceptual inventory which would include definitions of key terms which we are dealing with such as competitiveness, innovation, and so on. It is not so much a matter for the Committee to negotiate on these terms but rather to have a common language while discussing and implementing the work programme.

We are also updating our contact database of those experts who could be useful in our future work. We very much hope that countries will soon provide us with information on national experts and institutions which could contribute to or benefit from the work of the Committee. This would allow us to develop networks of such experts as called for in the reform document.

* *

For more information contact
andrey.vasilyev@unece.org



Task Force on Common Metadata Framework (METIS) does not intend to create new standards, but it has an ambition to organize information on various models, standards and guidelines, and make it easier for national statistical offices to have their metadata compatible with other countries.

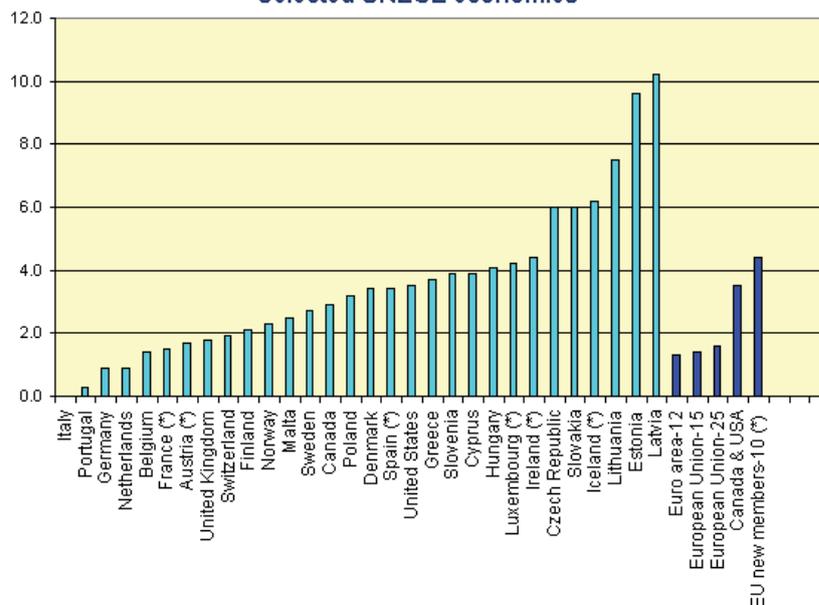
After two years of work, the first broad exchange of views will take place at the Work Session on Statistical Metadata (METIS 2006), 3-5 April in Conference Room XVI. The agenda and papers are available at <http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2006.03.metis.htm>. Information from some of the papers presented at the meeting will be directly or indirectly incorporated into the Common Metadata Framework. * *

For more information contact Juraj Riecan (juraj.riecan@unece.org).

Facts and figures

The rate of economic expansion in the Baltic States is higher than in the rest of the EU

GDP growth rates in 2005
(percentage change over previous year)
Selected UNECE economies



(*) Eurostat's forecast

In 2005, the recovery of the Euro area continued, but at a moderate rate (+1.3%). The most dynamic economies were Ireland (+4.4%), Luxembourg (+4.2%), Greece (+3.7%) and Spain (+3.4%). A slightly higher growth rate was reached in the European Union-15 (1.4%). With an average GDP growth rate of +4.4%, the 10 new EU members are still the fastest growing economies in the European Union, the Baltic States having the highest increase. The average economic expansion in the 25-member European Union was 1.6%. The economies of North America (Canada and USA) have shown more dynamism in 2005 with an increase of production of 3.5%.