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UNECE Reform and the future relationship between the UNECE and the EU



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As former Chairman of the UNECE I had the privilege to assist in the launching of the first phase of the

UNECE Reform which we are now in the process of implementing. From the outset it was our aim to address the concerns of all Member States and to streamline the organization by furthering the role of the UNECE where it has recognized expertise. Throughout this important exercise and during the Austrian EU Presidency in particular, I have stressed the need for closer cooperation with the European Commission.

Today I am very pleased to see the positive outcome of the UNECE Reform. The UNECE has in effect seized the opportunity to adapt to recent geo-political challenges. The creation of a new subprogramme devoted to economic development and

integration for the benefit of countries with economies in transition in particular was an important feature of this reform. The same is true with regard to the strengthening of the respective programmes on environment and transport. The UNECE has thus proven its added value as a pan-European organization while at the same time it has been a forerunner in the overall UN reform process.

When we adopted the UNECE reform in December last year we made it clear that enhancing cooperation with other international and regional organizations was a cornerstone leading to the success of the reform. In particular, we tried to determine the specific areas where the UNECE provides valuable support and added value to Member States as well as synergies by enhanced regional cooperation. In this context, the special cooperation between the UNECE and the EU is of utmost importance and should be further strengthened in the future with a view to finding solutions to key issues of common concern.

In the area of transport, for example, this cooperation has already led to impressive results. On a large number of issues the international agreements and conventions developed within the UNECE provide a commonly

ICT – providing better support to official statistics

ICT managers from the National Statistical Offices (NSOs) of UNECE member countries, Japan, Republic of Korea, UNESCO and IMF again this year exchanged experiences at the Joint UNECE/Eurostat/OECD Seminar on Management of Statistical Information Systems (Sofia, Bulgaria, 21-23 June).

New communication patterns

ICT managers and experts discussed the impact of changing statistical processes on the organization of statistical information systems. Recent years have witnessed new communication patterns, trends toward



the greater use of existing information for statistical purposes contained in administrative registers and records, and numerous integration and harmonisation initiatives.

Consequently, relations among clients/users of statistics as well as respondents are also changing. More and more data are available free-of-charge to professional users as well as the public on the websites of statistical offices. The young generation of

statistics users will appreciate attempts to develop new navigation tools (e.g. GapMinder) based on experiences acquired in the development of computer games and flash technology that help to make statistical websites

Aarhus compliance review leads to debate on access to justice in Belgium

In response to an investigation by the Aarhus Convention's Compliance Committee, Belgian government officials, parliamentarians, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and members of



the judiciary have come together to explore ways in which to strengthen the right of the public to have access to justice in Belgium.

The investigation was initiated when a Belgian NGO, Bond Beter Leefmilieu, wrote to the Compliance Committee claiming that the failure of some Belgian courts to grant standing to environmental NGOs in certain cases concerning the issuing of construction permits and planning decisions was in violation of the Convention.

In a letter to UNECE, Belgium's Federal Environment Minister Bruno Tobback set out a number of measures being taken to address the matter. A multistakeholder roundtable had been held in the federal parliament in mid-May and plans were under way for further training for the judiciary, consultations between the relevant Ministers at federal and regional level and the establishment of a national team of officers to follow up on the matter. Improvements in the law were also under consideration.

No failure to comply

The Compliance Committee, in its findings which were adopted on 14 June 2006, did not in fact conclude that Belgium had failed to comply with the Convention. However, it noted that certain court decisions arising from proceedings initiated before the entry into force of the Convention would have been in conflict with the Convention's provisions had the proceedings been initiated after the entry into force. In other words, if those practices were to continue, Belgium would be in non-compliance. This finding



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accepted legal and technical framework for the development of international road, rail, inland water and combined transport in the UNECE region. These instruments are widely recognized as being particularly useful for the economic integration of Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe as well as Central Asia. Some of these agreements are even applied on a global scale.

This clearly shows one very important comparative advantage of the UNECE, namely the geographical range of the application of its norms and standards. In addition, many EU directives are based on key UNECE agreements, like for instance in the case of vehicle construction. Likewise, the mutual recognition of technical requirements between countries plays an important role in the removal of barriers to trade. This has had the effect of extending the economic and trade benefits of the EU single market well beyond the European Union.

During the recent visit of UNECE Executive Secretary Marek Belka to Brussels, the existing good cooperation with the European Commission in the areas of transport, energy, trade and the EU Neighbourhood Policy was highlighted. Furthermore, the new sub-programme addresses common themes such as modern industrial policy, SMEs and innovation. With its focus on non-EU countries the UNECE is in effect instrumental in helping to avoid the emergence of new dividing lines in Europe. For this integration process to succeed, active involvement of the EU Member States as well as of the Commission is essential.

Finally, by providing a multilateral forum for discussion, review and exchange of experience and best practices as well as the elaboration of policy recommendations, the UNECE plays an essential role that complements the numerous respective bilateral activities of the EU in the UNECE region. This already existing good relationship should thus in my view be even further strengthened in the future. ❖

the concentration is more on the specialized functions such as metadata systems, data protection, etc.

Partnerships between NSOs may also help to increase the efficiency of ICT services for statistics. A new initiative was launched last week in Sofia. The Office for National Statistics of the United Kingdom suggested forming a consortium of NSOs in the development of Web-service solutions for components of the statistical value chain. A number of the international organizations present also expressed their interest in this initiative. ❖

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was sufficient to prompt Belgium to initiate the above steps.

Mechanism working at its best

The Committee's Chairperson, Mr. Veit Koester of Denmark, commented that the case showed the compliance mechanism working at its best: "Even without the unpleasant business of having to find a Party in non-compliance, the consideration of the case has led to positive steps being taken – largely thanks to the willingness of Belgium to cooperate with and listen to the Committee and to take the initiative. It also illustrates the value of having a mechanism which responds to input from the public, without which the issue might not have come to the attention of the Committee."

Several multilateral environmental agreements have developed mechanisms to strengthen and support compliance. However, the Aarhus Convention's compliance mechanism is unusual in that it allows for any member of the public to trigger a review of a Party's compliance by simply writing to the Compliance Committee. ❖

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more attractive and user-friendly. Dissemination experts also do not forget the generation of traditional statistics users and provide data alternatively in more classical formats.

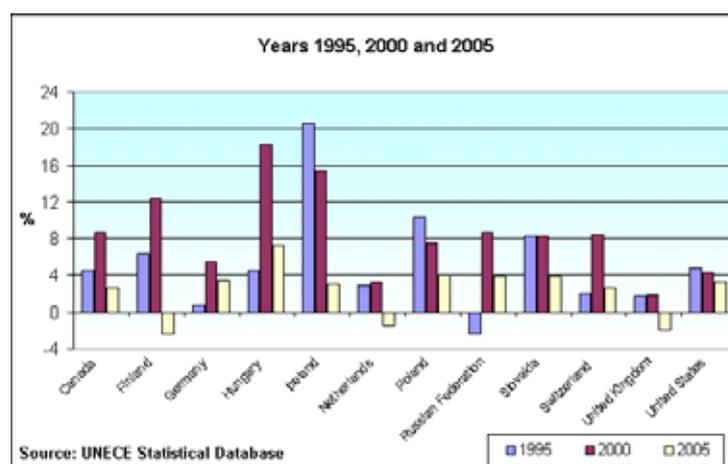
Confidentiality ...

More data on the Internet also means a greater vulnerability to disclosure of confidential microdata on individuals and businesses. The discussion, therefore, also focused on leading practices in implementing ICT tools for statistical disclosure control.

... and efficiency

On the practical side, ICT managers are also concerned about the efficiency of their operations. Efforts are made to use generalised software tools and re-use solutions between organizations and countries. Tasks requiring specific expertise, not available in statistical agencies, are often outsourced to external contractors. While the past practice in outsourcing and off-shoring was primarily focused on general ICT infrastructure, nowadays

Facts and figures Annual industrial output growth rates for selected UNECE countries



An industrial production index (IPI) is an index covering production in mining, manufacturing and public utilities (electricity, gas and water). IPI is one of the most important measures of economic activity.

During 1995, 2000 and 2005 most of the selected UNECE countries recorded an increase in industrial output. In 1995 Ireland recorded the largest increase in industrial output of 20.5%, while the Russian Federation recorded the largest decrease of 2.4%. In 2005 Hungary recorded the largest increase in industrial output of 7.3%, while Finland recorded the largest decrease of 2.4%. During the period 1995-2005 inclusive, Ireland recorded the largest annual average increase in industrial output of 11.0%, followed by Hungary with 8.0%. At the other end of the scale, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands recorded the smallest average increases in industrial output of 0.25% and 1.2% respectively.

Not an official record - For information only

Coming up ...

3-12 July

ECOSOC Sub-Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods



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