



UNECE Weekly

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

Issue N° 188 - 4-8 September 2006

China considers Aarhus Convention an example



In a new initiative aimed at furthering environmental democracy as well as educating and engaging the public in environmental protection, the Chinese State Environmental Protection

Administration (SEPA) is supporting development of a set of rules for public information and participation in environmental decision-making. UNECE has been invited to contribute to the process by sharing its experience with the Aarhus Convention*.

As part of a year-long initiative, a Symposium on the Drafting of the "Measures on Public Participation in Environmental Protection" (Beijing, China, 13-22 August) was co-organized by the Chinese Centre for Legal Assistance to Pollution Victims and the Natural Resources Defence Council, in cooperation with SEPA, to gather comments and to fine tune the draft regulation. Its participants included representatives of the Chinese parliament's environment committee, national, provincial and local government representatives, academics, students and environmental organizations.

Example of Central and Eastern Europe

UNECE's presentation was particularly focused on issues faced by Central and East European governments as they developed their regulations to implement the Convention. In the past decade, most of the countries in that region have either introduced or strengthened their relevant legislation in the light of the adoption in 1998 of the Aarhus Convention. Some, in particular in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, are continuing to develop practical implementation measures and make appropriate institutional arrangements.

Aiming to produce a comprehensive set of rules, Chinese legal experts developing the regulation are assessing relevant legal norms and practices from other countries and their applicability in China. The recent experience of the Central and East European region and its successes and challenges were considered by some of the participants as particularly relevant in the Chinese context.



Photo Pierre Vivot

The draft regulation is due to be submitted for SEPA's consideration and possible adoption at the end of 2006. It has a more limited scope than the Convention in that it only applies to decisions and information within the SEPA mandate rather than the whole range of public authorities. However, if adopted and successfully implemented, it would represent a significant step forward in strengthening the environmental democracy in China. *

**UNECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters*

For more information visit <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/welcome.html> or contact public.participation@unece.org.

Internet consultation on classification and labelling of chemicals

The European Commission has launched a public consultation on a draft proposal for a Regulation introducing the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals (GHS) criteria into Community law. Open between 21 August and 21 October, it is in the form of an Internet consultation and an online questionnaire (http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/reach/ghs_consultation_en.htm).

Work on elaborating the GHS began, in cooperation with ILO and OECD, with the premise that existing systems applied in various sectors (transport, agriculture, workplace safety, consumer protection, environment protection) should be harmonized in order to develop a single, globally harmonized system to address classification of chemicals and hazard communication (labels and safety data sheets). A first version was adopted in 2002 by the ECOSOC Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods and on the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals, and a revised version was published in 2005.

The GHS defines 27 classes of chemical hazards, each of them divided in several categories representing different hazard levels. These hazards are listed in three main groups: physical hazards (such as explosivity and flammability); hazards to health (such as toxicity, corrosivity, mutagenicity) and hazards to the environment (notably the aquatic environment). The





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GHS contains the criteria for classification under the various classes and categories as well as provisions for hazard communication. It indicates the symbols and pictograms which should be used to identify chemical hazards on labels, as well as the various other elements, such as the precautionary statements, precautionary pictograms which should appear on the label. It also contains guidance on the preparation of safety data sheets (SDS) and recommendations for a harmonized presentation of information required therein.

Worker protection

The information required in SDS is intended to enable employers to develop an active programme of worker protection measures, including training, which is specific to the individual workplace, and to consider any measure which may be necessary to protect the environment. In addition the SDS provides an important source of information for workers, emergency responders (including poison centres), and consumers.

The World Summit on Sustainable Development, in the Plan of Action adopted in Johannesburg in 2002, encouraged countries to implement the GHS as soon as possible with a view to having the system fully operational by 2008.

Worldwide implementation

The System is now ready for worldwide implementation. This has already started with pilot countries introducing the system in their national practices in different regions of the world, notably with the capacity-building support of ILO and UNITAR.

The European Commission's proposal strives for coherence between EU legislation on classification and labelling, downstream legislation related to consumer products, handling of chemicals, control of chemicals, occupational health and safety, waste and End-of-Life-Products, and legislation concerning transport of chemicals which is itself based on UNECE legal instruments applicable to the transport of dangerous goods. *

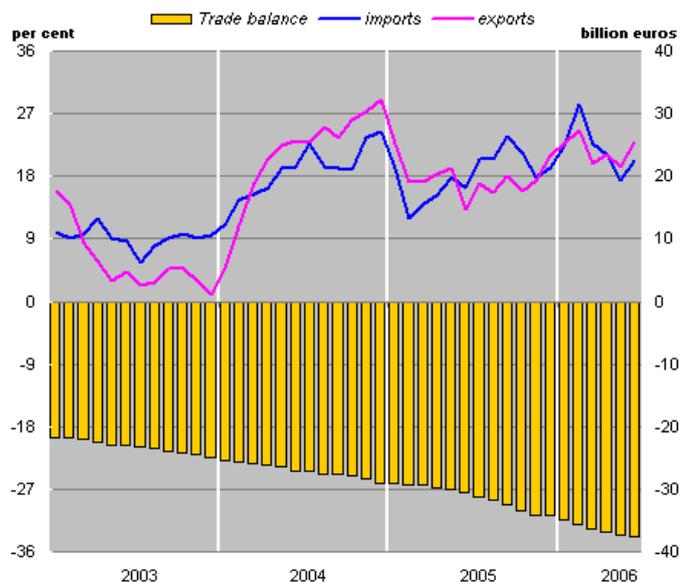
The GHS activities are carried out under the auspices of ECOSOC, and the secretariat services are provided by the UNECE. The text of the GHS is available in the six UN languages on the UNECE website at: http://www.unece.org/trans/danger/publi/ghs/ghs_welcome_e.html.

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Facts and figures

Trade deficit in south-east Europe continues to grow

Merchandise trade in south-east Europe, January 2003 - June 2006



Source: National statistics and UNECE Statistics division computations.

Note: Right scale - merchandise trade balances in billion euros at the end of the month, cumulated over 12 months. Left scale - monthly year-on-year percentage changes for exports and imports based on three-month moving average values in euros. South-east Europe refers to Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, Serbia and The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

The deterioration of merchandise trade deficits accelerated markedly since mid-2005 across the south-east European countries. In Romania alone, the trade deficit soared by a third over the last twelve months as strong domestic demand and the appreciated leu boosted import growth. In the region as a whole, the imports of fuels, inflated by rising prices on international markets, grew steadily and recovering investment and the exporting sectors' needs for capital and intermediate goods also contributed to overall import growth. Recovering demand in major EU markets and improved intra-regional cooperation supported double-digit growth rates for exports from south-east Europe, which lately even outstripped growth of imports. However, in many of these countries a certain fragility of export performance is due to the dominance of textiles and footwear exports, which face an increasing competition from Asian suppliers.

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