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Interview with Miroslav Spasojević, Chairman of the Ad Hoc Working Group of Senior Officials "Environment for Europe"

Where do you stand with the preparations for the 2007 Environment for Europe Conference in Belgrade?

At the UNECE level we are currently discussing the agenda and the major issues that will be tackled at the Conference. On the other hand, Serbia as the host country has more complex tasks. We have to prepare logistical arrangements to organize this meeting. We are expecting around 1300 officials and between 1500 and 2000 representatives from NGOs, civil society, private sector businesses, and so on. We would like to have a successful meeting but also present our country. We hope to demonstrate where we are with our environment and if possible to attract the international community to help us to get in line with the other countries of the UNECE region. We are now making all kinds of efforts to improve the legal institutional framework and to allow the people of our country to learn much more about the environment so that they will be able to cope with the challenges that are emerging.

What are the main issues to be discussed at the Conference?

Our slogan is "Environment for Europe building a Bridge for the Future". We will first assess what has been done between the Kiev Conference (2003) and the Belgrade Conference. Under this item, we will have a Belgrade report prepared by the European Environmental Agency. Following this report, we will see what is the situation about the monitoring and assessment. Then we will focus on the implementation of the multilateral agreements that have been adopted by UNECE. We will also discuss the issue of Environmental Performance Review introduced by UNECE and we will present our EPR to the International Community.

Another segment will be dedicated

to Panels, where Ministries of Environment and of Education will discuss together education related to sustainable development. The idea is to introduce our children to sustainable development. If they can really understand what sustainable development is, we will make real progress in the future.

The second issue is biodiversity. Ministries, NGOs and civil society will participate in the debate to see how we are going to take action before 2010 to protect biodiversity.

The second day will be allocated to the two other main issues – Capacity Building and Partnerships. Under capacity building, we will discuss two regional aspects – firstly the perspectives of Central Asia and Caucasus countries and secondly the South-eastern countries. Then we



will discuss energy efficiency, water and sanitation, environment and security and sustainable consumption production.

Finally, on the third day we will discuss three issues: the future of environment for Europe, the ministerial declaration and the chairman's summary.

I think we need to discuss environmental issues all over Europe. This is a platform where all the countries of UNECE are establishing cooperation between themselves but also with other international organizations such as the World Bank and other financial and developing organizations.

What are your expectations regarding the outcome of the Conference?

The main outcome will be the Ministerial Declaration that should reflect the discussions of the meeting. We would like the Belgrade Declaration to be short in order to attract Governments'



UNECE region marketplace reshaped by China's forest products trade and policies

The UNECE Timber Committee has analysed the current forest products market situation in 2006 and forecast markets for



2007 in the light of current policy issues. The theme of the annual Timber Committee Market Discussions was "China's influence

on forest products markets in the UNECE region." For the full text of the Committee's approved market statement see <http://www.unece.org/trade/timber>.

China's influence on UNECE region markets

China has rapidly become the world's largest exporter of forest products in value terms, and is second only to the United States as an importer. China's own forests meet only a small part of its industrial roundwood appetite, with the result that China is now



the world's number one importer of logs, both softwood and hardwood. Russia is the main source of softwood logs, supplying about 70% of China's needs. A small part of China's imports is of certified origin but it does seem that a significant share may be from illegal sources. According to official Russian sources, China imports 19.2 million m³ of logs from Russia, but Russian experts estimate that in addition to that volume there is a significant supply of logs from the Far East region of Russia based on illegal logging.

Investments in Chinese mills and transportation, aided by government incentives, have





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attention. In this Declaration, we will focus on three issues: the implementation of the Kiev commitments, because there are still many things that need to be done, then it will focus on the major findings of the Belgrade Assessment. Another important segment will be about the implementation of environmental agreements and environmental performance reviews. It will also focus on capacity building.

We want to have a more harmonized European space but we know that there are still regions that are lagging behind. We aim at developing different instruments and tools to achieve progress in implementing multilateral agreements from an institutional point of view. Finally, one part will be dedicated to the future of Environment for Europe. ✨

Interview done by Amélie Churlet and Elodie André



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led to a huge expansion in value-added processing, especially furniture, millwork and mouldings. Over the last decade China's furniture exports have grown at a rate of 34% per year and China is by far the major supplier of furniture to the US, and second only to Canada as a supplier of forest products. China's low-cost labour is balanced by rising raw material, energy and transportation costs. Competition from low-priced Chinese wood products is leading to the increasing trade disputes: complaints have been filed in the US, Canada, Germany and Italy. Although exports are escalating, domestic consumption equivalent to about 75% of production is rising with the standard of living. UNECE region forest products companies are faced with a rapidly changing marketplace: some are

successful in profiting from investments in China and trading with China, while others that were not able to adapt have reduced revenues.

Value-added wood products

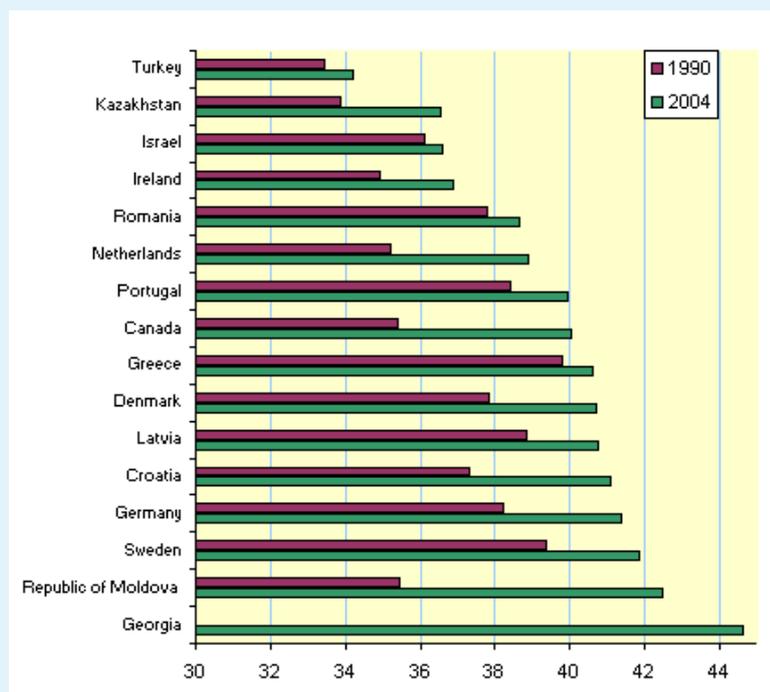
There has been phenomenal growth in the level of furniture exports from China and southeast Asia into the five major importing countries, US, France, Germany, UK and Japan. The world furniture trade has opened up faster and more profoundly than anticipated and the impact on manufacturers in the US in particular, has been severe. Chinese labour costs are low but their large-scale enterprises are highly efficient and final quality is also high. China accounts for 43% of US wood furniture imports and 33% of Europe's. China may now be the world's number one furniture exporter, unseating Italy from this long-held position. Similar impacts are being witnessed in the flooring sector. Wood has increased its share of the flooring market in Europe, but faces stiff competition from non-wood products as well as imported flooring. In terms of parquet flooring, for instance, China has increased its market share from about 10% in 2000 to over 35% in 2005. In response to these pressures, a marketing campaign to promote "real wood" flooring is being launched to raise consumer awareness and to encourage demand, in competition against other flooring materials. ✨

For more information contact: Ed Pepke (info.timber@unece.org).

Facts and figures

Pronounced shift in the period of active life

Labour force median age in selected UNECE countries (in years)



Source: UNECE Gender Statistics Database.

Note: The median age refers to the age that splits a population into two subpopulations of same size. Data for Kazakhstan, Latvia and the Republic of Moldova in 1990 refer to 1989; for Israel, Greece in 2004 refer to 2003. Turkey: in 1990, people aged 12 years and plus were surveyed. In general the active age starts at 15-16, depending on the country.

Social structures of the world are affected by the aging of the population in many ways. People's active life boundaries are changing. They enter but also leave the labour market later in their life. As a result, the median age of the active population is rising, in particular in high and medium-income European and North American countries. Over the past 15 years, in many of these countries the median age of the labour force increased by 1.5 to 4.5 years, and approached or even exceeded 40 years. The very strong shifts were observed in Canada and the Netherlands and the least important in Israel and Greece. The most considerable shift was in fact observed in the Republic of Moldova, but the cause of this was probably significant labour emigration of the younger population rather than the aging process itself.

Coming up ...

17-19 October

Working Party on Road Transport

17-20 October

Working Party on General Safety Provisions

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>