



# UNECE Weekly

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

Issue № 201 – 4-8 December 2006

## Fostering reforms and innovation

Fostering reforms and innovation in the Western Balkans and other CEI member countries was a main theme of the *CEI Summit of Heads of Governments* and the *Economic Forum* held in Tirana on 22-24 November. The Summit discussed the role of reforms and innovation in improving competitiveness of national economies. Paolo Garonna, UNECE Deputy Executive Secretary, presenting the UNECE view, stressed that building a knowledge-based economy is essential to avoid dividing lines and to ensure peace, security and development in a pan-European context. Both UNECE and CEI, he said, work towards reaching these objectives through concrete projects in energy, transport, environment and trade in line with the MoU between the two organizations (1998). New opportunities to strengthen cooperation with CEI members is provided by the subprogramme on economic cooperation and integration.

### Women in innovative business

The UNECE session at the Economic Forum, jointly organized with EBRD,



focused on *Women in Innovative Business*. It discussed how to mobilize women's potential for growth through innovation in women-run businesses, the most dynamic sector of SMEs in most countries. Women's potential, barriers and messages to Governments were addressed. The environment for innovation should be friendly and competitive but also gender sensitive, said the chair of this session, Brigitte Schmögerová, Deputy President of EBRD. Anca Vlad, who founded FILDAS Trading, the first Romanian private distribution company, pointed out the problems women face in balancing business and family responsibilities.

The gender digital divide is wide – in Serbia for example, said Natasha Gospic, a professor at Belgrade University, only 30% of internet users are women (age 15-20 and above) 

## Assistance programme starts its second phase

High on the agenda of the 4th Conference of Parties to the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents (Rome, 15-17 November) was the Assistance Programme adopted at the previous meeting, which aims to help UNECE countries with economies in transition to increase the level of industrial safety in the region through their implementation of the Convention.

### Coordinated assistance

For a country to prevent, be prepared for and react to an industrial accident requires that authorities at different levels act in a coordinated manner and cooperate with industry and the authorities of the neighbouring countries. Some countries, mainly those of EECCA and SEE, face challenges in implementing it. The first phase of the Assistance Programme, almost completed, aims to identify the particular problems in this area for each of the EECCA and SEE\* countries participating in the Programme. 

The second phase, starting



\* EECCA: Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia; SEE: South-East Europe

## Question of the week

to Badriddin Obidov, chargé d'affaires a.i., Permanent Mission of Uzbekistan in Geneva

### What is the position of Uzbekistan vis-à-vis the United Nations and UNECE?

This year Uzbekistan celebrates the 15th Anniversary of its Independence. After gaining sovereignty, Uzbekistan occupied its deserved position in the world community. In 1992 the country became a member of the UN and then joined other prestigious international organizations.

Within the framework of Uzbekistan's integration in the international economic community, its membership and cooperation with international organizations are important, including UNECE, which strives to foster sustainable economic growth among its member States. At present cooperation with UNECE is carried out practically in all the main directions of the Commission's activity: transport, environment, energy, statistics, trade and others.

### What do you think of the newly created subprogramme on economic cooperation and integration?

The creation of the subprogramme is, in our view, one of the important elements of the UNECE reform.

In this regard mention should be made of the successful conclusion of the first inaugural session of the Committee on Economic Cooperation and Integration (CECI). We can say with confidence that the legal basis of CECI has been set up by the adoption of the Terms of Reference and the Programme of Work. The decision to set up Teams of Specialists on Competitiveness and Innovation Policies, and on Intellectual Property, as well as expert networks, will undoubtedly promote the successful functioning of the subprogramme.

In general, the topics to be covered by CECI reflect the relevant problems of the countries in transition. To ensure a positive outcome, we should try to give priority to the demand-driven principle in the programme of work. ♦

## Assistance programme starts its second phase (cont.)

in 2007, will develop activities such as workshops, pilot-projects, directed to the specific needs identified during the first phase.

The list of hazardous substances for the purposes of defining hazardous activities annexed to the Convention has been amended — chemical substances have been added and deleted and changes made to their thresholds — to better correspond to the legal requirements recently developed within the UNECE region.

### Simple web-based software

Web-based technology will be introduced into the UNECE Industrial Accident Notification System to enhance its communication procedure. The simple web-based software, which should be available to the points of contact within the next two years, will facilitate and speed up the communication which is currently done by fax.

The system will be accessible to the points of contact directly from the Industrial Accident Convention internet site. They will be able to notify an accident by completing electronic forms with check boxes, menu lists, etc.

### Safety guidelines for pipelines

Safety guidelines and good practices for pipelines are a comprehensive tool for authorities and pipelines operators to prevent but also to prepare for and respond to accidents involving pipelines. Guidelines prepared by a joint group of experts from both the Water and Industrial Accidents Conventions have been approved and will be put into operation. ♦

For more information contact Lukasz Wyrowski ([lukasz.wyrowski@unece.org](mailto:lukasz.wyrowski@unece.org)).

## Women in innovative business (cont.)

30), and in Albania only 10% of women businesses use ICT according to Flutura Xhabija, President of the Association of Professional and Business Women.

That is why introducing young women to higher value added skills is so important, stressed Brigitte Watson, EBRD Regional Programme Director, and has the support of their TAM/BAS\* Management Group. Gender-informed policies require, however, a longer-term commitment of Governments, private and other stakeholders to have an impact, underlined Ewa Ruminska-Zimny, UNECE. The possibility of cooperation between UNECE and EBRD in supporting women in innovative business will be further explored. ♦

\* TurnAround Management and Business Advisory Services

For more information contact Ewa Ruminska-Zimny ([ewa.zimny@unece.org](mailto:ewa.zimny@unece.org)).

## Coming up ...

4-5 December

Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development

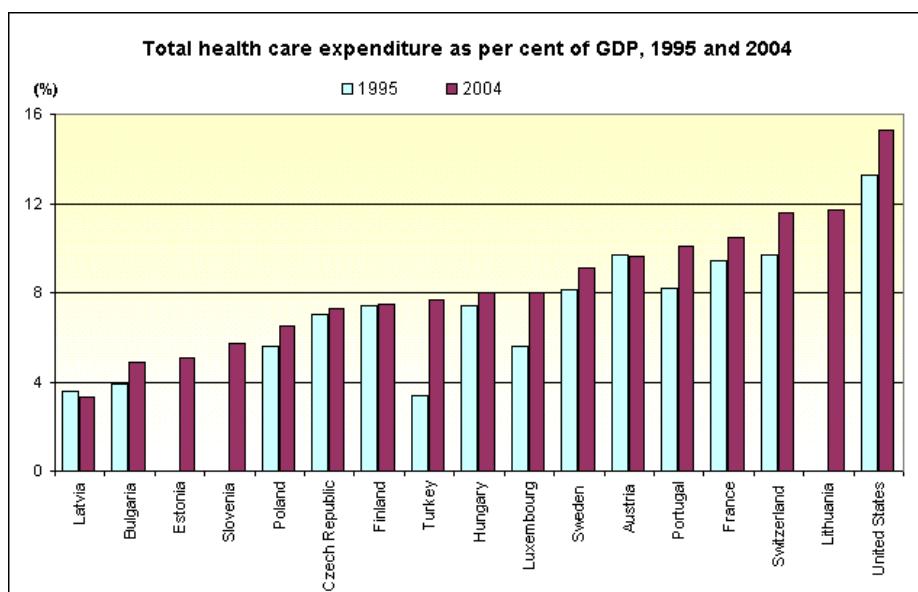
**2448**

4-12 December

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

## Facts and figures

### The rise of health expenditure outpaced economic growth in many UNECE countries over the last decade



Source: UNECE Statistical database.

Note: Total health expenditure refers to expenditure for which the primary objective is to improve or prevent the deterioration of health status and includes all expenditures incurred by government, private households and donors.

In the case of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovenia, 2004 data refer to 2002, and for Bulgaria, to 2001.

Over the last ten years, health expenditure increased markedly in UNECE countries, and in most of them this increase outpaced the overall economic growth. According to the available data, the median share of health expenditure in 31 UNECE countries amounted to 8.7% of GDP in 2004, up from 7.6% a decade earlier.

However, the variation across the region remains considerable: for instance, countries in our sample devoted from 3.3% to 15.3% of GDP to health spending in 2004. In general, high-income economies tend to spend more on health care than medium- and low-income countries. There are, however, deviations from this pattern (Finland and the United States, Latvia and Lithuania), which in part reflect different financing and organizational structures of health systems.

Advances in preventive medicine, diagnostic and health treatment capabilities as well as population ageing are among the major factors of the rise in health expenditures.