



**Economic and Social  
Council**

Distr.  
GENERAL

TRADE/2002/6  
8 May 2002

ENGLISH ONLY

**ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE**

COMMITTEE FOR TRADE, INDUSTRY AND  
ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT  
Sixth session, 28 and 31 May 2002  
Item 8 of the provisional agenda

**WORKING PARTY ON TECHNICAL HARMONIZATION  
AND STANDARDIZATION POLICIES**

**Summary of main activities and developments**

This paper summarizes the main activities of the Working Party on Technical Harmonization and Standardization Policies (WP.6) since its eleventh session (29-31 October 2001).

The objective of this sub-programme is to promote trade, as well as industrial and enterprise development in the UNECE region, by (a) encouraging the international harmonization of standards and technical regulations, (b) removing or gradually reducing technical barriers to trade, and (c) promoting scientific and technological cooperation through the development of policies for standardization and related activities.

The Committee will be asked to endorse the report of the Working Party's eleventh session (TRADE/WP.6/2001/18 and TRADE/WP.6/2001/18/Add.1). With regard to this report, the Committee will be asked to endorse the proposals contained in paragraphs 15 and 21, might wish to consider WP.6 proposals for cooperation with SBs (paragraphs 36 and 37) and to note the remainder of this document, which has been submitted for information.

The report of the Working Party's eleventh session and other documents of the Working Party are available at the following website address: <http://www.unece.org/trade/stdpol>

The Working Party will hold its twelfth session in Geneva from 28 to 30 October 2002.

## **Working Party 6 October 2001 session-main results and follow-up activities**

1. The eleventh session of the Working Party on Technical Harmonization and Standardization Policies was held from 29 to 31 October 2001. The meeting was attended by 34 countries, 6 intergovernmental organizations and 7 non-governmental organizations. The main results are described below:

### **UNECE project “International Model for technical harmonization based on good regulatory practice for the preparation, adoption and application of technical regulations via the use of international standards” (“International Model for technical harmonization”)**

2. The purpose of this project is to explore how national (mandatory) technical regulations could make wider use of international standards and promote, where feasible, greater regulatory convergence. It was prepared by an ad hoc Team of Specialists on STandardization And Regulatory Techniques (“START” Team), which is an open ended group of government experts.

3. The “International Model” comprises a set of voluntary mechanisms and principles of good regulatory practice that can be used by countries wishing to align their regulatory regimes in specific sectors or product areas. The basic concept behind the “Model” is that the technical content of regulations should be drafted in terms of broad objectives (addressing safety, environmental and other legitimate concerns of Governments) and refer to international standards for more detailed performance-based technical requirements. This would allow companies that are manufacturing regulated products according to relevant international standards to obtain conformity to technical regulations and thus contribute to establishing a level playing field for the benefit of all market players (industry, trade, consumers, etc.).

4. It is recalled that ongoing discussions at WTO have confirmed the importance of good regulatory practice for the preparation, adoption and application of technical regulations for the facilitation of trade and that, to this end, the WTO Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade explicitly suggests a number of means to regulators (for example, use of international standards as a basis for technical regulations). At the same time, the WTO agreement does not provide a concrete format or procedures on how these means could be implemented and thus the UNECE “International Model” might be of interest to countries wishing to start a regulatory convergence dialogue by providing them with a possible voluntary mechanism/framework for initiating such cooperation.

5. The concept of the “International Model” has been reported at various international and regional forums, including at the meetings of the WTO Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade. It was presented to and well received by representatives of the private sector. With a view to involving all interested countries in the elaboration of the project the “START” Team, for example, established liaison with and received regularly feedback on its activities from members of the CIS Interstate Council for Standardization, Certification and Metrology.

6. After discussions, the Working Party agreed:

- (a) that there was a clear market need and an interest from Governments in further reduction of trade barriers and facilitation of market access;
- (b) that the elaborated “International Model” would contribute to the facilitation of market access by providing a voluntary framework for establishing sectoral agreements between interested member countries;
- (c) to request the secretariat to include the text of the “International Model” in the set of UNECE Recommendations on Standardization Policies and to publish it ;
- (d) to endorse revised Terms of Reference of the “START” Team (see TRADE/WP.6/2001/8/Add.1, annex 2);
- (e) to call on the START Team to :
  - explore, as a follow up to a request from the CTIED (cf. ECE/TRADE 280, paragraph 64), with UNECE subsidiary bodies the possibilities for using the principles and concept of the “International Model” in their areas of competence with the goal of identifying potential pilot projects;
  - assist with sectoral initiatives based on the “International Model” , as requested by interested parties.

7. After the October 2001 session, the “START” Team decided to concentrate its activities on the identification of areas where governments and companies see a need for regulatory cooperation and on assisting interested parties, if required.

8. In view of the strong interest demonstrated by business in the telecom sector, an informal expert meeting for experts from the telecom industry was organized on 24 April 2002 in Geneva. The purpose of the meeting, bringing together primarily private companies and interested governmental experts, was to identify areas where the lack of regulatory convergence impedes market access for private operators. Representatives of private multinational companies and of business associations from Asia (Japan and Australia), which took part in the meeting agreed on a number of telecom products which, in their opinion, might provide a starting point for initiating a dialogue with regulators on enhancing regulatory convergence. The “START” Team will ensure a follow up to this “industry telecom initiative” which will be reported to the Committee.

9. It could be also noted that the new UNECE Recommendation “L” (the “International Model”) was welcomed by a number of UNECE member States as useful instrument. Thus, the Council of European Communities in its conclusions on standardization of 1 March 2002 when referring to the international dimension of standardization invited ”the Commission and the Member States to continue promotion of standards-receptive regulatory models with the Community’s trading partners, such as those developed by the UNECE, and to continue supporting the implementation of appropriate measures by third countries and other regions”.

10. There is an interest in some of the Working Party’s projects also from countries outside the UNECE region. Thus, the problem of technical harmonization and in this context, the relevance of the “International Model for Technical Harmonization” was raised at the 7<sup>th</sup> Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) on standards and conformity assessment (SCA) held in Beijing on 10-11 April 2002. In the report of the meeting, with reference to their future programme of work it was noted that “the UNECE international model for technical harmonisation is an important example of

international regulatory collaboration and that developments on regulatory cooperation will be closely followed to consider their relevance to the work of the SCA Group.”

### **International Workshop on Conformity Assessment Procedures and Trade Facilitation**

11. The purpose of the Workshop (held on 30 October 2001) was to identify and discuss trade-related difficulties and problems encountered by authorities and companies in different countries when implementing and applying various conformity assessment procedures.

12. Discussions concentrated on the following major topics related to conformity assessment matters:

- the experience of transition economies in restructuring their conformity assessment systems (legal, organizational and other aspects);
- the experience of Governments with the mutual recognition agreements;
- voluntary recognition and certification schemes (with international and regional scope) and tools to ensure the competence and credibility of conformity assessment bodies;
- practical problems faced by private operators in meeting conformity assessment procedures in different markets.

13. During the workshop and at the session delegates also provided information on the latest conformity assessment and standardization related developments, new changes in regulatory structures, horizontal legislation and other matters.

14. The conclusions of the Workshop (endorsed by the Working Party), inter alia, called on UNECE Governments and international and regional organizations:

- to encourage effective cooperation between Governments, international and regional organizations and economic operators in seeking ways for greater convergence and harmonization of conformity assessment requirements;
- to intensify co-operation on criteria for assessing the appropriateness of conformity assessment requirements, and to define the conditions necessary for the establishment and operation of recognition agreements in the regulatory and non-regulatory areas;
- to show their commitment to the facilitation of international trade by use, whenever feasible and appropriate and without prejudice to their legitimate objectives of less trade-restrictive conformity assessment means; the use of duly supported supplier's declaration of conformity (SDoC) should be substantiated by a supporting framework including, amongst other things, well functioning market surveillance procedures for products circulating on the market.

15. The Committee is invited to endorse the conclusions of the Workshop.

### **ECE Standardization List**

16. The Working Party considered the final version of the revised ECE Standardization "List", which incorporated changes and comments received by the secretariat. The purpose of the List is to promote substantial participation by Governments in international standardization by identifying sectors where Governments consider it useful to develop voluntary standards.

17. The Working Party approved the revised "List" and requested the secretariat to publish this new edition. The Working Party also asked the secretariat to take the necessary measures to promote the "List" among interested Governments and organizations. In particular was noted that the format of the "List" could be useful as a mechanism for identifying of priorities, for example, on a sub-, regional levels among interested countries (as it being done at present, for example, between CIS states).

### **Role of international standards in international harmonization and national transposition of international standards**

18. Delegations discussed the importance of the use of international standards for the facilitation of international trade in member countries and noted difficulties regarding access to information on the transposition of standards at a national level, which created special problems for business operators.

19. In this context the Working Party was informed , that the Committee (at its fifth session) had found useful and thus had supported and approved the WP.6 proposal calling on member Governments to consider the feasibility of accepting an obligation of informing the secretariat on the national transposition /use of legal instruments, recommendations, and standards elaborated at UNECE.

20. After discussions, and as a practical follow up to this proposal, the Working Party asked the secretariat to contact other UNECE subsidiary bodies with a request for information on the types of recommendations and standards elaborated by them and if they had any systems to monitor their national transposition. Based on this information, possible further action by the Working Party with a view to exploring the possibilities for implementing this recommendation (on national transposition of UNECE standards and recommendations) will be considered.

21. The Committee is asked to endorse this request addressed to UNECE principal subsidiary bodies.

### **Sub-regional cooperation**

22. While discussing matters of coordination and cooperation with governments and various organizations in the UNECE region, the Working Party noted with satisfaction the close cooperation that had been established with a number of regional organizations and in particular the organization comprising this standards bodies of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), namely Interstate Council for Standardization, Certification and Metrology. The Working Party took note that major Working Party documents were regularly submitted for information and discussion at sessions of this organization and relevant comments were then forwarded to UNECE.

23. The representative of the CIS Interstate Council confirmed interest on the part of CIS States in cooperating with the Working Party and announced that information on the activities of the Working Party and discussions of its "International Model for Technical Harmonization" project were on the agenda of the 19th session of the CIS Council held in Bishkek (30 October-1 November 2001). It was also noted that results of the discussions at the eleventh session (including on the "International Model" and its final text) will be presented at the next CIS standardization meeting in May 2002 in Minsk.

24. On 12-13 December 2001, at the invitation of the Slovak Government a workshop on standardization and conformity assessment matters in the transition economies was held in Bratislava, Slovakia.

25. The workshop was attended by more than 70 delegates from 14 countries of the UNECE region (Austria, Czech Republic, France, Ireland, Latvia, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, United Kingdom, Yugoslavia) and also from the European Commission, as well as from international and regional organizations (the International Organization for Standardization and European Organization for Conformity Assessment) and from private the sector. Following discussions at the workshop a number of further activities aimed at transition economies were proposed, and will be examined by the Working Party during its October 2002 session.

### **Quality issues**

26. At its eleventh session the Working Party was informed of the results of the UNECE expert meeting on best practice in the creation of quality assurance systems for SMEs (25 - 26 October 2001, Geneva) organized by the UNECE Regional Advisor on SMEs and Entrepreneurship in cooperation with the Working Party.

27. Among issues where further action by the Working Party would be required, the following matters were outlined: establishing of a CIS quality centre and a quality centre in Russia; further work on governmental quality promotion policies and programmes; assistance to SMEs in establishing quality assurance systems.

28. The Working Party agreed with the proposal from the Expert Meeting on the usefulness of establishing a cross-sectoral group of experts to deal in depth with a variety of quality-related issues. Such a Group was established on 13 February 2002 as a joint venture between Working Party 6 and the Working Party on Industry and Enterprise Development (WP.8).

29. The Working Party is also cooperating closely with the Working Party on Standardization of Perishable Produce and Quality Development (WP.7) on the possibilities of preparing a quality mark for meat under the WP.7 specialized section on standardization of meat. This project will be further discussed in October 2002 during the parallel sessions of WP.6 and WP.7.

### **Cross-sectoral activities**

30. In view of the cross sectoral nature of its activities, the Working Party has been working in cooperation with other subsidiary bodies on matters of concern to countries in transition.

31. Thus, in response to the Committee's proposal to strengthen work on sustainable trade in timber, during the

eleventh session the secretary of the UNECE Timber Committee made a presentation on different voluntary systems of forests certification, their role in international trade, the attitude of consumers and market players to these schemes and on related activities of the Timber Committee. The secretary to Working Party 6 also made a presentation at the UNECE Timber Committee session (October 2001) on WP.6's certification-related activities.

32. At present, the WP.6 rapporteurs and the secretariat, in cooperation with the secretariat and the Bureau of the Timber Committee, are considering the follow up to be taken to these discussions on forest certification matters.

33. During the Working Party session, a representative of UNCTAD referred to problems in international trade caused by the lack of harmonization of certification schemes and reported on the forthcoming international conference on organic guarantee schemes (17-19 February 2002, Nuremberg; Germany). The conference dealt with a problem of proliferation of certification requirements and regulations which have become one of the major obstacles in the organic sector, especially for developing countries. UNECE was invited to participate and contribute with presentations. The Chairman of Working Party 6 took part in this conference (of more than 200 participants from all continents) and presented the results of relevant WP.6 activities, in particular those relating to problems of international harmonization and equivalence.

34. Following requests from the countries in transition expressed at the WP.6 session and at the Workshop in Bratislava, the Working Party decided to organize a Forum on market surveillance in conjunction with its twelfth session.

#### **Proposed Areas for possible cooperation of Working Party 6 with other UNECE Subsidiary bodies :**

36. The Working Party has identified the following as possible areas of cooperation between WP.6 and other UNECE subsidiary bodies:

- (a) identifying possible projects for initiating regulatory convergence as a means of trade facilitation in markets areas/sectors where UNECE has standard-setting activities using the principles proposed in UNECE Recommendation "L" ("International Model for Technical Harmonization");
- (b) continuation of projects on quality related matters with Working Party 7 and with Working Party 8;
- (c) promotion of the "ECE Standardization List" as a means of prioritising countries standardization needs;
- (d) identifying of good regulatory practices in the area of voluntary certification schemes in order to avoid their proliferation and creating unnecessary obstacles to trade (example, forest certification project with the Timber Committee).

37. The Committee might wish to consider these proposals in view of its decision of strengthening cross sectoral links in the secretariat.

\* \* \* \* \*