ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

COMMITTEE FOR TRADE, INDUSTRY
AND ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT
Working Party on Technical Harmonization
and Standardization Policies
Twelfth session, 28-30 October 2002
Item 8(b) of the provisional agenda

Environmental Management Standards

Environmental Standardization and Certification and International Trade -
As Viewed from a Country in Transition

The present paper on problems related to environmental certification is submitted by the
International Center for Environmental Protection of the Baltic Sea Region (ICEP).

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GE.02-32720
Environmental Standardization and Certification and International Trade -
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1. We refer to the meeting of UNECE Working Party 6, which will be held from 28 to 30 October 2002. Having examined the preliminary agenda of the 12th session, and having taken into account that “the international model for technical harmonization” will be discussed in relation to the WP.6’s future work, the International Center for Environmental Protection of the Baltic Sea Region (ICEP) suggests to consider our proposals regarding the organization of work in the area of standardization and certification on environmental requirements.

2. Standardization and certification on environmental requirements could be an important instrument of international economic policy in the sphere of international trade. On one hand, they could be instruments of protectionism and, on the other hand, instruments of facilitation of trade. Strengthening of environmental standards for different kinds of products leads to a remarkable rise in their price. This is a result of additional costs for providing the new quality level, as well as for implementing the relevant certification and/or environmental requirements. As a result of the above, a consumer will have to bear additional expenses.

3. There are different competitive certification systems for various kinds of goods. Objective approaches to the comparison of such systems are lacking. As a result of that, large certification centres in economically developed countries promote their systems and standards neglecting the relevant systems and standards of countries with economics in transition and developing countries.

4. International organisations and structures such as the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, UNCTAD, WTO and others do not use their opportunities for the objective evaluation of present standards and systems of certification on environmental requirements.

5. In consequence of the above we consider the following possible approaches:

   - To introduce the practice of establishing international centers for certification in countries with economics in transition as well as in developing countries, on the mandatory condition that these centers involve in their work the relevant certifying structures in the mentioned countries, and take into account existing standardization systems in these countries;

   - To introduce the practice of ecolabelling on products and resources, which could be given a preferential access to markets (at the international bilateral and regional levels) in economically developed countries, countries with economics in transition, and developing countries, as well;
- To encourage support from economically developed countries in environmental management implementation at enterprises in countries with economies in transition, and developing countries, which aspire to work by international environmental requirements;
- To encourage a policy of easier access to markets for goods and resources certified in accordance with international environmental requirements (demand for these goods will give an opportunity to compensate for the expenses associated with the certification procedure, and to relieve consumers from additional costs);
- To examine from the point of view of economically developed countries, the possibility of offering to transition and developing countries the opportunity to reduce external debts using “environmental credits” in order to introduce stricter environmental standards, and the provision of financial support for the expenses related to the relevant certification.

6. The Ministry of International Affairs of Russian Federation considers the International Centre for Environmental Protection as the organization authorized from the North-West region of Russia to implement a program of international certification on environmental requirements and their introduction within the structure of intergovernmental organizations of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) and the Barents Region (in the first instance for forest resources and food products).

7. In consequence of the above, we suggest to the UNECE to consider the opportunity to implement a pilot sub-regional project on the evaluation and harmonization of various standardization systems (including systems of standardization on environmental requirements) in the spheres of food products trade and sustainable forestry. In the case of successful implementation of this project such practices could be extended to other regions.

8. ICEP offers to organize a working meeting for representatives from certifying organizations, international trade participants, and other interested organizations at St.-Petersburg in the beginning of 2003, jointly with administrative structures of Subjects of the Russian Federation being a part of the North-West Russia Association to discuss the possibilities for preparing this project as well as the possibility of establishing of a group of experts to pursue work on other potential projects.

9. It would be appreciated if WP.6 would contribute interested experts, organizations, and governmental structures to this work implementation.

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