ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

COMMITTEE ON TRADE

Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies

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PROGRAMME OF WORK OF THE WORKING PARTY

Vision, mission, strategic directions for 2007-2010
and programme of work for 2007-2008

Note by the secretariat

The present document prepared by the Bureau of the Working Party, is based on document ECE/TRADE/C/WP.6/2006/12. This revised version incorporates the comments made at the sixteenth session of the Working Party and at the first session of the Committee on Trade. This document contains the Working Party’s general strategy for 2007-2010 and outlines its programme of work for 2007-2008. Both the strategy and the programme of work reflect the specific request made in the UNECE Reform Plan (E/ECE/1434/Rev.1) to review the programme of work of WP.6 and the general requests to all subsidiary bodies to generate resources to increase technical assistance activities and strengthen cooperation with other international organizations. At its annual sessions, the Working Party may wish to consider the programme of work contained in this document and decide on the details of the work items.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. Many countries remain on the periphery of the European and the global economy. These include the countries of the former Soviet Union and countries in southeast Europe, as well as most developing countries. One of the principal objectives of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) is to help countries become better integrated into these large economic frameworks. For instance, UNECE provides or supports a variety of capacity-building workshops and training programmes in good practices and governance. These workshops and programmes are particularly important in the areas of regulatory harmonization and standardization, as they help participants to create tools for identifying and removing technical barriers to trade, thereby contributing to regional trade and economies integration.

2. The UNECE Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies is comprised of between 50 and 70 specialists from all over the world. The Working Party’s major concern is to encourage all 56 UNECE member countries, whenever possible, to develop, adopt and apply converging regulatory, standardizing and conformity assessment approaches and technical regulations and standards, as well as conformity assessment procedures. Its main objectives are to safeguard public health and safety, to improve the environment and to promote of scientific and technological cooperation, while at the same time minimizing technical barriers to international trade that result from disparate technical regulations and standards and their applications.

II. OUR VISION

3. Our vision is to achieve a predictable, transparent, least restrictive and converging regulatory environment for citizens and economic operators, both nationally and globally.

III. OUR MISSION

4. Our mission is to improve the current legal and administrative framework to enable economic operators in countries, irrespective of their level of development, to trade in safe and reliable products and services to achieve less costly, more predictable and more open market access.

5. To accomplish this, the Working Party will:

   (a) Develop supporting recommendations and good practices;

   (b) Facilitate trade and market access by:

      (i) Providing a platform for increased awareness and cooperation through information exchange on national, regional and international experiences on regulatory and standardizing issues;

      (ii) Stimulating dialogue on regulatory cooperation and convergence;
(iii) Encouraging the participation of all countries in international standardization;

(iv) Promoting the use of international standards and guides;

(c) Supporting scientific and technological development related to standardization;

(d) Keeping the World Trade Organization’s Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade informed of the Working Party’s activities and achievements.

6. All the above activities will fully support the goals and principles of the United Nations Millennium Declaration, specifically: to further develop “an open, equitable, rules-based, predictable and non-discriminatory multilateral trading and financial system”; “to create an environment - at the national and global levels alike - which is conducive to development and to the elimination of poverty”; and to help integrate sustainable development principles in national policies (http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.htm).

IV. STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS, 2007-2010

7. In 2007-2010, the Working Party will:

(a) Identify least trade-restrictive means for regulatory, standardization and conformity assessment action related to products traded in UNECE member States;

(b) Share experience and information on developments in regulatory, standardization, market surveillance, conformity assessment, metrology, consumer and environmental protection policies relevant to member States;

(c) Review current recommendations and develop new ones to encourage good standardization and regulatory practices and approaches;

(d) Promote national implementation of the recommendations, providing capacity-building to countries, as necessary;

(e) Strengthen partnerships with the private sector and civil society in pursuit of economic development and consumer/user protection;

(f) Liaise and cooperate with other organizations and agencies;

(g) Use its “UNECE Standardization and Regulatory List” (new name) of sectors and product areas of interest to member States (ECE/STAND/20/Rev.5, to be revised) to identify sector and areas where Governments see the need for further work on international standards and are interested in regulatory cooperation;
(h) Update its recommendations on standardization policies (ECE/STAND/17/Rev.4) in order to take stock of latest developments. The Working Party will collect and disseminate information on good practices in the regulatory and standardization policy areas including on market surveillance and consumer protection, as requested and agreed to by our member States, and draw up recommendations for regulators and other stakeholders to use to promote efficiency in their operations while ensuring a minimum of trade-restrictive effects;

(i) Provide upon request, to countries in transition, and when relevant, to developing countries, advice and assistance in implementing standards-receptive regulatory regimes in different areas and sectors. In particular, the Working Party will, in cooperation with interested Governments and agencies, put in place programmes of assistance based on UNECE Recommendation “L” and its “International Model for Technical Harmonization” (available in English, French and Russian at: http://www.unece.org/trade/wp6/major_doc.htm);

(j) Continue to cooperate with a wide range of organizations at the international, regional national levels, including organizations from the United Nations family as well as those from the Commonwealth of Independent States, the European Union and the European Free Trade Association. The Working Party will also explore the interest of the regional commissions of the United Nations and other regional groupings, beginning with Africa and Asia in developing projects in their regions;

(k) Work with the private sector and non-governmental organizations, bringing their concerns to the attention of Governments, and support, in consultation with industry, market-based regulatory projects approved by the Working Party.

V. PROGRAMME OF WORK, 2007--2008

A. Technical regulations and standardization

1. International standardization and definitions of terms

Objectives:

(a) To review, on a regular basis, the standardization-related international, regional and national issues pursued by member States and international, regional and national standardizing organizations;

(b) To facilitate national practices for implementing standards;

(c) To update the “UNECE Regulatory and Standardization List” (new name) of sectors and product areas of interest to member States, and to reassess the criteria according to which the List was drawn up.
Work to be undertaken:

(a) Provide a forum for exchanging information and experiences on issues of concern to UNECE member States, other States Members of the United Nations, international and regional organizations, and representatives of business and civil society;

(b) Collect information on the participation of Government officials from UNECE member States in international standardization activities related to environmental protection and management, and on those countries’ progress in adopting new and better standards. (This information will be posted on a special subsection of the UNECE website.);

(c) Complete the sixth revision of the “UNECE Regulatory and Standardization List” (new name) based on an ongoing dialogue with member States and international standardization organizations;

(d) Explore the interest of other United Nations regional commissions in using the principles and criteria laid down in the List for identifying the interest of Member States in standardization and regulatory cooperation;

(e) Take account of the work on new definitions by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the International Electrotechnical Commission, and prepare, if required, a proposal for a revision of the Recommendation “J” on “Definitions” (latest revision done in 2006; document TRADE/C/WP.6/2006/5), as contained in the set of the UNECE Recommendations on Standardization Policies.

2. National practices and transnational cooperation in technical regulations

Objectives:

(a) To review on a regular basis issues related to national practices and transnational cooperation in technical regulations within the UNECE region;

(b) To facilitate good regulatory practice and regulatory cooperation;

(c) To update existing recommendations and prepare new ones to respond to needs of member States for regulators cooperation and related actions.

Work to be undertaken:

(a) Provide a forum for exchange of information and experiences on issues of concern to UNECE member countries, other States Members of the United Nations, international and regional organizations, and representatives of business and civil society in the area of technical regulation;

(b) Collect information on national horizontal legislation, structures and practices and to post this information on a special subsection of the UNECE website;
(c) Pursue sectoral initiatives in the areas of telecommunications, earth-moving machinery and pipeline safety and equipment for use in explosive environments according to the “International Model for Technical Harmonization”;

(d) Support new sectoral or regional initiatives for projects using the mechanisms and principles of the “International Model for Technical Harmonization”, in cooperation with interested Governments, international organizations and private operators;

(e) Revise Recommendation “D” on “Reference to Standards”, as contained in publication “Recommendations on Standardization Policies” (ECE/STAND/17/Rev.4);

(f) Ensure follow-up to the initiatives raised at the International Forum on Common Regulatory Language for Global Trade held in conjunction with the annual meeting of the UNECE Committee on Trade (June 2006).

B. Conformity assessment

Objectives:

(a) To review and promote harmonized international conformity-assessment principles and practices as well as bilateral and multilateral agreements and arrangements for the acceptance of conformity-assessment results;

(b) To regularly review trade-related work on conformity assessment in other international and regional organizations.

Work to be undertaken:

(a) Continue to provide a forum for the exchange of information and experience on conformity-assessment issues of concern to UNECE member States, other States Members of the United Nations, international and regional organizations, and representatives of business and civil society;

(b) Review standardization and conformity-related quality and environmental policy issues, including national quality policies, eco-labelling and the use of management standards and systems (e.g. ISO 9000 and 14000), with particular reference to the needs of business operators in transition economies;

(c) Consider the use of ISO 9001:2000 and other quality management schemes in public administration;

(d) Gather information on and promote an exchange of experiences about the mutual recognition agreements (MRAs) entered into by UNECE member countries, and promote good practices in this area.
C. **Market surveillance**

This part of the programme of work supports the related United Nations Guidelines for Consumer Protection as set out in General Assembly decision 54/449 of 22 December 1999.

**Objectives:**

(a) To review and exchange information on national market surveillance approaches and practices in UNECE member States;

(b) To develop and promote guidance on good practices.

**Work to be undertaken:**

(a) Consider preparing guidelines on good practices in market surveillance activities, following proposals by the Working Party’s subsidiary body in this area, (the Advisory Group on Market Surveillance (“MARS” Group);

(b) Ensure a follow-up to the International Forum on Market Surveillance and Consumer Protection (October 2005);

(c) Consider the revised proposal for a new recommendation on the use of market surveillance as a means to protect consumers from counterfeit goods, elaborated by the “MARS” Group and discussed at the International Forum.

D. **Metrology**

**Objectives:**

(a) To exchange information on national metrology policies and practices in UNECE member States;

(b) To consider possible ways of establishing criteria for metrological procedures.

**Work to be undertaken:**

(a) Continue providing a discussion forum for metrology issues of concern, with special emphasis on countries in transition;

(b) Maintain contact with interested UNECE member countries and metrology organizations (e.g. the International Organization of Legal Metrology and the Euro-Asian Cooperation of State Metrology Institutions to explore their interest in developing new recommendations for guidelines on the methodology for measuring procedures.
E. **Capacity-building and technical assistance**

To support implementation of its recommendations and other programmes, the Working Party will evaluate and, when appropriate and financially possible, respond to requests for training and capacity-building from interested countries and organizations from the UNECE and other regions. To that end, it will continue working with donors to obtain extrabudgetary resources for financing such projects.

F. **Priorities**

The ranking of priorities of the Working Party for 2007-2008 is: (1) **Higher**: National practices and transnational cooperation in the area of Technical Regulations; and Market Surveillance; (2) **Lower**: Metrology; and (3) **Medium**: All other programme elements.

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