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International regulatory cooperation

Progress report on the Sectoral Initiative on Telecom

Note by the secretariat*

Summary

The Sectoral Initiative on Telecom works to create a more open trading environment on the market for telecommunication products. The Working Party approved Common Regulatory Objectives for this sector in 2004. Although there has been limited interest in using these in national legislation or as a basis for mutual recognition agreements, they may nevertheless be a relevant reference in current negotiations under way in the WTO Negotiating Group on Non-agricultural Market Access (NAMA), in the forthcoming discussions within the non-tariff measures work programme in the WTO Information Technology Agreement (ITA). The Common Regulatory Objectives could be used to provide practical examples of good regulatory practice in the information and communication technologies sector.

This document is for discussion and information.

* At its eighteenth session, the Working Party asked the secretariat to provide annual updates on the work of all the sectoral initiatives (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.6/2008/18, para.63). Accordingly, this report contains information on the status of the Telecom Initiative, and describes the main activities that have been completed or are under way.

I. Project objective and key deliverables

1. The objective of the Sectoral Initiative on Telecom is to create greater market access for information and communication technology (ICT) products. Common regulatory objectives (CROs) for ICT products constitute agreements among interested countries on regulatory convergence in support of legitimate requirements (see TRADE/WP.6/2003/16/Add.2).

2. Common regulatory objectives were drawn up in 2003 for equipment such as:

- personal computers
- PC peripherals
- legacy Public Switched Telephone Network Terminals
- Bluetooth
- Wireless Local Area Network
- Global Standard for Mobile Telecommunications
- International Mobile Telecommunications (IMT-2000).

[<http://www.unece.org/trade/wp6/SectoralInitiatives/Telecom/CROs.htm>]

II. Current status of project

3. A meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Information Technology Agreement (ITA) Committee took place on 15 May 2012, resulting in a decision to start informal bilateral and plurilateral consultations on expanding the Agreement's product coverage (see: www.wto.org/english/news_e/news12_e/ita_15may12_e.htm).

4. Although countries were not going to discuss non-tariff barriers--a subject they appeared to leave open for discussion under the group on non-tariff barriers to trade--the re-engagement of countries in the talks was a positive step. The work of the UNECE initiative could be of value here and had earlier been brought to the attention of WTO. For a detailed analysis of how the CROs could be used in the context of the WTO Non-agricultural Products Market Access (NAMA) negotiations, please see ECE/TRADE/C/WP.6/2010/10.

III. Responsibility for the continuation of the work

5. In 2012, the informal group held one meeting in Geneva, as part of the Annual Planning Meeting of UNECE WP.6 Activities. It was decided to keep the dialogue with WTO counterparts open, especially in the context of the sixth Triennial Review of the WTO Technical barriers to trade (TBT) Committee, which would be concluded in late November.

IV. Role of the secretariat

6. The Sectoral Initiative recommends that the secretariat should assist it in initiating a discussion about the CROs with the main producers and Governments of East-Asian countries (e.g. China, Japan and the Republic of Korea).