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International regulatory cooperation

Progress report on the Telecom Sectoral Initiative

Note by the secretariat*

Summary

The Sectoral Initiative on Telecom works to create a more open trading environment for telecommunication products. In 2004, the Working Party approved Common Regulatory Objectives for this sector. 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 World Trade Organization (WTO) Negotiating Group on Non-agricultural Market Access (NAMA) and 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 Sectoral Initiative on Telecom seeks to create greater market access for information and communication technology (ICT) products. Common regulatory objectives (CROs) for ICT products constitute agreements among countries on regulatory convergence in support of legitimate requirements (see TRADE/WP.6/2003/16/Add.2). Common regulatory objectives were drawn up in 2003¹ for equipment such as:

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

II. Current status of project

2. 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). A number of countries are engaged in negotiations which have lasted longer than foreseen but are expected to be concluded by end of 2014..

3. Following a successful conclusion of the ITA product coverage list in late 2014, attention will be focused on non-tariff barriers (NTBs). A workshop on NTB (originally planned for October 2014) may be held during the 1st half of 2015, to see how work on these matters could be advanced within the framework of ITA. The work of the UNECE Initiative could be of value for the ITA 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, see ECE/TRADE/C/WP.6/2010/10).

III. Responsibility for the continuation of the work, and the role of the secretariat

4. 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 Triennial Reviews of the WTO Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Committee.

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

¹ www.unece.org/trade/wp6/SectoralInitiatives/Telecom/CROs.htm