



Economic Commission for Europe

Committee on Trade

Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies

Twenty-first session

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Report of the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies on its panel session on its panel session on “Standards and regulations as a tool for promoting sustainable development: preparing for Rio +20” held as part of its twenty-first session*

Note by the secretariat

107. The panel opened with a presentation on the forthcoming United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, to be held in June 2012 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and the related preparatory processes. The two main topics of the conference would be: (a) a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication; and (b) the institutional framework for sustainable development.

108. The Conference aimed at involving all major groups, including business and NGOs, who would be contributing to a “zero-draft document” that would serve as the basis for negotiations.

109. The Conference outcome document would target the integration of economic, social and environmental goals through consistent and committed action at all levels.

110. Another important ongoing negotiation, within the United Nations system, is progressing within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Within UNFCCC, standards play a very important

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role, especially in connection with the three market-based mechanisms under the Kyoto Protocol, namely:

(a) International emissions trading: until now 3,536 registered projects in 72 countries, with over 750 million certified emission reductions (CERs) issued to date and more than 2.7 billion expected by the end of 2012;

(b) Clean Development Mechanism (CDM): Projects in developing countries;

(c) Joint Implementation: Projects in any country with a commitment under the Kyoto Protocol.

111. Speakers from standards-development organizations and private-sector conformity-assessment bodies then shared their vision of how standards and certification could be instrumental to these two major processes and more generally to sustainable development.

112. ISO reported how its activities supported progress towards a green economy by delivering different types of international standards: specifications for products and materials or for processes, standards for measurement and conformity assessment, and management standards.

113. These were complemented by the ISO 26000 standard, which provides guidance on social responsibility. Published in November 2010, with contributions from more than 400 experts, from 99 countries, it received more than 26,000 international comments during development. Taken together, these tools responded to the demand of business companies for which sustainability was no longer an extra but rather a core issue, and also contributed to a better use of the earth's scarce resources.

114. The representative of IEC stated that meeting the challenge of a growing demand due to growing world population and growing energy use would require an improvement in utilization of resources by a factor of four: using half as much, twice as efficiently.

115. The main priorities were to:

- Make energy use more efficient
- Electrify and “de-carbonize” transport and heating
- Invest in renewables.

116. That could be realized by agreeing on the “what” —precise technical specifications based on consensus, and the how—conformity-assessment modules to check that requirements are met and to compare efficiency.

117. Regulations could refer to, or be based on, standards, which then became the basis for policy-making and investment. Additionally, the IEC provides global schemes for assessment with reliable and predictable results, as well as obligatory mutual acceptance of test results. That gave policymakers the advantages of Mutual Recognition Agreements without the overheads and difficulties.

118. The European Standardization System contributed effectively to shaping the EU single market with significant industry involvement, representing a unique model of co-regulation.

119. In that context, current priorities in the development of standards focused on the three components of sustainable development:

(a) Economic growth (promoting competitiveness and innovation, realizing economies of scale, and facilitating trade);

(b) Environmental integrity (in particular efficiency, environmental management and ecological safety);

(c) Societal progress (consumer protection, worker protection, health services, accessibility).

120. Within CEN/CENELEC, a number of specific standards in each of those areas had been recently adopted or were in progress.

121. Another important dimension of the sustainability debate was the availability of data to measure progress towards sustainability, both for a single company and at an aggregated level. Standards also played a key role in supporting the global deployment of new metrics particularly in the consumer goods sector, and for the automated exchange of this information between trading partners.

122. A pilot project had been undertaken to measure the sustainability of packaging, with input from the Consumer Goods Forum. Sustainability was a multi-dimensional concept, which included the sustainability of inputs used in the production of packaging, and the packaging biodegradability, recyclability, compostability, and contribution to responsible land use through lowering the contribution to landfills.

123. The reduction of energy and water use in the production of packaging was also important. To measure all these different dimensions effectively required a common language, effective information sharing between trading partners, a common interpretation by all, and reliable and up-to-date data.

124. A representative of the European Academy for Standardization (EURAS) shared the view that to promote further use of standards, including in the context of sustainable development, training and education was an essential priority—at all levels of the educational curriculum but especially in vocational training and in universities.

125. The Working Party welcomed the exchange of experience regarding the role of standards in the three dimensions of sustainable development. It requested the secretariat, the Bureau and delegations to find appropriate ways of channelling the Working Party expertise into work related to the preparations for the Rio+20 Conference.