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PREPARATIONS FOR AND FOLLOW-UP TO WORLD CONFERENCES

Note by the Executive Secretary

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The role of the regional commissions, including the ECE, in contributing to both the preparation of, and follow-up to, United Nations global events has been emphasized for many years in various UN fora, including during the 1998 session of ECOSOC during the discussion on the report of the Secretary-General on the role of regional commissions.. In that report the Secretary-General emphasized the Regional Commissions play a double role: they ensure that regional problems are addressed at the global level and contribute to the global work programme and they facilitate regional cooperation and follow-up to global events at the regional level.
2. The importance of the Commission's contribution to the preparation for and follow-up to global events has, even since 1998, been increasingly recognized by global bodies, with the awareness that inputs from the regions stimulate, and even shape, the debate at the global level prior to the global events. Moreover, the follow-up to such events can be more effective at the regional level.
3. Notwithstanding this increased recognition, more needs to be done to ensure that the regional dimension is not forgotten once the global debate gains momentum. More also needs to be done to ensure that the follow-up activities, including those requested by global bodies, are both feasible and in line with the priorities of the Commission.
4. In this connection, the paragraphs below demonstrate that the possibilities for follow-up to global events are many and varied. This clearly points to the need, as emphasized by the Executive Secretary in her Conference Paper on Strengthening the Organization, for a strengthened priority-setting mechanism of the Commission. This in turn may require, as also indicated by the Executive Secretary, an adjustment to the Commission's mandate, particularly as it relates to sustainable development and policy analysis and the implementation of norms and standards.
5. These and related points will be discussed in the context of debate concerning the Executive Secretary's reform initiative which she will introduce at the Annual Session. In a parallel process, the process by which the regional commissions' contributions to global events are taken into account,

and the process by which the Commissions are mandated at the global level to undertake follow-up actions will also be taken up with the Secretary-General in the discussions concerning his Strengthening the Organization initiative.

II. INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON FINANCING FOR DEVELOPMENT – POSSIBLE FOLLOW-UP BY ECE TO THE MONTERREY CONSENSUS

6. The Millennium Declaration is an effort to ensure that globalization brings opportunities and benefits to all countries. The Financing for Development process has revolved around the means to achieve these goals.

7. To provide a regional input to that process, the ECE hosted meetings and, in that connection, invited experts and produced analytical studies that focused on financial issues related to eastern Europe and the CIS:¹

- The “European Regional Consultative Meeting on Financing for Development” organized by the ECE in cooperation with EBRD and UNCTAD, Geneva, 6-7 December 2000.
- The “Regional Expert Meeting on Enhancing the Benefits of FDI and Improving the Flow of Corporate Finance in the Transition Economies,” organized by the ECE in cooperation with EBRD in Geneva 3 on December, 2001
- The ECE also helped to organize and participated in the “Inter-regional Conference on Financing for Development” in Mexico City, 14-15, January 2002.
- During the International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey (18-22 March 2002), the Executive Secretary, delivered a statement on behalf of the ECE during the High-Level Plenary Session and also participated in several Ministerial Round Tables.

8. In her statement, the Executive Secretary emphasized the importance of capacity building and policy advice so that development assistance can be more effectively utilized by recipient countries. She also stressed the considerable gap in real incomes per capita that exists within the transition countries, pointing out that within the ECE region, eight low-income countries are eligible for the IMF Poverty Reduction and Growth Arrangement, and that in seven low-income countries of the CIS, about 20 million people live in extreme poverty. The gap in development levels risks being a source of economic and political instability, hence the need for ODA from the most developed states of the region to the low-income countries.

9. In the Outcome of the International Conference on Financing for Development, (“Monterrey Consensus”) a number of references are made to the role of the regional commissions. In paragraph 64, which calls for “strengthening the effectiveness of the global economic system’s support for development”, actions are encouraged to “Promote the role of the regional commissions and the regional development banks in supporting policy dialogue among countries at the regional level on macroeconomic, financial, trade and development issues.” In addition, within the context of ensuring a proper follow-up to the implementation of agreements and commitments reached at the Conference,

¹ The conclusions drawn by the meetings have been made available to Geneva Missions and to the PrepCom. The papers presented at the meetings are available on the ECE website (www.unece.org).

the signatories have resolved “to harness the active support of the regional commissions and the regional development banks”. (paragraph 70)

10. Many of the development and financing issues raised in the outcome document have been regularly addressed by the ECE in the work of the Principal Subsidiary Bodies (PSBs) and in the Economic Survey of Europe,² the Spring Seminar and the follow-up policy discussions held on the First Day of the commission session. For example, the ECE regularly monitors domestic resource mobilization and external financial flows (including FDI) in the transition economies, examines their determinants, and recommends how those flows can be enhanced and used more efficiently by the host countries. For example, the ECE monitors the external financial flows (including FDI) in the transition economies, examines their determinants, and recommends how those flows can be enhanced and used more efficiently by the host countries. It has also produced an ad hoc study on the macroeconomic aspects of domestic resource mobilization in support of the Financing for Development process. Further studies on this subject could be envisaged and the ongoing analysis of capital flows could be enhanced depending on the availability of resources.

11. The following proposals could be considered in order to strengthen ECE programmes related to the Monterrey Consensus:

- (a) Enhance policy dialogue within the region on macroeconomic, financial, trade and development issues using ECE meetings, including the First Day of the Commission, the Spring Seminar and other ECE fora, stressing policy issues relevant to the work of the PSBs.
- (b) Give more emphasis to the analytical work of the ECE, including the Economic Survey) to identify key issues facing ECE countries, including the low-income transition economies, in the area of trade and the mobilization of domestic and foreign financial resources (including FDI). (This proposal, and economic analysis in general, require the maintenance of a comprehensive and up-to-date economic data base, including statistics on cross-border flows. More of these data could be made available to governments and other outside users.)
- (c) Increase activities in implementation and monitoring of best practices in respect of good governance, it being emphasized that good governance is key to increasing the effectiveness of aid.
- (d) Ensure that the operational activities target the countries most in need.
- (e) Drawing on the conclusions of the ECE Financing for Development expert meeting in December 2001, consideration could be given to measures through which the ECE could help to enhance the benefits of FDI for recipient countries. A step in this direction is the decision to discuss at the forthcoming meeting of the Working Party on Industry and Enterprise Development how local firms can become suppliers to multinational and large domestic corporations and whether it is desirable for countries to establish national linkage programmes. The further promotion of SME's, including financing, might be considered in this context;

² The *Economic Survey* is produced bi-annually, in the spring as a background document for the Commission Session, and, in the fall, when it includes an update of macroeconomic developments and the proceedings from the Spring Seminar.

- (f) Public-private partnerships (PPPs) are a means of mobilizing finance. The ECE could contribute to their promotion by exploring ways in which to equitably share the benefits and risks between the private and public partners;
- (g) The development of a coherent ECE programme to promote trade in the region (with a special focus on the low-income countries) could also be considered. This could include promoting:
 - An efficient, safe and sustainable transport system in the ECE region through the adoption and implementation of the regulatory framework developed by the ECE and through the development of infrastructure corridors and networks with the involvement of the EC, international financial institutions and private capital.
 - Adoption of trade-facilitating norms and standards, especially in the transition economies;
 - Enhanced dialogue on trade policy issues in the ECE region, particularly those involving the CIS;
- (h) The ECE has begun a review of the benefits stemming from the adoption of UNCEFACT (electronic business standards for data interchange), which has facilitated the more timely exchange of data between financial institutions, including with the Bank for International Settlements (BIS). A broader range of more up-to-date financial data may improve the basis for investment decisions and help to increase global financial stability.
- (i) The ECE might explore the means by which advanced transition economies can assist those countries (often the low-income ones) lagging in the reform process (eg. by sharing their experiences, offering financial and technical assistance, etc). In this connection a number of ECE transition economies have become aid donors, some of them having pledged to increase their ODA in Monterrey. Could they (as well as other ECE donors) allocate a part of their increased commitments to low-income ECE countries?
- (j) The ECE could organise seminars to discuss the adequacy of financing available to improve the environment and restructure/upgrade the energy and transport sectors in the transition economies, with the emphasis on the least developed countries. ECE bodies might also be used to examine the financial implications of inter-connecting electric power grids, including the potentially reduced capital requirements associated with smaller peak-load generating capacity.
- (k) The ECE will give increasing emphasis to promoting the effective implementation of environment norms that would contribute to the goal of achieving sustainable development.
- (l) The ECE will intensify its role in the initiatives and programmes of country groupings that include some of the low-income countries of the region (eg. BSEC, SECI, and SPECA).

12. With regard to the follow-up international conference to review the implementation of the Monterrey Consensus, the modalities of which will be decided not later than 2005, the Commission will have to decide on how to approach the regional assessment process.

III. SECOND WORLD ASSEMBLY ON AGEING (MADRID 2002 AND THE ECE MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON AGEING (BERLIN 2002))

13. As mandated by General Assembly Resolutions A/54/24 and A/54/262, and by the decisions taken at the 55th session of the Economic Commission for Europe, the ECE secretariat is working on the preparations for a Ministerial Conference on Ageing, which is to be held in Berlin from 11 to 13 September 2002. This Conference is a follow-up to the Second World Assembly on Ageing (WAA-2) in Madrid, and its objective is to consider and adopt a Regional Implementation Strategy (RIS) for the International Plan of Action on Ageing 2002, which was adopted by the World Assembly.

14. The Second World Assembly on Ageing was held in Madrid, Spain from 8 to 12 April 2002. It was devoted to an overall review of the outcome of the first World Assembly on Ageing (Vienna, 1982) in an effort to address the demographic changes that are taking place throughout the world. The aim of the Assembly was to advance the global ageing agenda beyond the 1982 Plan of Action and provide a blueprint for responding to the opportunities and challenges of population ageing in the 21st century and the promotion of the concept of a “society for all ages”. Prior to the Assembly, the ECE secretariat took part in the work of the Technical Committee, established to assist the Secretary-General in the preparatory process for WAA-2, and followed the work of the Preparatory Committee for the Assembly. A publication entitled “From Madrid to Berlin: ECE and the Ministerial Conference on Ageing” (ECE/EAD/PAU/2002/2) was prepared and published for the Assembly. During the Assembly itself, the Deputy Executive Secretary delivered a statement on behalf of ECE to the Main Committee. UNECE also organized a panel discussion on the economic and social implications of ageing in the region, as a side event during WAA-2. The panellists agreed that multifaceted demographic changes in the ECE region require policy responses of governments and social partners in many areas, including pension and health systems, employment and education, work and leisure, family and community life, and social dialogue and the political process.

15. The preparatory work for the Berlin Conference is being pursued along the three tracks: expert, intergovernmental and civil society. Most of the work along the expert track has been successfully completed. Three seminars were organized during 2001, where leading experts from a broad cross-section of professional and geographic backgrounds offered advice on various substantive issues related to the Conference.

16. The focus of the work along the intergovernmental track is on the drafting and negotiations of the documents to be submitted to the Berlin Conference, the focus of which will be to adopt a Regional Implementation Strategy (RIS) for global ageing policies. This strategy relies on the close cooperation/coordination between ECE and the other major players active in the region (such as the OECD, the ILO and the EC), and on promoting implementation, follow-up and monitoring tools, as envisaged in the “Strengthening of the Organization” Conference Room Paper.

17. A first meeting of an Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) was held in December 2001. The ECE secretariat submitted to the meeting an initial draft of the RIS. Reactions from member States on the structure and general content of that document were received during that meeting. Based on these, the secretariat issued the first draft of RIS and member States were invited to provide their comments in writing. These comments were integrated into a consolidated draft of RIS, which was the basis for the intergovernmental negotiations that started at the second meeting of OEWG (29 April – 3 May

2002). The OEWG is expected to meet on one or more additional occasions to complete these negotiations and, in the process, reach a consensus on challenges of and policy responses to population ageing, which are sometimes seen in different lights by the various member States.

18. To be effective, the implementation of the Regional Implementation Strategy will require an integrated and comprehensive cross-sectoral approach to policy formulation and performance with inputs provided by the different PSBs and Working Groups of ECE. In this connection, follow-up to the Second World Assembly on Ageing and the Berlin Conference could include cross-sectoral activities undertaken by the Principal Subsidiary Bodies. For example, the Conference of European Statisticians and the Committee on Human Settlements (or, in the event that the Commission were to decide to establish it, a Committee on Social Affairs, Local Developments Human Settlements) could organize a joint meeting to consider the current and projected future housing situation of the elderly population in ECE Region and the policy implications of this for ECE Governments.

19. The main event as part of the civil society track of the preparatory process will be an NGO Preparatory Meeting, which will consider and provide inputs into the draft Regional Implementation Strategy. The forum will be convened from 27 to 29 May 2002. The German Association for Private and Public Welfare has offered to host it at its premises in Frankfurt.

20. In addition to working with OEWG, the UNECE secretariat reports regularly to the ad hoc meetings of the Commission, and has sought the member States' views on, and where necessary, approval of different aspects of the preparatory process.

21. Population ageing translates into increases in the share of national income spent on older people. The challenge is to accommodate this transfer of resources in ways that can prevent conflicts between different generations, in particular between the working and the retired, and the youth and the retired. This points *inter alia* to need to design policies that assist families to preserve and strengthen the ties that bind their members and measures designed to increase the fertility rates. These and other social policy issues will be considered as part of a broader multi-country research programme in ECE/EAD/PAU on "The Generations and Gender Programme: A Study of the Dynamics of Families and Family Relationships" which was initiated in early 2000.

IV. ECE'S ROLE IN ICT FOR DEVELOPMENT AND THE WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY (WSIS)

22. In July 2000, ECOSOC held a high level Panel on the role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for Development. It called for the establishment of a high level UN Task Force on ICT for Development that was created in November 2001 and which should help to bridge the so-called "digital divide". All the Regional Commissions have been asked to support the ICT for Development Task Force and to promote regional ICT networks. The United Nations Development Programme is also assisting the Task Force. The ECE is working in very close relation with the UNDP in Bratislava (the European UNDP regional office) and with the global secretariat of the UN ICT Task Force (the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs, DESA).

23. The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) was agreed at the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) Plenipotentiary Conference in 1998. The WSIS will bring together Heads of States, Executives from UN agencies, NGOs, and industry leaders in Geneva in 2003 and in Tunis in 2005 in order to help develop a better understanding of the ICT revolution and its impact on the international community. A common vision on the promotion of sustainable development through ICT will be the main WSIS target. The ITU has set up a WSIS Executive Secretariat, with assistance from the Swiss government.

24. These two processes for ICT for Development and the WSIS are both long-term. ECE will need to make provision in its resource allocation to enable continuing support for the UN High Level Task Force on ICT for Development in the region. Similarly, the WSIS in December 2003 in Geneva will set the global agenda for 2004-5, leading to the WSIS for development meeting scheduled for 2005 in Tunis.

25. The intergovernmental preparatory process for the WSIS will involve both global and regional expert meetings. The first preparatory Committee meeting (PRECOM 1) will be organized by ITU in Geneva from 1 to 5 July 2002 and ECE will participate in it. All UN agencies and civil society representatives are invited. An informal consultation process with Geneva Missions on procedures and the organization of the PRECOM has been launched. The draft agenda for the PRECOM 1 will lead to an input document for the Summit. However, PRECOM 1 will not make a decision on the final agenda. Following this meeting, a series of regional conferences aiming at bringing an input to the WSIS will be organized.

26. The Government of Romania will host the WSIS European Regional Preparatory Meeting on 7-9 November 2002 in Bucharest in cooperation with ECE.

27. Additional thematic meetings will take place leading to the first WSIS in December 2003 in Geneva. An agreement on final recommendations and an action plan should be reached in PRECOM meetings before the final summit takes place. All governments have agreed that the participation of the civil society and the private sector is essential.

28. In January 2002, the United Nations General Assembly endorsed the WSIS and called upon governments and UN organisations to participate actively in this event, and to link the process to the UN ICT for Development Task Force's activities. The UNECE acts as the focal point for the five UN Regional Commissions to disseminate information and to liaise with the Executive Secretariat, based at ITU, on behalf of all the Regional Commissions. In the context of planning for the WSIS, the Executive Secretary appointed the Director of the Trade Division as the ECE Focal Point for ICT for Development and the WSIS and requested ECE divisions to contribute to these processes.

29. The ECE has set up an Inter-divisional Task Force on ICT for Transition and Development, coordinated by the Deputy Executive Secretary. Its role is to liaise with the UN ICT Task Force and WSIS Executive Secretariat, to encourage the implementation of ICT for the ECE region, to stimulate the development of ICT policy and technical cooperation and to act as the focal point for the UN Regional Commissions on the WSIS. The ECE Task Force recently produced an inventory of ECE activities, which already support the development of ICT and knowledge based economies in the region. These include projects to build capacity, standards and infrastructure for statistical

information infrastructure, projects on energy efficiency and sustainable energy information systems, the use of information tools for environmental matters (the Aarhus Convention) and the development of advanced standards for electronic business infrastructure such as ebXML. In addition, the ECE conducts a series of activities to facilitate the implementation of ICT in transition economies such as the series on best practices in Internet development or the development of an Internet based system for aligned electronic trade documents (UNeDocs). Recently the ECE has strengthened its co-operation with the United Nations Economic and Social Commissions for Western Asia (ESCWA) and Africa (ECA) to launch a programme on ICT capacity building for the Mediterranean region. In 2002, meetings have been held in the secretariat to further discuss how these activities can be better focused to support a cross-sectoral approach to ICT for Development.

30. The ECE has developed and distributed a WSIS questionnaire to all the other Regional Commissions. The purpose of this questionnaire is to identify on a preliminary basis both the current common interests and the regional particularities in relation to the themes of the WSIS. The ECE Trade Division will provide an analysis of the questionnaire to the ITU.

31. The ECE has launched a series of country assessment reports "Towards a Knowledge-Based Economy", covering the economies in transition. These reports would serve as a basis for identifying digital gaps and their underlying causes, as well as constraints that impede the efforts of these countries to help bridge the digital divide separating them from the more advanced economies of Western Europe and North America. These activities would be undertaken in consultation with other organizations in order to avoid duplication. The reports could serve as a useful basis for policy development in the individual countries as well as inputs to the international debates at the forthcoming regional and global conferences.

32. The ECE will organize an informal regional expert meeting on 29 April 2002 in Geneva, in cooperation with the UNDP European Regional office and with participants from all relevant regional organizations, experts from ECE member States, ITU, DESA and from civil society and the business community. The meeting will launch the European regional network for ICT for Development. It will also be an important opportunity to reflect on the themes for the WSIS global preparatory meeting in Geneva in July 2002 and for the WSIS European Regional Preparatory Meeting scheduled for 7-9 November 2002 in Bucharest, Romania.

33. All the PSBs will consider how to integrate the implications of ICT for Development and the results of the WSIS in their future work. To this end, for example, the ECE Inland transport Committee will organize a round table on "Intelligent Transport Systems" in the context of its annual session in February 2003, which will include the implications for its work programme regarding transport infrastructure and regulatory issues.

V. WORLD SUMMIT ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (WSSD)

34. The ECE held, in cooperation with the Regional Office of UNEP, a Ministerial Meeting for Sustainable Development in September 2001 and, based on the outcome of that meeting, the contribution from the ECE region was submitted to the second session of the Preparatory Committee held in New York in February 2002. This presentation was made by Switzerland, as Chair of the ECE regional preparatory meeting.

35. During this second Preparatory Committee, representatives from all regional commissions met with the Chair and the two Vice-Chairs of the Committee who are responsible for preparing the sustainable development part of the expected outcome of the Summit. Such informal consultations on the role of the Regional Commissions after the Summit will continue on the occasion of the next steps of the preparatory process. The regional commissions also agreed on a joint statement that was presented at the Preparatory Committee Meeting.

36. In March 2002 ECE senior staff had a bilateral meeting with DESA to present the capacity of the ECE for promoting sustainable development in the region as well as the range of its activities in this field. DESA senior staff participating in the meeting appreciated the fact that the ECE has a strong multisectoral character which enables it to develop linkages among various key aspects of sustainable development and to support regional processes related to these areas. Thereafter, during the International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey, the Executive Secretaries of the Regional Commissions adopted a joint position regarding the proposals for decisions at the Summit on regional governance on sustainable development. A joint side-event for the regional commissions is being prepared for the last Preparatory Committee in Bali, Indonesia, in June 2002.

37. Following the second and third meetings of the Preparatory Committee for WSSD, held respectively in February and March 2002 in New York, the expected outcome of the Summit can be outlined as follows: (i) the adoption of a global agenda for change, which should focus on important issues where insufficient progress has been made in the implementation of the Rio commitments and others taken in the field of sustainable development since then; (ii) concrete initiatives to be launched in order to materialize this agenda, in the form of specific partnerships between member States with the support of the private sector, foundations and civil society organisations; (iii) the adoption of an institutional setting for sustainable development governance at the national, regional and international levels.

38. The importance of sustainable development governance at the regional level has been widely recognized during the sessions of the Preparatory Committee. The role of the Regional Commissions is currently being discussed and the following functions are in particular **considered**:

- (a) Fully integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development into their work, in a balanced way, so that the Commissions become regional sustainable development commissions. In this regard the capacity of the Regional Commissions to support sustainable development should be enhanced.
- (b) Facilitate and promote the integration of sustainable development into regional and sub-regional bodies e.g. by providing for an exchange of experience, good practices, case studies and partnership experience related to sustainable development implementation.
- (c) Consider establishing regional or sub-regional processes by which national reports on implementation of Agenda 21 are mutually reviewed and analysed, and experiences are shared.

39. In line with the above, the following possibilities to maximise the catalytic role of the ECE in the aftermath of the Summit could be explored:

- (a) to further strengthen sustainability aspects already developed in the work of the ECE in sectoral areas (transport, energy, timber, trade, industrial restructuring and enterprise development), in cross sectoral areas (economic analysis, statistics) and on intersectoral issues (e.g. transport, environment and health; timber, trade and environment; energy and environment;
- (b) in particular, the efforts already made for incorporating the social dimension into the ECE areas of work should be actively pursued on such issues as the social consequences of market reforms in the energy sector, the employment implications of industrial restructuring and foreign direct investments, the impact of ageing on growth, and the gender aspects of sustainable development; ECE should also address, at the regional level, the policies which aim at combining economic objectives with environmental considerations such as the decoupling of economic growth from resource use and the sustainability of production patterns;
- (c) to set up a high level political process for the whole region which would involve jointly governmental policy makers in the fields of economy and finance, labour and social affairs, and the environment. The ECE would thus play a catalytic role for an integrated policy dialogue, in cooperation/complementarity with other regional organisations and institutions also active in sustainable development, in particular the OECD and the EU.
- (d) A system of monitoring, within the region, of the implementation of the decisions taken at the Summit could constitute the basis of such a process. Manageable ways to conduct assessments of progress made and related policy dialogue should be explored. The monitoring should give value to the subregional dimension of problems met and progress made for sustainable development.

40. The ECE's contribution to the follow-up of WSSD would rely on the existing rich and diversified activities referred to above.