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**PREPARATION FOR AND FOLLOW-UP TO WORLD AND
REGIONAL CONFERENCES**

Note by the Executive Secretary

Summary

In its resolution 1998/46, the Economic and Social Council recognized the dual role of the regional commissions as regional outposts of the United Nations and as part of its respective institutional landscape. With regard to the former, ECOSOC stressed the importance of linking more effectively the activities of the commissions with the overall activities of the Organization in the economic and social sectors and emphasized the role given to the regional commissions in the preparations for and follow-up to major United Nations conferences.

At its fifty-fifth session, “the Commission reviewed ECE’s contributions to global debates and events and strongly supported ECE’s role as a regional arm of the United Nations called for in ECOSOC resolution 1998/46.” It further “expressed its satisfaction with the ability of ECE to offer a region-wide forum on social and economic issues...” (E/2000/37)

In his report “Strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change” (A/57/387), the Secretary-General stated that the major international “conferences have helped to ensure that the focus of the United Nations has evolved with the times and responded to new challenges facing the world’s peoples.” (para. 7). At the same time, he stated that “we must now ensure that our programme of work is adjusted to support these goals and priorities.” (para. 34).

ECE's input to global processes has been regularly reported on to the Commission. The present note provides information on the holding of the Pan-European Regional Ministerial Conference in preparation for the World Summit on Information Society and Preparations for the World Summit as well as the follow-up to the Ministerial Conference on Ageing. Follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development is addressed under agenda item 2 of the provisional agenda.

I. PAN-EUROPEAN REGIONAL MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE IN PREPARATION FOR THE WORLD SUMMIT ON INFORMATION SOCIETY (WSIS) AND PREPARATIONS FOR THE WSIS.

1. In preparation for the WSIS, the Pan European Regional Ministerial Conference was held in Bucharest on 7-9 November 2002, organized by the Romanian Government in cooperation with the UNECE and the WSIS Executive Secretariat. The Conference adopted a Policy Declaration that identifies and clearly spells out the fundamental principles of the information society, providing an effective framework for formulating, monitoring and evaluating the plans of action, the initiatives and partnerships required for the achievement of concrete goals and targets. It also produced a report of the many ideas that were discussed and the experience of best practices presented in Bucharest.

2. The Conference was preceded by an intense period of work and preparations under the leadership of the Romanian authorities. Sub-regional meetings were held providing substantive inputs to the Bucharest Conference and its follow up in preparation for WSIS. In particular, the "Bishkek Stakeholder Conference on the Information Society for the CIS Region" in Kyrgyzstan in September and its follow-up meeting in Moscow in October, reviewed major challenges facing the information society and discussed new regional initiatives. The Bishkek and Moscow Conferences produced a resolution on the information society representing an input to the WSIS preparatory process. In addition, the "Telecommunication for Development" Conference in Belgrade, in October, formulated a set of proposals for action and agreed a joint ICT policy agenda for six South-eastern European countries.

3. The UNECE cooperated closely with the Romanian Authorities in preparing the Bucharest Conference. In particular UNECE prepared a first draft of the set of "Principles" for the Information Society. These Principles laid the basis for an intergovernmental process led by the Romanian Authorities that produced the substantive political declaration adopted in Bucharest. Other organizations like ITU, UNDP and the European Commission, and several stakeholders from civil society and business, took active part in the process. The Bucharest declaration, jointly with the Bamako declaration adopted at the African Regional preparatory conference, and the other policy statements produced by the regional meetings, are expected to provide major inputs to the WSIS process.

4. The UNECE organized three events that were important parts of the Bucharest Conference. Firstly, a parallel event on "Building a Gender Sensitive Information Society",

which was quoted as best practice in including a gender perspective into the WSIS process; secondly, the UNECE Team of Specialists on Internet Enterprise Development that held a thematic workshop on “E-policy and E-Regulations”; and thirdly, the UNECE contributed, in cooperation with ISO, IEC and ITU, to organizing a section in the workshop on “Defining the Information Society”.

5. As a contribution to the activities of the UN ICT Task Force, the UNECE hosted in April 2002 a European Regional Meeting on the UN ICT Task Force Regional Network and its contribution to the WSIS. The European and Central Asian Regional Nodes of the UN ICT Task Force were then launched, with the purpose of bringing together different stakeholders and contributing to the activities of the UN Task Force. Stakeholders from throughout the region participated, many coming from civil society, research and education organizations as well from the business community. A website for the Geneva Node of the UN ICT Task Force has been designed and implemented. The relevant information and activities of the Geneva Node and the World Summit on the Information Society have been made available, including relevant links to the UN ICT Task Force, the Moscow Node, the United Nations Online Network in Public Administration and Finance (UNPAN) and the European database on Public Administration and e-government. More information can be found at the website address: <http://www.unece.org/etrades/ict/>.

6. The preparation for Bucharest and the WSIS have provided an occasion to better link together and place in a consistent framework the considerable amount of work that UNECE carries on in the field of ICT-related policy areas on the basis of current mandates in the different sectors. An Information Society Team (IST) has been set up within UNECE to share information and coordinate across the different sectors the various activities. IST has been the main player in providing input and support to WSIS.

7. The outcome of the Bucharest Conference marks an important step in the WSIS process. The many ideas and suggestions developed at the Bucharest meeting gave way to a policy dialogue, which is expected to contribute significantly to the preparation for WSIS. Other regional preparatory meetings are to be held in the Asian and Latin American regions (WSIS Asian Regional Conference 13-15 January, Tokyo, and the Latin American one in Bávaro, Dominican Republic, from 29 to 31 January 2003).

8. The main objective of the Second Preparatory Committee (Geneva, 17-28 February 2003) will be to begin considering a draft Declaration of Principles and Action Plan, to be eventually submitted for the approval of Heads of State attending the Summit in December 2003. The regional inputs will be carefully considered at the Preparatory Committee meeting. In particular, the Bucharest Declaration should provide a basis for the Declaration to be adopted at the Summit. UNECE is playing a coordinating role vis-à-vis the other regional commissions in the provision of inputs to the WSIS process.

9. The UNECE will continue to provide support to the preparatory work of the WSIS by mainstreaming the WSIS main themes into its current work. A few specific events, organized by or in cooperation with UNECE, are being planned to take place in Geneva. These include an event proposed by the UNECE Team of Specialists on Internet Enterprise Development (TSIED), an event jointly organized with the “ITU Working Group on Gender and ICT” and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) on gender issues, and a joint

ISO/IEC/ITU and UNECE event dealing with the role of open standards in the information society.

II. FOLLOW-UP TO THE MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON AGEING IN BERLIN

10. The Ministerial Conference on Ageing was held from 11 to 13 September 2002 in Berlin (Germany). The Conference adopted two main documents: the *Regional Implementation Strategy for the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing 2002* (RIS) and the *Berlin Ministerial Declaration: A Society for All Ages in the UNECE Region*. The overall approach of the *Strategy* is holistic and multifaceted, based on the premise that population ageing is one of the most important aspects of the complex demographic changes that the countries in the UNECE region are undergoing. The *Strategy* is organized in ten commitments, which emphasize the importance of mainstreaming ageing into various policy fields, and underscore that policies for different sectors, systems and groups, ought to be comprehensive, well coordinated and mutually supportive. Specific policy objectives that need to be met as part of each commitment are also identified, as are the actions necessary to fulfil these objectives.

11. Among other things, the *Strategy* sets out a number of sound principles for its implementation. This is codified in the commitment "To promote the implementation and follow-up of the regional implementation strategy through regional cooperation" (Commitment 10). It emphasizes, *inter alia*, that the follow-up, which will be done within the existing framework of meetings of the UNECE, should focus on: strengthening the cooperation among UNECE member States in the field of ageing, adequate reporting on the implementation, and effective exchange of information, experience and best practices. The *Strategy* emphasizes the importance of providing opportunities for civil society, including NGOs, and other relevant stakeholders to cooperate in this process. The network for such cooperation already exists. For example, the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research in Vienna, an intergovernmental organization affiliated with the United Nations, which has a network of collaborating institutions, will put at the disposal of the follow-up work a unit consisting of two professionals, which will assist the UNECE secretariat. The Austrian Government has offered to financially support this arrangement.

12. In order to respond to the exigencies of the *Strategy* concerning its implementation and follow-up, various activities in collaboration with concerned stakeholders can be envisaged which would facilitate strengthened cooperation among UNECE member States in the field of ageing, the adequate reporting on the implementation, and the effective exchange of information.

13. These activities are expected to include:

- (a) *Organizing jointly with other organizations expert seminars on relevant topics*. As the UNECE has expertise in only some of the issues related to ageing, cooperation with organisations such as ILO, the Council of Europe and OECD, is essential and inevitable. Policy briefs which would highlight salient issues related to ageing in the UNECE region, and studies on the policy-relevant topics, which focus on both theoretical issues and on national experiences and best practices among UNECE countries, will be prepared in support of the work of these seminars.

The topics that could be addressed by the seminars are varied and could include, for example, the implications of population ageing on the labour markets (where UNECE will seek collaboration with ILO), interrelated social and economic aspects of living arrangements of older persons (in collaboration with the Council of Europe), social housing for older persons, where the UNECE has a recognized know-how, as well as gender aspects of ageing. In this context, the Slovenian Government has offered to host a seminar, which will focus on employment and employability of older persons in south-eastern Europe.

The seminars would be attended by both government policy-makers, representatives of the civil society, including NGOs and trade unions, the business community, and representatives of partner organizations. The involvement of the business community is essential since issues such as the employment of older persons cannot be solved without their active participation.

The seminars would also allow for adequate reporting on the progress, opportunities and constraints to implementation, thus allowing for an increased awareness of the status of the implementation of the RIS and a wider dissemination of policy-relevant knowledge on the implications of ageing on various sectors of the society and the economy.

- (b) *Collecting data and preparing analyses*, including the aforementioned policy briefs and studies. These would be carried out by the UNECE's Population Activities Unit (PAU) in collaboration with the above-mentioned European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research. This work will be based in part on the long-standing and ongoing work of the PAU in data gathering and research, carried out as part of several successive projects funded by extra-budgetary resources, and supported by the UNECE's Statistical Division.
- (c) *Strengthening the global implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) 2002*. In addition to fostering cooperation between UNECE member States in promoting and strengthening the regional follow-up to the Berlin Conference, this work will strengthen the global implementation of MIPAA 2002. The UNECE will share its experience with the other regional commissions, primarily through jointly organized meetings, thereby promoting the implementation of MIPAA 2002.

14. To ensure that the follow-up receives the necessary intergovernmental overview, it is proposed that reports on the activities undertaken as part of the follow-up process are submitted to Ad Hoc Informal Meetings of the Commission/the Annual Session.
