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Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT)

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**INFORMAL BRIEFING ON UNECE'S WORK  
REGARDING THE WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION  
SOCIETY AND THE UN HIGH LEVEL TASK FORCE ON INFORMATION  
AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT**

Submitted by the secretariat

This document is submitted to the Centre for information.

## **1. Introduction**

The UNECE is working to support the participation of the region in two distinct processes which have many inter-linkages. Each of the regional commissions is contributing to these global processes. This paper explains how UNECE is implementing the work.

## **2. The UN High Level Task Force on ICT for Development**

In July 2000, the Economic and Social Council held a High-Level Panel on the Role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for Development that called for the establishment of a High Level United Nations Task Force on ICT for Development. This Task Force was set up in November 2001 to act as a facilitating, catalytic and advisory body to help to bridge the so-called "digital divide".

Each regional commission has been requested to support this Task Force and to promote regional networks. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is also active in assisting the Task Force. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) is working in close collaboration with the European regional office of UNDP (based in Bratislava). UNECE is also maintaining close contact with the secretariat of the United Nations ICT Task Force (the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs, DESA).

## **3. World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)**

In a parallel process, the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) was adopted at the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference in Minneapolis in 1998. The Summit will bring together Heads of States, Executive Heads of United Nations agencies, industry leaders and NGOs in two high-level meetings to develop a better understanding of the ICT revolution and its impact on the international community. The Summit meetings will be held from 10 to 12 December 2003 in Geneva and in 2005 in Tunis. In January 2002, the UN General Assembly endorsed the WSIS and called upon Governments and the United Nations organizations to actively participate at the highest possible level in this event and to link the process to the activities of the UN ICT for Development Task Force. The ITU, with assistance from the Government of Switzerland, has set up a WSIS Executive Secretariat.

## **4. UNECE's Role in the Preparatory Process for the WSIS and the UN ICT for Development Task Force**

In the preparatory process of the WSIS, UNECE acts as the focal point for the five United Nations regional commissions to disseminate information and to liaise with the Executive Secretariat, based at the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in Geneva, on behalf of **all** the regional commissions. The UNECE Executive Secretary appointed the Director of the Trade Division as the UNECE Focal Point for ICT for Development and the WSIS and requested UNECE divisions to contribute to these processes. In order to best respond to these two major ICT initiatives in the United Nations system, in 2001 the UNECE set up an inter-divisional Task Force on ICT for Transition and Development. The role of this Task Force is to liaise with the UN ICT Task Force and the WSIS Executive Secretariat, to encourage the implementation of ICT for the UNECE region, to stimulate the development of ICT policy and technical cooperation and to act as the focal point for the United Nations regional commissions on the WSIS. The UNECE Task Force recently produced an inventory of UNECE activities which already support the development of ICT and knowledge based economies. 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.

The UNECE has recently 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 analysis of the questionnaire will be provided to the ITU by the UNECE Trade Division.

The intergovernmental preparatory process for the WSIS will involve both global and regional expert meetings. The first global meeting will be organized by ITU in Geneva from 1 to 5 July 2002. With regard to the WSIS European Regional Preparatory Meeting, an offer has been received from the Government of Romania to host it from 7 to 9 November 2002 in Bucharest in cooperation with UNECE.

Further consideration will need to be given to the allocation of resources to support these processes.

## **5. Action**

UNECE will organize an informal regional expert meeting on 29 April 2002 in Geneva. This will be in cooperation with the UNDP European Regional office and with participants from all relevant regional organizations, experts from UNECE member States, ITU, and DESA. The meeting will discuss how a European regional network for ICT for Development could be set up. It will also be an important opportunity to reflect on the themes for the WSIS global preparatory meeting in Geneva in July and for the WSIS European Regional Preparatory Meeting provisionally scheduled for November 2002 in Bucharest.

UNECE member States are kindly requested to inform their relevant government departments, the business community, non-governmental organizations, and research institutes about the meeting on 29 April 2002, and to encourage qualified experts to attend.

You may wish to note the following dates in your diaries for 2002-2003:

	<b><u>2002</u></b>	
G-8 DOT.Force, Palermo (Italy)		10-11 April
UNECE Informal Regional Expert Meeting on ICT for Development and WSIS, Geneva (Switzerland)		29 April
WSIS Global Preliminary Preparatory Conference, Geneva (Switzerland)		1-5 July
WSIS European Regional Preparatory Conference, Bucharest		7-9 November
	<b><u>2003</u></b>	
WSIS, Geneva (Switzerland)		10-12 December 2003
	<b><u>2005</u></b>	
WSIS, Tunis		

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