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Bureau overview of recent developments

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Submitted by the UN/CEFACT Bureau for information

Summary

This brief report by the Bureau to the eighteenth Plenary sets the stage for topics to be taken up during the session. It provides an overview that focuses on themes the Bureau would like to bring to the Plenary's attention, particularly in the context of its initial months of working within the new structure that was adopted at the seventeenth session, in July 2011.

As the report was drafted in November 2011 for a meeting in February 2012, it will be updated with additional information when the report is presented at the Plenary.

1. A more streamlined project-oriented management structure for UN/CEFACT was approved by the Plenary at its seventeenth session, which was held on 7 and 8 July 2011. The new structure puts the central focus of management attention on the strategic development of the programme of work, practical implementation and governance. In particular, the structure provides for a more manageable organization of tasks and processes for increased transparency, and facilitates more timely project deliverables to address critical needs of member States and other stakeholders.

2. The elections for vice-chairs at the seventeenth Plenary were the starting point for the new Bureau to make use of the new structure to develop and maintain high-quality recommendations and standards in the field of trade facilitation and electronic business. Essentially, the work in the Bureau over the past few months has involved issues of UN/CEFACT's legacy and its future, especially making sure to carefully identify well-established deliverables that need to be maintained to secure stakeholder investments.

3. It is already clear that the new composition of the Bureau should guarantee that UN/CEFACT is well positioned for significant achievements. Most of the vice-chairs are from government; with the others coming from the private sector and international organizations. They have a broad range of skills in management, technology, communication and expertise in domains such as the following:

- agriculture;
- customs;
- defence;
- procurement;
- product identification;
- supply chain;
- tax;
- trade facilitation;
- transport.

4. Several have worked in, or collaborated with, regional and international organizations, as well as organizations developing standards, and are also experienced in capacity-building. They intend to (a) extend outreach in order to focus on priorities and (b) take steps to reduce duplication of effort.

5. The vice-chairs—who will serve for three-year terms of office—also have experience in the challenges of developing and transition economies. They were nominated by heads of delegation from Australia, Belarus, France, India, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States. Combined with the Plenary's regional rapporteurs for Africa and for Asia and the Pacific, a globally relevant set of skills can be seen as guiding UN/CEFACT's way forward.

6. A range of liaison initiatives are also under way. Following the seventeenth UN/CEFACT Plenary, both ISO TC154 and the MOU Management Group on e-Business expressed support at their own Plenary sessions for working together more closely with UN/CEFACT.

7. As part of the Bureau's transitional steps, it is already evident that due diligence is being taken with respect to all of the recommendations proposed by EXCOM, which concern:

- information-sharing and communication
- governance
- balance in programme activities
- enhanced involvement of countries with economies in transition
- capacity-building
- cooperation with other institutions.

8. The Bureau considers outreach to be fundamental to ensuring greater participation from a wider range of countries from around the world, and their experts in the public and private sectors.

9. As the new organizational arrangements mature over the coming months, both the Bureau and the UNECE secretariat are giving priority to closer collaboration. Benefits of particular importance to member States are envisaged to be achieved through a strengthened programme of outreach and capacity-building. The programme will take advantage of the combined knowledge and competencies within UN/CEFACT, from the public and private sectors, and from the UNECE secretariat.

10. The eighteenth UN/CEFACT Forum of experts was held under the new structure from 19 to 23 September. This involved first steps towards addressing a wide range of strategic and project-oriented issues concerning the current and future programme of work, as well as critical maintenance and operational tasks.

11. The exchange of views was organized through an initial set of five broad Programme Development Areas, led by the vice-chairs:

- trade and transport facilitation
- supply chain
- regulatory
- sectoral
- methodology and technology.

12. Key business domains supporting UN/CEFACT's activities currently involve experts in agriculture, accounting and audit, customs, e-government, environmental management, finance and payments, insurance, international trade procedures, procurement, supply chain management, transport, travel and tourism. Progress is also being made in preparations for the 19th Forum in India and the 20th Forum in Austria.

13. A roster of experts is also helping the Bureau to identify persons prepared to take up specific programme-support tasks, e.g. communication, and the maintenance of UN/EDIFACT and other libraries. A critical support task already under way is the improvement of UN/CEFACT's website design and availability of information, particularly to provide for easier access to activities of the Programme Development Areas and project details.

14. Building on the exchange of views during the seventeenth Plenary and the 18th Forum, the Bureau prepared draft Plenary agenda items to cover a wide range of topics and also to allow sufficient time for an exchange of views among delegations. Key procedural matters will be followed by a discussion of strategic directions.

15. The Bureau has included a day of panel discussions concerning challenges in trade facilitation and electronic business, which involve better understanding the perspectives of representatives of government, national, regional and international institutions, the private sector and organizations engaged in developing and implementing standards. This aims to put things into context as the Plenary takes up the programme of work for 2012-2013.
