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**THE WORK OF THE GROUP OF EXPERTS ON
THE PROGRAMME OF WORK**

Report by the Chairperson of the Group of Experts

1. Since the fifty-eighth session of the Commission, the Group of Experts on the Programme of Work (GEPW), which has met on nine occasions between March and December, has had to discuss and make recommendations (when necessary) on the following issues:

- UNECE reform:
 - Review of intergovernmental structure;
 - Technical cooperation activities;
- The routine affairs of the Commission:
 - The secretariat's proposals on teams of specialists, the Regional Implementation Forum on Sustainable Development and the topic for the spring seminar;
- The procedure for establishing the programme budget narratives.

UNECE reform: review of intergovernmental structure

2. At its fifty-eighth session, the Commission instructed GEPW to continue to study the question of UNECE reform, including the points raised by delegations, and to submit recommendations to the Commission. The Group first of all proceeded to catalogue the intergovernmental structure by circulating a questionnaire to the principal subsidiary bodies and working groups. This questionnaire has already provided a clearer insight into the range of activities undertaken by the intergovernmental bodies. It will make it easier to coordinate activities and will serve as a basis for the streamlining of work and structures that is already partially under way.

3. The Group next embarked on a study of certain aspects of the activities of the intergovernmental structure, particularly assessment, priority-setting and rationalization. It also evaluated suggestions by the principal subsidizing bodies and working groups to improve working procedures within UNECE. The discussion identified (i) steps the secretariat could take, for example to further improve communication and optimize the flow of information between the various UNECE institutions and member States; and (ii) some principles around which consensus could crystallize, especially with regard to assessment of activities and priority-setting. This latter area is directly linked to the review of the procedure for preparing the programme budget.

4. The Group could continue this work in January and February 2004 with a view to drawing up recommendations for the Commission.

5. As to the role of the Steering Group and the strengthening of the role of GEPW desired by the Commission, the Group will embark on a discussion of this topic once the secretariat has submitted its comments to the officers of the Commission.

UNECE reform: technical cooperation activities

6. Pursuant to the mandate entrusted to it by the Commission, the Group has looked into the proposals put forward by the secretariat in the area of technical cooperation as presented at the fifty-eighth session of the Commission.

7. After a thorough discussion, the Group has drawn up conclusions and recommendations. On 28 May it adopted the document *Conclusions and recommendations of the GEPW on E/ECE/1399, Part I*, which deals principally with monitoring,¹ evaluation,² strengthening of the dialogue between the secretariat and member States and the need for a technical cooperation strategy, which the secretariat has been invited to draw up. The Commission approved these conclusions and recommendations at its Ad Hoc Informal Meeting on 26 June. On 6 October the Group adopted a recommendation on a priority-setting mechanism in the area of technical cooperation³ and referred it to the Commission. It hopes that the Commission will be able to study this recommendation (see Annex II of document E/ECE/1411) at its fifty-ninth session, at the latest.

Activities connected with the routine affairs of the Commission

8. At the request of the Commission secretariat, the Group discussed the draft guidelines for the teams of specialists, the proposed topics for the spring seminar and the proposed Regional Implementation Forum on Sustainable Development in the context of the biennial cycle of work of the Commission on Sustainable Development. These discussions enabled the secretariat to optimize the proposals, which have subsequently been referred to ad hoc informal meetings of the Commission for endorsement.

Procedure for establishing programme budget narratives

9. As a result of experience gained in autumn 2003 regarding consideration of the UNECE programme budget narratives for 2004-2005, the Group took note of the need to improve the process. It therefore launched a discussion on possible ways to make the preparation of UNECE programme budget narratives more straightforward, transparent, predictable and inclusive. This winter the Group will press ahead with its efforts to complete its work in this area by the spring.

10. Some delegations have remarked that better exchanges of information on current budget exercises should also help to achieve the objectives referred to above.

11. As a result of intensive dialogue between the Group and the secretariat, member States have obtained detailed information on the role and use of the extrabudgetary resources administered by UNECE. This exchange is proving productive and should therefore be continued in a structured fashion, in the context of the dialogue mentioned above.

Conclusion and future activity

12. The Chairperson of the Group notes with satisfaction that the discussions at the Group's meetings and the dialogue with the secretariat at these meetings are making a significant and constructive contribution to transparency and communication between member States and the secretariat. The Group has also performed valuable work in preparing the questions to be dealt with by the Commission.

13. Despite these undoubtedly positive results, however, it must be acknowledged that the Group still faces a number of challenges in the year ahead. In the view of the Chairperson, three topics appear to be top priorities for the Group in 2004, namely (i) streamlining the budget procedure (with a possible extension of the debate to include resource management, to the extent permitted under United Nations rules); (ii) action on the outcome of debates in the Commission and any measures it adopts between its fifty-eighth and fifty-ninth sessions, including measures adopted at the sessions themselves; and (iii) further reform, bearing in mind the impact that the enlargement of the European Union could have on the Commission's work. The better to serve the needs of member States while paying special attention to the needs of least-developed

countries in transition, much more thought needs to be given to the effects of enlargement of the European Union on the many and varied activities of UNECE, its structures and cooperation between various UNECE bodies and the European Commission and other pan-European institutions. In considering these topics, the Group should also draw on the views and opinions of the Steering Group, the principal subsidiary bodies and the secretariat.

Notes

¹ Action 8 proposed by the secretariat in document E/ECE/1399.

² Action 9 proposed by the secretariat in document E/ECE/1399.

³ Action 7 proposed by the secretariat in document E/ECE/1399.
