



United Nations

UNECE Weekly

Economic Commission for Europe

Issue N° 215 – 26-30 March 2007



The Commission celebrates 60 years

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe is celebrating its sixtieth anniversary at its upcoming session on 25-27 April, to be held in Conference Room XIX of the Palais des Nations.

Highlights of the session, which is built around the overarching theme of "Building on ECE's 60-year contribution to pan-European integration", include panel discussions on cooperation for stability and prosperity in the region and on pan-European economic cooperation. Other panels will be held on the promotion of sustainable development in the UNECE region and will centre around three themes: energy security, secure transport development, and the economics of gender in the European economy.

All panels feature eminent moderators and speakers from governments, partner organizations and the private sector.

Other Events

Swedish-born Gunnar Myrdal, first Executive Secretary of the UNECE and winner of the Nobel Prize for Economics in 1974, is at the centre of an exhibition featuring photos and documents from UN and Swedish archives. This, together with an exhibition on "ECE in Action" will be displayed during the Anniversary Session on the 3rd floor of the Palais des Nations, near Conference Room XIX.

In addition, a book on the past and future of the Economic Commission for Europe, being prepared by Yves Berthelot, former UNECE Executive Secretary, and Paul Rayment, former Director of the Economic Analysis Division, will be launched.

Reduced ecological footprint

For the first time, UNECE has conducted a distance training using Internet telephony and remote access computer technology to link a North American-based trainer to experts gathered at a capacity-building workshop in Europe. The subregional workshop "Capacity-building for the Aarhus Clearinghouse mechanism and electronic information tools" was conducted in Szentendre, Hungary, on 8-9 March 2007. The workshop had been organized by the Aarhus Convention Secretariat in partnership with the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC). Twenty-seven experts drawn mainly from Central and South Eastern Europe participated in the unique exercise.

"This is the first time REC has done a training using these technologies," said Jerome Simpson, Head of Information Programme at REC. Stephen Lapointe,

Senior Web Programmer - UNEP/GRID-Arendal, led the one-hour training from his office in Cambridge, Massachusetts (USA). "The application of telephony reduced the ecological footprint of the workshop and saved about US\$ 2,000 in travel and other expenses," reported the Aarhus Convention secretariat.

Best National Node

The Szentendre workshop also recognized the Belgium web portal www.aarhus.be as being the "Best National Node (2007) of the Aarhus Clearinghouse Mechanism." The Belgium national portal provides citizens with clear information on the development and impact of the Aarhus Convention at the Belgian level. Ms. Mieke Van de Velde, Communications Officer of the



Belgium Federal Public Service Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment, Directorate-General, received the Best National Node (2007) certificate from the secretariat. BlueLink Information Network (Bulgaria) was also recognized as "a Leading Contributor to the Aarhus Clearinghouse".

The capacity-building workshop on the Aarhus Clearinghouse mechanism and electronic information tools is the first in a series being organized to promote participation in the Convention's Aarhus Clearinghouse for Environmental Democracy.

For more information contact public.participation@unece.org or visit <http://aarhusclearinghouse.unece.org>.

Action Programme for the Dniester River



A Transboundary Diagnostic Study for the Dniester river basin was published at the end of 2005 and a Protocol of Intentions signed by water and environmental authorities in Ukraine and Moldova (see www.dniester.org).

This was the basis of a UNECE-OSCE project: "Action Programme to improve transboundary cooperation and sustainable management of the Dniester river" that started in August 2006. The objective is to develop an Action Programme to improve the cooperative management of water and related resources of the Dniester River Basin according to the principles of the UNECE Water Convention.

The activities include drafting, negotiating and agreeing on a new bilateral agreement between the two countries. In a meeting in Chernovtsy, Ukraine in February 2007 the project participants agreed on the text of the new agreement. As it will take some time for a new agreement to be officially approved and signed, the project also aims to develop the existing framework for cooperation according to an agreement from 1994. It is a positive sign that representatives from the Transdniester region of Moldova have participated in the project work.

For more information contact
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Coming up

26-30 March

Working Party on Lighting and Light-signalling

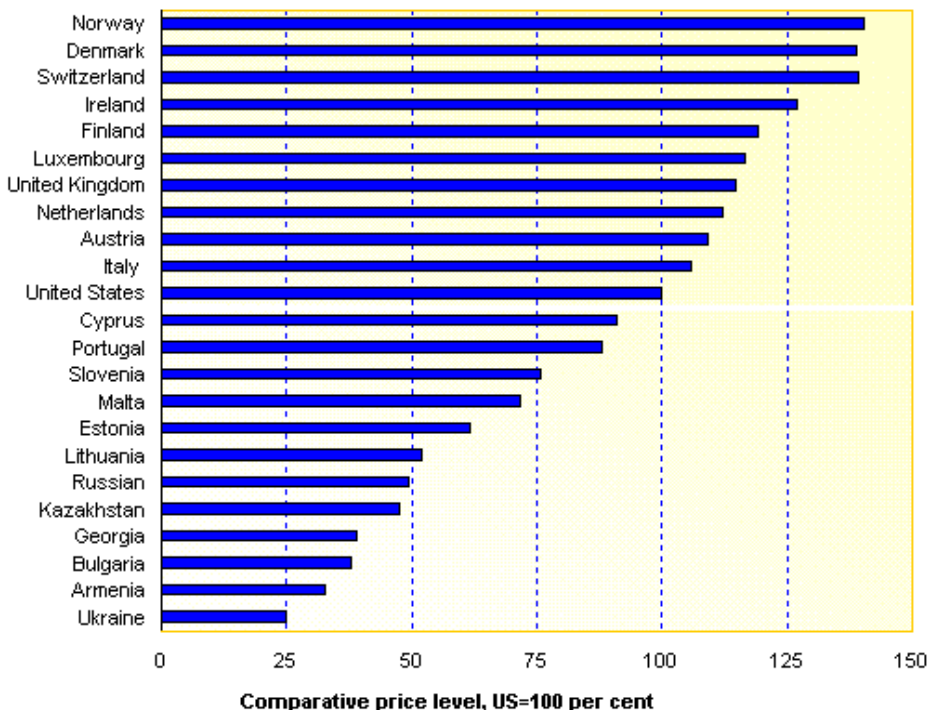
26-30 March

Joint Meeting of the RID Safety Committee and the UNECE Working Party on the Transport of Dangerous Goods (Bern, Switzerland)

Facts and figures

Price levels vary greatly among UNECE countries

Comparative price levels in selected UNECE countries, 2005



Source: UNECE Statistical Database

Note: Countries ordered by the comparative price level. Comparative price level is defined as the ratio of the purchasing power parity of GDP and the exchange rate for a given country, both measured in national currency per dollar in 2005.

Comparative price levels covering the whole basket of consumer goods and services, government services, equipment goods and construction projects indicate the order of magnitude of the price differences across countries. In the UNECE region these differences are substantial: for instance, the comparative price levels are nearly six-fold higher in Norway than in Ukraine (2005). In general, across UNECE, high price levels are characteristic for Nordic countries, Luxembourg and Switzerland, while the lowest price levels are observed in the CIS countries.

The considerable price level disparity among the UNECE countries reflects to some extent differences in their income levels. Within subregions, the disparities are much less striking: in 2005 the coefficient of variation, which is a measure of dispersion, was 12% within the (high-income) EU-15, and 25% among the (medium- and low-income) CIS countries, whereas for the 45 UNECE countries for which data are available it was 48%.