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THE PROTOCOL ON STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT ENTERED INTO FORCE ON 11 JULY

A new international treaty is set to ensure that environmental considerations inform and are integrated into governments' strategic decision-making, in support of environmentally sound and sustainable development.

The Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment to the UNECE Espoo Convention, signed by 35 governments and the European Community in May 2003 in Kiev, entered into force on 11 July 2010. The Protocol counts 17 Member States plus the European Union as an organization.

Ján Kubiš, UNECE Executive Secretary, described this new international law as "making environmental protection an integral part of the development process".

Strategic environmental assessment is a systematic and anticipatory process, undertaken to analyze the environmental effects of proposed government plans, programmes and other strategies, and to integrate the findings into decision-making. It involves the public and environmental and health authorities, giving them a say in government planning: the responsible authority has to arrange for informing the public and consulting the public concerned, and the decision-maker has to take due account of comments received from the public and from the environmental and health authorities. Such assessments are most commonly carried out for land-use planning at various levels of government, but are also applied to other sectoral plans, such as for energy, water, waste, transport, agriculture and industry.



Montenegro, for example, has already used the Protocol to improve both domestic planning in general and, in particular, its hydropower development planning which is likely to affect neighbouring Albania. The Protocol requires the assessment of plans and programmes irrespective of whether they are likely to affect other countries.

The Protocol also encourages the application of this powerful tool to higher levels of decision-making as well, requiring governments to endeavour to assess also their policies and legislation. It will also provide a legal basis for the health sector to have a role in development planning, requiring for the first time that health authorities are always consulted on development planning.

The entry into force of the Protocol will be a concrete step towards achieving Millennium Development Goal 7, to "ensure environmental sustainability", and its first target: "Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources".

The Protocol will be open to all United Nations Member States, upon approval by the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol, which will meet first in June 2011. That body will also define how the compliance mechanism under the Espoo Convention, operated by its Implementation Committee, will be extended to review States' compliance with the Protocol. □

For further information, please visit: www.unece.org/env/sea or contact Nick Bonvoisin at: eia.conv@unece.org.



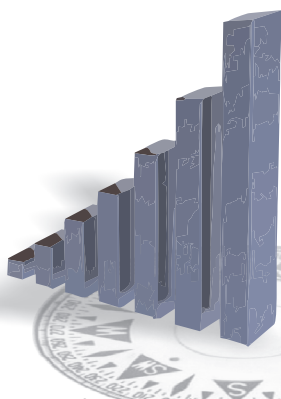
Malaysia has just launched a 3-months information campaign to raise awareness on the adoption of the UNECE regulation No. 75 for motorcycle tyres. This Regulation is already applied by 37 countries worldwide. As of 1 October 2010, all tyres for motorcycles over 250cc sold in Malaysia will have to comply with the UNECE Regulation.

MALAYSIA TO ADOPT UNECE REGULATION FOR MOTORCYCLE TYRES

This campaign will target not only retailers but also users who will be advised to use safe motorcycle tyres.

As in many other countries in South-East Asia, motorcycles are widely used in Malaysia and motorcyclists are especially vulnerable. In 2009, out of 6,745 casualties recorded in the country, 4,067 involved motorcyclists. Research conducted by the authorities showed that the bulk of these accidents are caused by mechanical factors, such as unsafe tyres, improperly functioning brakes or lights. □

THE IMPACT OF GLOBAL CRISES ON STATISTICAL SYSTEMS



The impact of global crises on statistical systems was the main topic at the plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) held in Paris on June 8-10.

National official statistical systems can use their broad coverage of topics to monitor crises from the financial, economic and social perspectives. This has resulted in the pressure from users of statistics for more frequent and timely data from statistical offices in times of crisis. Participants raised concerns about the implications of these pressures for data quality and the important role of official statistics in maintaining high quality standards. The discussion highlighted the dependence of statistical offices on other agencies for the supply of information, and the need to ensure that these data are reliable.

Some agencies have been very creative – with YouTube videos, expanding visual presentation of data, the use of data mining, a tool to transfer data into information, and the flexible use of available data sources.

Another main topic discussed was the role of a spatial dimension in official statistics, linking data to a geographical location. The geographic reference is one of the basic elements in statistics that can provide essential information for planning purposes at national and regional level. This information is increasingly used in such areas of statistics as housing, agriculture, land use, environment, social stratification, energy, transport and business. Examples of good practices were provided on how to get added value from the combination of geographic and statistical data that can be effectively used for policy making.

The Conference addressed the challenges of conducting time-use surveys. These surveys are complex and expensive to implement but the resulting data are an invaluable source of information on many different topics, including living conditions, unpaid work and quality of life. The importance of better measuring these issues was highlighted in the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi report. □

For more information, please see:

<http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2010.06.ces.htm>
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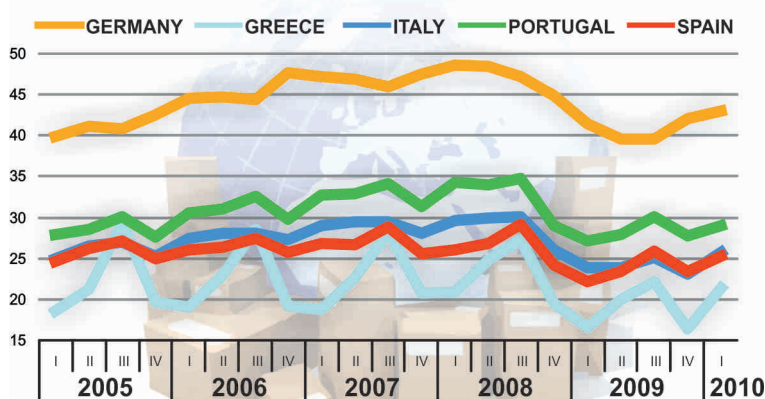
FACTS AND FIGURES

CAN EXPORTS HELP EUROPEAN UNION COUNTRIES EXIT THE CRISIS?

An important debt crisis is currently affecting many European countries. In this situation, better performance of exports - here represented by the export propensity rate (i.e. the share of exports in GDP) - may help countries to reduce their budget deficits and recover faster from the crisis. The chart considers South European countries characterized by similar economic background: Italy, Greece, Spain, and Portugal; the benchmark is Germany, the biggest country of the Euro area.

The export propensity showed an upward trend from early 2005 through the third quarter of 2008; then as the financial turmoil escalated into the global economic crisis, export propensity dropped sharply. Only recently some of these countries managed to recover to the export propensity levels of 2005. The export recovery since mid-2009, buoyed by the depreciation of the Euro, has become again the primary driver of growth for these countries.

Export propensity, 2005Q1-2010Q1
(per cent)



Source: UNECE statistical database (2005 to 2009Q4) and OECD statistical database (2010Q1).

Whether the current export-based recovery may lead to sustained growth depends on the ability of European countries to reassure economic players about stability in the entire Euro area, leading to a recovery in investments and higher household spending. Although confidence remains fragile, the revival of exports is a good starting point for an economic pick-up. □