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**WORKING PARTY ON TECHNICAL HARMONIZATION
AND STANDARDIZATION POLICIES**

Summary of main activities and developments

This paper summarizes the main activities of the Working Party on Technical Harmonization and Standardization Policies (WP.6) since its tenth session (6-8 November 2001).

The Committee will be asked to endorse the report of the Working Party's tenth session (TRADE/WP.6/2000/20). With regard to this report, the Committee will be asked to endorse or support the proposals contained in paragraphs 21 and 26 and to approve the proposal in paragraph 35 of the document and to note the remainder of this document which has been submitted for information.

This report of the Working Party's tenth session and other documents of the Working Party are available at the following website address: <http://www.unece.org/trade/stdpol>

The Working Party will hold its eleventh session in Geneva from 29 to 31 October 2001.

Introduction

1. The tenth session of the Working Party on Technical Harmonization and Standardization Policies held in Geneva in November 2000 commemorated the thirtieth anniversary of UN/ECE activities on standardization policies and technical harmonization matters.
2. The objective of this sub-programme is to promote trade, as well as industrial and enterprise development in the UN/ECE region, by (a) encouraging the international harmonization of standards and technical regulations, (b) removing or gradually reducing technical barriers to trade, and (c) promoting scientific and technological cooperation through the development of policies for standardization and related activities
3. During discussions at the tenth session much praise was given to the 30 years of service to Governments and the regional and international standardization community rendered by the Working Party and its predecessor body, the Meeting of Governmental Officials Responsible for Standardization. The usefulness and importance of the Working Party's activities and of its outputs (for example, the Standardization List and Recommendations on Standardization Policies) was particularly noted in view of its expanding activities in the countries in transition.

International Workshop on the Role of International Standards and Technical Regulations in International Trade (7 November 2000)

4. The Workshop was organized in conjunction with the tenth session of the Working Party. The purpose of the Workshop was to examine the current situation and the problems faced by business operators; problems due to differences in technical regulations, standards and conformity assessment procedures in different markets.
5. Representatives of international, regional and national standardization organizations, regulatory authorities, conformity assessment bodies, trade and industry operators presented their views on how, on the one hand, to ensure health, safety and environmental protection, and, on the other, how to minimize technical barriers to trade; they also expressed their views on the need for harmonizing regulatory objectives and the possibility of using international standards in this context.
6. The Workshop also provided an opportunity to exchange views on the UN/ECE project on the draft "International model for implementing good regulatory practice for the preparation, adoption and application of technical regulations via the use of international standards", which was prepared by the
7. The Workshop was organized in three sessions. The opening session was devoted to a presentation of the Working Party's activities. During the second session international experience with technical harmonization issues in different areas/sectors was considered. Presentations were made on the experience of the UN/ECE World Forum for Harmonization of Vehicle Regulations (WP.29), on the Global Harmonization Task Force for Medical Devices, on activities of the International Organization for

Standardization (ISO)/International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC), as well as on practical issues faced by regulators and private companies.

8. The third session was devoted to the analysis of problems in certain sectors, namely, elevators (lifts), electrotechnical goods and earth-moving machinery from the point of view of companies, regulators and standardizers. Economic operators and regulators exchanged views and concerns on the possibility of facilitation of trade through technical harmonization at national, regional and international levels.

9. Discussions at the Workshop showed that differences in standards, technical regulations and conformity assessment procedures constituted one of the major obstacles to international trade at present. Participants expressed their concern that existing work on international technical harmonization in international and regional intergovernmental forums had not yet been fully utilized with regard to the elimination of technical barriers to trade and facilitating market access.

10. In this context, participants welcomed the initiative of the Working Party to explore how technical regulations could make wider use of international standards and also welcomed the submitted draft "International Model" as a good starting point for further dialogue on international regulatory cooperation and on promoting, whenever possible, regulatory convergence.

11. Private companies and business associations expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to engage in a dialogue with governmental officials from different parts of the UN/ECE region on issues of interest to the private sector and to society in general.

12. At the end of the Workshop, the participants adopted the conclusions, which summarized the deliberations of the Workshop.

13. These conclusions, inter alia, called on UN/ECE Governments and international organizations:

- to show their commitment to the facilitation of international trade by wider participation in international regulatory cooperation and international standardization and effective implementation of the results;
- to encourage effective coordination and cooperation between Governments and regulatory authorities and economic operators, and different international organizations and intergovernmental forums and to follow up on practical proposals on regulatory cooperation in particular sectors/product areas;
- to involve, where appropriate, private-sector representatives in such activities thus promoting a public-private partnership approach.

ECE project "International Model for implementing good regulatory practice in the preparation, adoption and application of technical regulations via the use of international standards"

14. It is recalled that at its ninth session the Working Party decided to create a team of specialists to examine the relation between international standardization and regulations and, in particular, how technical regulations could use international standardization more effectively. The establishment of such a team was endorsed by the Committee for Trade, Industry and Enterprise Development in June and in September 1999 the ad hoc Team of Specialists on Standardization and Regulatory Techniques ("START" Team) held its first meeting. The work of the Team is intended to provide guidance for good regulatory practice and a mechanism for voluntary cooperation between regulatory authorities, standardizers and industry, so that legislation can make the most appropriate use of international standards.

15. Such mechanisms were tentatively called "An International Model for Implementing Good Regulatory Practice for the Preparation, Adoption and Application of Technical Regulations via International Standards". The idea of the "International Model" was presented to a number of international and regional forums including the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and was supported by a number of countries and organizations, which expressed their interest in cooperating with the UN/ECE in preparing these mechanisms.

16. The START Team held six meetings during 1999 - 2000 and the first draft of the "International Model" was presented to the Working Party at its tenth session.

17. The Working Party took note of a document (TRADE/WP.6/2000/8) containing the draft text of the "International Model" and of a document (TRADE/WP.6/2000/9) summarizing comments on the "International Model" made by delegations and organizations, as well as other background documents related to the "International Model".

18. The Working Party agreed:

- To continue working on drawing up principles for international regulatory cooperation and its practical applications in specific sectors;
- To call on interested delegations to nominate experts to the "START" Team to continue this work.

19. New nominations to the Team were made and the first meeting of the expanded "START" Team was held in March 2001.

20. The Committee may wish to recommend to other UN/ECE principal subsidiary bodies (PSBs) to consider the possibility of using principles and mechanisms proposed in the draft "International Model" as a means of harmonizing technical regulations in the PSB's areas of responsibilities.

Harmonization : Role of international standards in international harmonization

21. At the session, the Working Party discussed ways of establishing transparent systems for the national transposition of international standards and of encouraging the use of international standards.

22. During discussions delegations stressed once again the importance of the use of international standards in countries and noted difficulties regarding access to transparent systems regarding transposition. The Working Party decided also on the usefulness of continuing contacts with major international standardizing organizations on matters relating to the use and implementation of international standards.

23. The meeting also recalled the earlier conclusion from the Workshop of May 1999, which suggested that national organizations which are members of international and regional standardizing organizations and which vote for the adoption of concrete standards or recommendations should consider the possibility of taking on obligations for providing information on whether (or to what extent) these adopted standards etc. are transposed and used in their countries. Such obligations would show the level of commitment of national organizations and their members to the transposition and use of international standards as a tool for facilitating international trade.

24. The Committee for Trade, Industry and Enterprise Development at its 1999 June session supported the relevance of the issues and endorsed both the conclusions of the workshop (which were reproduced in annex I of the Committee's report (ECE/TRADE/231)) and the particular recommendation noted above (see document ECE/TRADE/231, para 30).

25. The Committee may wish to consider to recall to the Commission that in June 1999 the CTIED recommended to the Commission that it should request UN/ECE subsidiary bodies to implement the above mentioned recommendation from the May 1999 Workshop.

DRAFT INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENT ON TECHNICAL HARMONIZATION ISSUES

26. It is recalled that the first drafts of the framework agreement and its protocols (documents TRADE/WP.6/1999/16 and TRADE/WP.6/1999/16/Add.1) were submitted to the Working Party at its 1999 session. After discussions the Working Party decided to continue its work on the text of the agreement and of its protocols, as well as to explore potential areas which might be covered by future protocols to the agreement.

27. At a meeting of office-bearers, rapporteurs and coordinators of the Working Party, in Budapest in April 2000, it was suggested to consider linking future discussions on the agreement with the preparation of the "International Model" and with the revision of the ECE Standardization List so that these three documents could complement one another as a legal framework for future agreements. It was noted that the "International Model" might, for instance, become one of the protocols to the future international agreement.

28. At the tenth session a number of delegations supported the proposal to link the draft "International Model" with the agreement, should the work on the "International Model" be successfully completed.

29. Among other possible subjects for inclusion in protocols to the draft international agreement was a proposal for a UN/ECE quality trademark for meat. The idea of this joint project between WP.6 and WP.7 (Working Party on Standardization of Perishable Produce and Quality Development) was discussed and supported by both working parties. As a result of discussions, it was suggested that the rapporteurs for WP.7's Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat prepare a draft protocol for the meat quality trademark, which then will be submitted to Working Party 6 for consideration.

30. Speaking at the tenth session, the Chairman of WP.7 noted the Working Party's interest in cooperation with WP. 6. Being also the Chairman of the Committee for Trade, Industry and Enterprise Development, he informed delegations that the Committee intended to encourage further intersectoral activities in UN/ECE and that the proposed quality-mark for meat could become one such project.

31. After discussion, the Working Party decided to put the project for the draft international agreement and its protocols in abeyance awaiting progress on the projects for an "International Model" and a "quality

Metrology : Standardization of test methods

32. At the tenth session, the Rapporteur on Metrology presented document TRADE/WP.6/2000/16 which suggests modalities for further work on the draft document on guidelines on methodology for measuring procedures (document TRADE/WP.6/1999/15) presented at the ninth session. Rapporteurs received a number of comments on the document from international and regional metrology organizations.

33. The Working Party agreed with the proposal presented by the Rapporteur on Metrology to establish an ad hoc team of specialists on metrology under the auspices of the Working Party to pursue further the work on the proposed guidelines. This team will report to the Working Party at its eleventh session on the progress with preparing these guidelines.

34. The Committee is requested to approve the establishment of such an ad hoc team of specialists on metrology.

ORGANIZATION OF WORKSHOPS

35. The delegation of Slovakia offered to organize, in autumn 2001, in cooperation with the Working Party, a workshop for transition economies on standardization and related activities. This proposal was welcomed by the Working Party and the provisional agenda of this meeting will be discussed at the WP.6 Bureau meeting to be held in March 2001.

36. At the request of the Turkish authorities, the Working Party continues preparation of a workshop on harmonization of technical legislation in Turkey.

37. At, and after, the session a number of delegations expressed their interest in the following areas: market surveillance, conformity assessment and environmental management standards, and asked for the Working Party's assistance in organizing workshops on these topics.

38. The secretariat, in cooperation with the UN/ECE Regional Adviser on Entrepreneurship and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), is currently organizing a meeting for SMEs on best practice in the area of quality assurance to be held in October 2001. This idea was supported by the Working Party at its tenth session.

PROGRAMME OF WORK AND PRIORITIZATION

39. In accordance with decisions taken by both the Commission and the Committee, the Working Party at its tenth session confirmed the prioritization of its activities made at its ninth session (TRADE/WP.6/1999/18, annex 3).

40. In this context, the Working Party recalled the request it made to the Committee at its third session regarding receiving more information on the criteria used by the Committee in setting priorities between different programme areas.

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