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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 ninth session. It also includes matters arising from the third session of the Committee for Trade, Industry and Enterprise Development. At the request of the Committee, the paper also contains proposals on cooperation between the Working Party and the Committee's other subsidiary bodies.

The paper is submitted to the Committee for information. The report of the Working Party's ninth session (TRADE/WP.6/1999/18) 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 tenth session in Geneva from 6 to 8 November 2000.

## **Introduction**

1. As trade becomes increasingly international, the importance of non-tariff barriers is growing in the form of different technical regulations and standards in different markets. Significant discrepancies between national and international standards are also making it difficult for local companies to sell in foreign markets. Business operators consider that national technical regulations and procedures often place them in an unfair position *vis-à-vis* domestic producers and shield local producers from foreign competition.

2. The Working Party on Technical Harmonization and Standardization Policies assists Governments in the move towards the international regulatory cooperation and the use of international standards and in developing simple, transparent frameworks for the adoption and an application of national technical regulations and standards.

### **I. ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS AND TECHNICAL REGULATIONS IN INTERNATIONAL HARMONIZATION**

3. On the occasion of its ninth session, in May 1999, the Working Party held a Workshop on the Implementation and Use of International Standards. The objective was to exchange information and views on implementing and using international standards, with the emphasis on particular sectors. Representatives of international organizations, regional and national standards bodies, national regulatory authorities and private business operators took part in the event.

4. Among the major proposals put forward by Workshop were: (a) that mechanisms for cooperation between international standards bodies the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC), the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU)) and business operators should be further developed; (b) that national standards bodies should make commitments to implement the results of international standardization; (c) that work needs to be undertaken at the global level on increasing harmonization of technical regulations based upon the use of international standards.

5. 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 Committee for Trade, Industry and Enterprise Development at its 1999 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 establishment of a team of specialists to examine these issues.

6. In September 1999, the Team of Specialists on Standardization and Regulatory Techniques (ASTART@Team) was established. 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 could make appropriate use of international standards.

7. Such mechanisms were tentatively included in a draft “Global Model for Implementing Good Regulatory Practice for the Preparation, Adoption and Application of Technical Regulations via International Standards”. In February 2000, an outline of such a model was sent to UN/ECE member Governments for information and comment. It was also presented for information to the World Trade Organization’s Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade at its February 2000 session and to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) special meeting on Technical Barriers to Trade in March 2000. (The text of this outline is reproduced in the addendum to this document).

8. The idea of the AGlobal Model® was supported by a number of countries and organizations, which expressed their interest in cooperating with the UN/ECE in preparing these mechanisms.

9. The Team of Specialists held four meetings between September 1999 and April 2000 and the first working draft of the AGlobal Model® is to be prepared in May 2000. In June, the Team plans to organize an informal expert meeting on the text with interested Governments, international organizations and business associations. It will include all relevant comments in the draft that it presents to the Working Party at its tenth session in November 2000.

## **II. DRAFT INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENT ON TECHNICAL HARMONIZATION ISSUES**

10. After preliminary discussions in recent years on the scope and format of an “international agreement on technical harmonization”, the Working Party decided to favour the option of preparing a framework agreement with horizontal obligations to be complemented by optional protocols on specific subjects. This approach was endorsed by the Committee at its second session in June 1998.

11. The initial draft of the framework agreement and its protocols (documents TRADE/WP.6/1999/16 and TRADE/WP.6/1999/16/Add.1) was submitted to the Working Party at its 1999 session. A number of delegations expressed interest in further clarification of how the agreement could be more closely linked to concrete technical harmonization problems in particular sectors. The Working Party decided, therefore, 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.

12. At a meeting of office-bearers, rapporteurs and coordinators of the Working Party in Budapest in April 2000, it was suggested to consider to link future discussions on the agreement with the preparation of the AGlobal Model® and with the revision of the UN/ECE Standardization List so that these three documents could complement one another as a legal system for future agreements. The “Global Model” might, for instance, become one of the protocols to the future international agreement.

13. A possible subject for a protocol could be a UN/ECE “quality trademark for meat”. The importance of such a mark was stressed by a number of experts in the light of consumer concerns following recent controversy about the quality control of meat in certain countries. The idea of organizing such a joint project between the Working Party the Working Party on Standardization of Perishable Produce and Quality Development (WP.7) was discussed at the WP.7 meeting in May 1999 (document TRADE/WP.7/GE.11/1999/5) and endorsed at the WP.7 session in November 1999 (document TRADE/WP.7/1999/7). As a result of discussions, it was suggested that rapporteurs of the 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.

14. The Working Party is closely cooperating with the World Trade Organization as well as international standardization organisations such as the International Organisation for Standardization (ISO) and the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC), representatives of which participate in the WP.6 sessions.

### **III. CROSS-SECTORAL ISSUES, SUB-REGIONAL COOPERATION AND ORGANIZATION OF WORKSHOPS**

#### **(a) Cross-sectoral issues**

15. In addition to the above-mentioned cooperation between these two working parties, the Working Party is cooperating with the ad hoc Group of Experts on the Chemical Industry on another project, “environmental management standards”. As part of this project a questionnaire on the use of ISO 14000 standards was disseminated among UN/ECE member States and an International Workshop was organized in Budapest from 30 to 31 March 2000 on the Use of ISO 14000 Environmental Management System Standards in the Chemical Industry.

16. The purpose of the Workshop was to promote an exchange of views, experience and information between countries with different levels of development in the use of ISO 14000 standards in the chemical industry. The provisional programme is contained in the document with the double symbol TRADE/WP.6/2000/1-TRADE/CHEM/SEM.3/1.

17. The Workshop was attended by 60 delegates from 18 countries (including 11 from transition economies). Participants represented international and regional organizations (ISO, the European Chemical Industry Council (CEFIC)), the European Commission, national standards and accreditation bodies, private companies (chemical, consultancy) from transition and developed economies, as well as ecologically oriented non-governmental organizations and educational institutions.

18. It was clear from discussions at the Workshop that a good level of awareness of ecological management standards existed in countries in transition and that these countries understood the growing ecological sensitivity in the UN/ECE region, in particular in developed market

economies. Representatives of private companies from countries in transition in particular appreciated the opportunity to learn from the first-hand experiences of leading western chemical companies of issues related to the introduction of environmental management systems.

19. The secretariat will make available the proceedings of the Workshop and will use the acquired information to develop a general methodology and procedures for introducing ISO 14000 standards in cross-sectoral applications both within and outside the chemical industry.

20. During 1999 and 2000 the Working Party also continued to prepare other workshops which are being organized at the request of, and in cooperation with, UN/ECE member States.

(b) **Cooperation with other UN/ECE subsidiary bodies**

21. The joint activities mentioned above and undertaken by WP.6, WP.7 and the Ad Hoc Group of Experts on the Chemical Industry could serve as good examples of cooperation on standardization-related issues for the Committee's subsidiary bodies.

22. The Bureau of the Working Party believes that there is plenty scope for further cooperation on standardization and technical harmonization matters among UN/ECE subsidiary bodies; in the first instance, among those reporting to the Committee.

23. The following are issues which, in the opinion of the Bureau, might be of interest to subsidiary bodies:

- quality and environmental management systems;
- harmonization of regulatory objectives, rules and procedures on the basis of relevant mechanisms drawn up by the UN/ECE;
- promotion of best practices in preparing, adopting and using technical regulations in areas where the UN/ECE has experience;
- preparing a joint platform (on the basis of discussions on the positions of different subsidiary bodies) *vis-à-vis* initiatives prepared by other international organizations on issues of concern to UN/ECE member States (for example, the "Standards for Global Market" initiative from ISO).

24. The Working Party is ready to consider further proposals of joint projects from other UN/ECE subsidiary bodies.

(c) **Sub-Regional Cooperation**

**European Union**

25. Representatives of the European Commission as well as the European standards bodies, the European Committee for Standardization (CEN) and the European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardization (CENELEC), and of the European Organisation for Testing and Certification (EOTC) regularly participate in the meetings organized by the Working Party.

**Commonwealth of Independent States**

26. The Working Party has established good working relations with the secretariat of the Commonwealth of Independent States Interstate Council on Standardization, Certification and Metrology. The CIS Interstate Council is a sub-regional organization which unites the national standards, certification and metrological bodies of the 12 CIS member States. Observers from other countries, such as the Baltic States and some countries of central Europe, also take part in the Council's sessions.

27. Owing to a lack of travel funds, most of the CIS standardization bodies cannot participate directly in the sessions of the Working Party in Geneva. The UN/ECE secretariat has therefore arranged for Working Party documents to be available to the CIS delegations; and major issues discussed by the Working Party are regularly put on the agenda of the CIS Interstate Council and comments by the CIS taken into account at discussions at the Working Party.

28. In addition, the Working Party considers requests from CIS countries for technical assistance including, at the May 1999 session, legal advice in preparing new legal instruments in standardization and related areas. The most recent request from the CIS concerned information on western experience in control over implementing standards and regulations.

29. The secretariat, in cooperation with the UN/ECE Regional Adviser on Entrepreneurship and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) in the UN/ECE secretariat, is currently studying a request for technical assistance for establishing a CIS Quality Centre to be based on the existing Information Centre of the CIS Interstate Council.

**Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development**

30. Representatives of the Working Party participated in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) special meeting on technical barriers to trade in Paris in March 2000 and informed participants about the Working Party's project on the harmonization of technical regulations: (i.e. the **AGlobal Model**®).

(d) **Specialized regional organizations**

31. The Working Party at its May 1999 session considered a proposal for preparing guidelines on measuring procedures. Delegations emphasized the need for standardizing test methods, as different methodologies could influence test results and lead to distortions in the testing. The regional metrology organization COOMET (ACooperation in Metrology") supported this idea.

32. Rapporteurs within WP.6 are currently working with a number of organizations, primarily the OIML (International Organization of Legal Metrology), EUROMET (European Metrology Cooperation) and COOMET, so that the revised version of the guidelines can be elaborated and submitted to the Working Party's next session taking into account relevant comments from countries and organizations.

(e) **Cooperation with the Business Community**

33. The Working Party considers it very important to work in close contact with the business community. Representatives of business associations and of companies from developed economies and countries in transition participate in its meetings. In turn, the Working Party's representatives take part in conferences of industrial associations to inform them about WP.6 activities. Such contacts provide for a better understanding of the current problems experienced by companies in standard and conformity assessment areas and more discussions at WP.6 meetings aimed at practically oriented actions from Governments and international organizations. As examples one could note deliberations at the international workshops on implementation and use of international standards (May 1999) and on environmental management standards in the chemical industry (March 2000).

#### **IV. PROGRAMME OF WORK AND PRIORITIZATION**

34. In accordance with decisions taken by both the Commission and the Committee, the Working Party at its ninth session prioritized its activities (TRADE/WP.6/1999/18, annex 3). It also considered the results of the prioritization of sub-activities under the auspices of the Committee made by the Committee at its second session in June 1998.

35. A number of delegations noted that the report of the Committee's second session (document ECE/TRADE/222) did not contain any reference to the criteria according to which the Committee established priorities among different programme areas, nor to the comparability of their programme elements. The Working Party noted that it would be useful for the subsidiary bodies if the Committee would on a regular basis include explanations of the prioritization exercise in the report of its session.