



ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA (ESCWA)

**Expert Group Meeting on “Trade Policy Trends in ESCWA Member Countries
And
Their Respective Implications on Trade and Economic Performance”
Beirut, 17-18 December 2008**

Information Note

I. Introduction

With the aim to increase awareness on the latest developments concerning assessment of trade policy trends in member countries, ESCWA is organizing an Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on “Trade Policy Trends in ESCWA Member Countries and Their Respective Implications on Trade and Economic Performance”. The Meeting will be held in Beirut, Lebanon, during the period 17-18 December 2008.

Globalization, trade liberalization and regional integration are in the forefront of the issues developing economies have to deal with in tandem with their development objectives and goals. Since the eighties, many developing countries embarked on economic reform and restructuring programmes, led either by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to ease their indebtedness or as a policy choice towards more liberalization and openness. The conclusion of the Uruguay Round, the establishment of the World Trade Organization and the trade related negotiations that followed, have put increased demand on developing countries to further liberalize their economies, enter into new bilateral and regional trading arrangements and increase their commitments to outside parties with the premise that free trade is conducive to growth.

ESCWA member countries, like other developing countries, have been actively involved in liberalizing their economies since the nineteen eighties. Many of them adopted restructuring and stabilization programs, others opted to liberalize their trade regimes in a step to integrate in the world economy. Most of ESCWA member countries are members of the World Trade Organization and the rest are either in the processes of accession, have gained an observer status or are about to apply for accession. Moreover, most of these countries are being actively involved in the setting up of several regional and bilateral trading arrangements. Often, the objectives of these arrangements are not solely trade related, but extend to political, economic, social, and cultural among others, necessitating the adoption of policy measures, which implicate the development process accordingly.

During the two-day discussions and deliberations, the EGM will aim to provide a summary of the underlying trends, goals and objectives of the trade policies adopted by the member countries and their implications on trade and economic performance. As such, it becomes pertinent to monitor main trade policy trends in ESCWA member countries and their respective implications.

The EGM aims to address the following issues:

- (1) Trade policy priorities in ESCWA member countries and future prospects;
- (2) Issues of development concern for the ESCWA member countries implicated by trade policy:
 - Export promotion and import liberalization and their impact on industrialization and production;
 - Subsidies; Market access for agricultural and non-agricultural goods; Competitiveness; Labor and Job creation;
 - Trade in services.
- (3) Opportunities and challenges of the multilateral trading system vis-a-vis bilateral trade agreements.

Member country working papers

Position papers from Ministries responsible for trade policy on the country level are welcome. These are expected to raise the member countries' positions vis-à-vis the major issues raised above, and provide a future perspective of the objectives sought by trade policy makers in their respective countries and their implications on trade and economic performance. Sufficient time will be allocated to the participants who wish to present their papers and for the discussions that will follow provided they communicate their wish to contribute in sufficient time prior to the convention of the EGM. In this context, It is imperative to notify ESCWA on the intention to submit a presentation on trade policy trends in the respective member countries and their impact on trade and economic performance during the EGM in the earliest possible and no later than 20 October 2008 and send the working paper before 30 November 2008 to make the necessary arrangements. Appreciate filling the attached nomination form. ESCWA will sponsor the travel and accommodation of one representative from each member country to participate in the EGM provided he/she will prepare and present the country's working paper. Each country's working paper is aspired to incorporate the topics raised in the following outline:

- I. Objectives of used trade policy as related to:
 - Economic and sectoral developments
 - Increase in market access and export promotion
 - Promotion of national and foreign investments.
- II. Elements of trade policy and instruments, such as:(if applicable)
 - Trade liberalization
 - Gradual reduction of custom duties
 - Conversion of non trade barriers to customs duties
 - provision of financial and administrative incentives for export promotion
 - Export financing and insurance programs
 - Elimination of duties on imports for the production of exports
 - Entry into bilateral, regional and multilateral trade agreements
 - Others

III Trade regime

Decision-making process and methodology of formulation of the trade policy and the parties involved. (Whether it is taken by a decision of the minister alone or as a result of a consultative processes, where it is on the national, regional or international level, formation of committees or clusters with other ministries or with the private sector or other non governmental organizations, etc.)

IV Major trade policy trends during the period 1980-2008

- Identifying major changes in trade policy trends that took place during the period highlighting landmarks, eg: a shift from import substitution policy towards export promotion, free and industrial zones, and/or establishing export manufacturing industries, entering in regional trade agreements, etc.

V. Implications of implemented trade policy on:

- Production sectors and their exports.
- Services sectors and their exports.
- Indigenization of advanced technology.
- Creating and attracting investments.
- Increasing employment and job opportunities.
- Increase in market accession.
- Implications resulting from trade agreements on market access, national market and economic sectors.

VI. Lessons learnt and recommendations

II. Basic Information

Date and venue

17-18 December 2008
UNESCWA- UN House,
Riad El-Solh Square,
Beirut – Lebanon

Invited Parties

1. Representatives of concerned ministries in ESCWA member countries.
2. International organizations: World Trade Organization (WTO); The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD); International Trade Center (ITC); International Labour Organization (ILO), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), UN Regional Commissions and the World Bank
3. Regional organizations: League of Arab States; Arab Monetary Fund; Arab Industrial Development and Mining Organization; Arab Labour organization, Arab Organization for Agricultural Development; Arab Fund for Social and Economic Development, Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development, Abu Dhabi Development Fund, the General Union of Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture for Arab countries (GUCCIAAC) among others.

Languages

Arabic and English.

Travel

ESCWA will cover the cost of travel (ticket and daily subsistence allowance) of a number of experts from member countries, other than Lebanon, provided they have been nominated from ESCWA's member country focal points to conduct their respective country's working papers. Purchase of their round-trip ticket from their country to Lebanon will be made by ESCWA. Tickets will be sent to participants via prepaid ticket advice (PTA). They are to coordinate their travel requests with ESCWA before November, 10, 2008. Sponsored participants are not to purchase their own tickets unless they are advised to do so.

Sponsored Participants by ESCWA to the EGM will receive the standard UN daily subsistence allowance and terminal expenses. All participants are requested to settle their own hotel bills and transportation costs.

Entry visas and accommodation

Entry visas can be obtained from the embassies of the Republic of Lebanon in the respective member countries, when applicable. Travel and hotel accommodation are to be borne by the participants themselves unless otherwise specified. For hotel reservation and other logistics please consult the EGM's website on the following link:
<http://www.escwa.un.org/information/meetingdetails.asp?referenceNum=835E>

Correspondence:

UN-ESCWA
Mr. Nabil Safwat
Officer-In-Charge
Economic Development and Globalization
Division (EDGD)
Tel: + 961-1-978342
Fax: +961-1-981510
E-mail: safwatn@un.org

C/O Ms. Naela Haddad,
FEAO, Trade Team, EDGD
Tel: + 961-1-978354
Fax: +961-1-981510
E-mail: haddad8@un.org

