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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

REPORT

OF THE SEVENTH SESSION OF THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE ON LIBERALIZATION OF FOREIGN TRADE, ECONOMIC GLOBALIZATION AND FINANCING FOR DEVELOPMENT IN THE COUNTRIES OF THE ESCWA REGION BEIRUT, 4-5 October 2011

Summary

The Technical Committee on Liberalization of Foreign Trade, Economic Globalization and Financing for Development in the Countries of the ESCWA Region held its seventh session in Beirut on 4 and 5 October 2011. The Committee considered the following items: (a) progress of the negotiations of the Doha Development Round in the area of services over the last ten years: a regional perspective; (b) review of action taken in the fields of liberalization of foreign trade, economic globalization and financing for development since the sixth session of the Committee; (c) financing for development: progress achieved in implementing the Monterrey Consensus and mitigating the impact of the global financial and economic crisis on development in ESCWA member countries; (d) proposed programme of work for the biennium 2012-2013 in the fields of liberalization of foreign trade, economic globalization and financing for development; (e) date and venue of the eighth session of the Committee; (g) other matters; and (h) adoption of the report of the Committee on its seventh session.

The present report contains the recommendations made by the Committee, in addition to a review of the main points of discussion on each agenda item.

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Introduction

1. The Technical Committee on the Liberalization of Foreign Trade, Economic Globalization and Financing for Development in the Countries of the ESCWA Region held its seventh session in Beirut on 4-5 October 2011, in implementation of ESCWA resolution 214 (XIX) of 7 May 1997. The meeting was convened in accordance with the recommendations made by the Committee at its sixth session (Beirut, 6-7 July 2009), which were adopted by ESCWA at its twenty-sixth session (Beirut, 17-20 May 2010).
2. The present report, which reviews the main points raised in the discussions under each agenda item, was adopted by the Committee during its closing session on 5 October 2011.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE ON LIBERALIZATION OF FOREIGN TRADE, ECONOMIC GLOBALIZATION AND FINANCING FOR DEVELOPMENT IN THE COUNTRIES OF THE ESCWA REGION AT ITS SEVENTH SESSION

A. RECOMMENDATIONS TO GOVERNMENTS

3. The Committee recommended that the Governments of ESCWA member countries:
 - (a) Establish regulatory structures which would involve all parties responsible for trade in services, with a view to consolidating, to the greatest possible extent, the decision-making process;
 - (b) Develop national strategies on trade in services, on the basis of long and short-term action plans aiming to enhance the provision and export of services, and set up a mechanism for assessing and monitoring those strategies;
 - (c) Coordinate between business communities and industrial and commercial unions in Arab countries on issues of common interest, particularly those related to the role of international service trade in achieving integration of industrial and productive sectors;
 - (d) Harmonize the positions of the Arab countries regarding domestic laws and the provisions of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), especially those on emergency safeguard measures, government procurements and subsidies;
 - (e) Intensify efforts towards concluding the negotiations between Arab countries of their commitments related to the implementation of the Agreement on Facilitation and Development of Trade among Arab States,¹ including the Beirut negotiation round started in 2002;
 - (f) Enhance the role of the GATS enquiry points² on trade in services in the countries of the region, and facilitate the exchange of experiences among them, with a view to achieving the objectives of GATS, concluded within the framework of the World Trade Organization (WTO), and those of the Agreement on Facilitation and Development of Trade among Arab States, concluded within the framework of the League of Arab States;

¹ Both the Arab Summit held in Beirut in March in 2002 and the Economic and Social Council meeting held in September 2002 addressed arrangements to establish the Greater Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA), which aimed to enhance the implementation of the Agreement on Facilitation and Development of Trade among Arab States. States Parties to this Agreement have concurred over its provisions. Those related to trade in services shall enter into force only once the commitments of each State Party have been identified and agreed upon. It is based on these commitments that the access of a State Party to the markets of another Party is determined. In order to enter into force, the Agreement must be ratified by no fewer than three Arab States.

² General Agreement on Trade in Services, Article III, paragraph 4.

(g) Revise laws and procedures related to investment, in line with the goals and needs of small and medium-sized enterprises, which constitute the majority of the enterprises in the region;

(h) Participate in the preparatory meetings organized by ESCWA prior to the International Conference on Financing for Development, to be held in 2013.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS TO ESCWA

4. The Committee recommended that ESCWA secretariat:

(a) Consider the economic implications of the recent developments in the Arab region among the issues of the liberalization of foreign trade, economic globalization and financing for development, dealt with by subprogramme 3 on economic development and integration of the proposed programme of work for the biennium 2012-2013;

(b) Pursue the implementation of capacity-building programmes at the national and regional levels, particularly in the area of legislation related to the services sector;

(c) Coordinate with the WTO and the League of Arab States, with a view to developing a regional project that aims to provide technical support for Arab countries in trade in services, and secure the necessary funds for the implementation of the related activities;

(d) Organize a meeting of experts to discuss, in the light of GATS, modalities for developing a framework for an agreement on the facilitation of trade between Arab countries;

(e) Prepare guidelines on raising awareness and harmonizing the legislation on trade in services;

(f) Conduct an assessment of trade in services in Arab countries, in the light of regional and international agreements, with a view to measuring its role, and exploring ways to enhance its contribution to investment and production;

(g) Devise specific models to create indicators to measure the performance of logistical services and the progress towards regional integration;

(h) Develop a mathematical model serving as basis for policymaking both on the macro and sectoral levels in Arab countries, with a view to regional integration;

(i) Provide member countries with thematic and technical studies, aiming to support national decision-making process.

II. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION AND DISCUSSION

A. PROGRESS OF THE NEGOTIATIONS OF THE DOHA DEVELOPMENT ROUND IN THE AREA OF SERVICES OVER THE LAST TEN YEARS: A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE (Item 4 of the agenda)

5. The Committee considered this item on the basis of document E/ESCWA/EDGD/2011/IG.2/3. It reviewed, from a regional perspective, developments of the past ten years in the negotiations on trade in services held under the Doha Development Agenda. Such review, which was based on the reports issued by WTO in April 2011, focused primarily on negotiations on trade in services. This report focused on the services sector, given its major contribution to the growth of other sectors as well as to employment generation, poverty reduction and to progress in sustainable development in ESCWA member countries. It addressed the four major areas of negotiations on services during the period under consideration, namely,

market access; local regulation; GATS rules; and implementation of measures related to the treatment of the least developed countries.

6. The Committee took note of the progress made in negotiations on trade in services since the WTO Fourth Ministerial Conference held in Doha in 2001. It also took note of the following: the contributions of Arab countries to the various stages of the negotiations on the services sector over the past ten years; the challenges to the effective participation of Arab countries in these negotiations; the positions of the Arab countries towards their interests; and also their aspirations for economic development and trade liberalization. Arab countries were called upon to develop their services sectors, to revise and update their legislative and regulatory frameworks as to serve national and regional interests, to promote regional cooperation, to liberalize trade in services and market access, and to strengthen the role of the private sector as a key partner in the services sector.

7. Discussions under this item touched upon the key aspects of trade in services in the Arab region, including GATS, within the framework of WTO; the Istanbul Protocol concluded by Mediterranean countries; the Agreement on Facilitation and Development of Trade among Arab States; and the free-trade agreements among a number of Arab countries with the European Union and the United States. Discussions also addressed progress made in the implementation of the Agreement on Facilitation and Development of Trade among Arab States and necessary measures to resume and conclude the Beirut round of negotiations, which began in 2004. Furthermore, discussions were held on the difficulties faced by Arab countries in the field of liberalization of trade in services, which are due to the multiplicity of agencies concerned with trade in services; limited access to information on various services sectors, including on schedules of commitments and the terms of access to markets; poor knowledge of the domestic rules and regulations governing these sectors; lack of accurate and timely statistics; lack of effective policies and strategies; and the weak role of the business communities. These are obstacles to the development of trade in services at the national and regional levels and also to the effective contribution of trade to sustainable development in the Arab region.

8. The Committee invited ESCWA secretariat to continue to play a role in building national capacities, issuing studies and holding meetings to raise awareness on rules and regulations governing trade in services. This would strengthen the participation of Arab countries in negotiations on trade in services, support the liberalization of the services sector, and also enable Arab countries to access regional and international markets.

B. REVIEW OF ACTION TAKEN IN THE FIELDS OF LIBERALIZATION OF FOREIGN TRADE,
ECONOMIC GLOBALIZATION AND FINANCING FOR DEVELOPMENT
SINCE THE SIXTH SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE
(Item 5 of the agenda)

9. Under this item, the Committee considered a document in three sections.

1. *Implementation of the recommendations made by the Committee at its sixth session*

10. The Committee had before it document E/ESCWA/EDGD/2011/IG.2/4(Part I). It reviewed the activities undertaken by ESCWA in implementation of the recommendations made by the Committee at its sixth session, on tackling the global financial crisis in the ESCWA region. Some of the recommendations were addressed to member countries; and others to ESCWA secretariat. The Committee took note of the action taken to implement the recommendations, examined ways to provide member countries with continued technical assistance in areas related to trade and financing for development.

2. Activities related to liberalization of foreign trade under ESCWA programme of work

11. The Committee considered the documents E/ESCWA/EDGD/2011/IG.2/4(Part II) and E/ESCWA/EDGD/2011/IG.2/4(Part III). It took note of the various activities implemented from July 2009 to October 2011, in several areas, including studies; expert group meetings and workshops; capacity-building programmes in negotiations of trade and investment bilateral, subregional and multilateral agreements, with a view to increasing trade and investment flows, supporting business start-up, financing small and medium-sized enterprises and providing technical assistance to member countries.

12. The Committee took note of these activities. It discussed the importance of revising laws and regulations on investment in the countries of the region with the aim of supporting the financing of small and medium-sized enterprises, given their effective contribution to the development of national economies, to employment and to poverty reduction.

13. The Committee also took note of the procedures to be followed in requesting the advice and technical assistance provided by ESCWA in the areas of trade liberalization and financing for development. In this regard, ESCWA secretariat reaffirmed that it would be always responsive and meet the requests of member countries, within the available resources.

14. The representatives of Kuwait, Palestine and Qatar briefed the Committee on achievements made by their Governments over the last years in trade liberalization and negotiations on trade and investment.

C. FINANCING FOR DEVELOPMENT: PROGRESS ACHIEVED IN IMPLEMENTING THE MONTERREY CONSENSUS AND MITIGATING THE IMPACT OF THE GLOBAL FINANCIAL AND ECONOMIC CRISIS ON DEVELOPMENT IN ESCWA MEMBER COUNTRIES (Item 6 of the agenda)

15. Under this item, the Committee considered document E/ESCWA/EDGD/2011/IG.2/5, on progress made by countries in the implementation of the Monterrey Consensus of the International Conference on Financing for Development, held in Mexico from 18 to 22 March 2002.

16. Discussions highlighted the progress made by a number of countries in the region in implementing the recommendations of the Monterrey Consensus, by taking various actions, including enhancing the role of the banking sector in financing for development, promoting foreign investment flows and increasing tax revenues.

17. The Committee also took note of the impact of the financial crisis that hit the global economy in 2008 on Arab countries, mainly on oil revenues, foreign direct investment flows, remittances and growth rates. It examined efforts made by the countries of the region to cope with the implications of the crisis and mitigate its adverse effects, including the development of plans to expand investment and of measures to ensure the resilience of the banking system.

D. PROPOSED PROGRAMME OF WORK FOR THE BIENNIUM 2012-2013 IN THE FIELDS OF LIBERALIZATION OF FOREIGN TRADE, ECONOMIC GLOBALIZATION AND FINANCING FOR DEVELOPMENT (Item 7 of the agenda)

18. The Committee discussed the proposed programme of work for the biennium 2012-2013 in the fields of liberalization of foreign trade, economic globalization and financing for development. This theme makes part of the subprogramme 3 on development and economic integration, within the strategic framework for the biennium 2012-2013, adopted by ESCWA at its twenty-sixth session (Beirut, 17-20 May 2010).

19. The secretariat included the remarks made by the representatives of member countries in the formulation of the final recommendations (Part I of this report).

E. DATE AND VENUE OF THE EIGHTH SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE
(Item 8 of the agenda)

20. It was agreed to hold the eighth session of the Committee in Beirut in May 2013, unless other member country requested to host it.

F. OTHER MATTERS
(Item 9 of the agenda)

21. No discussion points were addressed under this item.

**III. ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE
ON ITS SEVENTH SESSION**
(Item 10 of the agenda)

22. At its concluding session, the Committee adopted the report on its seventh session, provided that the amendments be made to the original version as agreed.

IV. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. DATE AND VENUE

23. The Committee held its seventh session in Beirut, on 4 and 5 October 2011.

B. OPENING

24. The opening speech was delivered by the representative of Saudi Arabia, Mr. Ahmed Mohammed Al-Shodari, representing the chair of the sixth session of the Committee. Mr. Al-Shodari welcomed the participants, underlining the importance of the trade sector and financing for development in Arab countries and pointing to challenges faced by all countries of the region with regard to intraregional trade. These challenges required Arab countries to review their trade policies and strategies and to undertake a thorough assessment of other sectors, especially the services sector, in order to identify obstacles to the promotion of intraregional trade. He concluded by calling upon ESCWA to assist member countries in liberalizing trade and accessing regional and international markets, in order to achieve sustainable development. He wished success to the session.

25. Mr. Abdullah Dardari, Director, Economic Development and Globalization Division (EDGD), delivered a speech on behalf of Ms. Rima Khalaf, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCWA. He welcomed the participants, extending his thanks and words of appreciation to the Minister of Economy and Trade of the Lebanese Republic, Mr. Nicola Nahhas, for sponsoring this session. He emphasized the importance of international trade and its positive correlation with the pace of economic growth and sustainable development. He pointed out that the Arab region is on the brink of a decline in economic growth due to lack of security and political stability. He added that ESCWA had started to develop a model to study the current macroeconomic situation in the Arab region, with a view to providing a fact-based analytical tool, supporting economic and social policies for the coming stage, and ensuring a direct link between economic growth, poverty reduction, equitable distribution and adequate employment under democratic governance and transparent institutions. Mr. Dardari stressed the importance of two issues on the agenda of the session, namely services and financing for development, and emphasized the role of ESCWA in these areas. He concluded by inviting Arab countries to play a pivotal role during the transition that the region is undergoing, to participate in international efforts aimed at putting economic

globalization and trade liberalization policies on the right track and to attract intraregional and foreign investment, with a view to establishing an alternative vision linking economic growth to human development and contributing to a restructuring of the world order towards more balance and justice.

26. The acting Director General of the Ministry of Economy and Trade, Mr. Fouad Fleifel, representing the Minister of Economy and Trade in the Lebanese Republic, welcomed the participants and thanked ESCWA for its ongoing efforts to support this Committee, as it strives to strengthen cooperation between member countries and advance regional integration. These efforts are meant to serve the common interests of the member countries and enable them to deal with major economic blocs on the international scene. Mr. Fleifel reviewed the main items on the agenda. He emphasized the importance attached to the liberalization of trade in services. To this end, adopted economic policies aimed at liberalizing the trade system and advancing integration of the country into the global economy, building on its comparative advantages in services. As the process of the liberalization of services under the Doha Round had not achieved the desired outcomes, Mr. Fleifel underlined the need to progress in the ongoing negotiations between Arab countries in order to liberalize inter-Arab trade in services, in the framework of the Beirut round of negotiations. This would move the negotiations at the level of the WTO forward. He mentioned that Lebanon had been closely following up these negotiations since they started. In this context, broad sectoral restructuring processes had been taking place; the first meeting had been held at the headquarters of the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States in Cairo on 4 and 5 July 2011, and another two meetings were to be held before the end of the year. Mr. Fleifel expressed hope that one of the outcomes of the Beirut round would be the establishment of a pan-Arab free-trade zone for trade in services by the end of next year.

C. PARTICIPANTS

27. The session was attended by representatives from eleven countries of the ESCWA member countries, namely Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan and Yemen.

28. The session was also attended by representatives of a number of international, regional and Arab organizations, namely the WTO, the League of Arab States, the Arab Planning Institute, the Islamic Development Bank, the Saudi Fund for Development, the Saudi Export Program, the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development, and the General Union of Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture for Arab countries. The list of participants is contained in annex I to this report.

D. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

29. Pursuant to rule 18 of the rules of procedure of ESCWA, “member countries shall assume the chairmanship of the sessions of the subsidiary bodies of the Commission on a rotating basis, in the Arabic alphabetical order employed by the United Nations.” Mr. Fadel Moukbel Mansour, the representative of Yemen, assumed chairmanship of the seventh session, after the representative of Saudi Arabia, which assumed the chairmanship of the sixth session (6 July 2009 to 4 October 2011). As per the procedures followed at previous sessions, the Committee elected the representative of Saudi Arabia and Mr. Mouhammed Khasawneh, the representative of Jordan, as Vice-Chairmen. Mr. Omar Mustafa Hassan Ahmed, the representative of the Sudan, was elected Rapporteur.

E. AGENDA AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK

30. At its opening session, the Committee adopted the following agenda, as presented to it and as included in document E/ESCWA/EDGD/2011/IG.2/L.1:

1. Opening of the session.
2. Election of officers.
3. Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters.
4. Progress of the negotiations of the Doha Development Round in the area of services over the last ten years: a regional perspective.
5. Review of action taken in the fields of liberalization of foreign trade, economic globalization and financing for development since the sixth session of the Committee:
 - (a) Implementation of the recommendations made by the Committee at its sixth session;
 - (b) Activities related to liberalization of foreign trade under ESCWA programme of work;
 - (c) Activities related to economic globalization and financing for development under ESCWA programme of work.
6. Financing for development: Progress achieved in implementing the Monterrey Consensus and mitigating the impact of the global financial and economic crisis on development in ESCWA member countries.
7. Proposed programme of work for the biennium 2012-2013 in the fields of liberalization of foreign trade, economic globalization and financing for development.
8. Date and venue of the eighth session of the Committee.
9. Other matters.
10. Adoption of the report of the Committee on its seventh session.

31. During the same session, the Committee adopted the draft organization of work presented to it in document E/ESCWA/EDGD/2011/IG.1/L.2.

F. DOCUMENTS

32. The documents considered by the Committee in its seventh session are listed in annex II of the present report.

Annex I

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

A. ESCWA MEMBER COUNTRIES

Egypt

Ms. Nur Abdel Maksoud
Department of International Economic Relations
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Mr. Ashraf Mohammed Mokhtar al-Bayoumi
General Manager
General Administration of WTO Rules
Trade Agreements Sector
Ministry of Trade and Industry

Mr. Tamer Mahmoud Abdel Aziz
Director of the Department of Regional
Agreements
Central Department for Bilateral and Multilateral
Agreements
Ministry of Industry and Foreign Trade

Mr. Magdi Abdel Aziz Seif al-Nasr
Director General of the Technical Bureau of the
Head of the Customs Department
Ministry of Finance

Mr. Saad Al-Sheikh
Head of the Office of the Deputy Minister
of Trade
Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt
Beirut, Lebanon

Iraq

Mr. Saad Sharif Yahya
Director General of the Department of Economic
Policy and Finance
Ministry of Planning

Jordan

Mr. Mohammed Khasawneh
Head of Financial Surpluses and Follow-up
Ministry of Finance

Kuwait

Mr. Khalid Al-Jiaan
Specialist in Administrative Coordination
Division of Economic Negotiations
Ministry of Finance

Mr. Fahad Bashir Al-Otaibi
Officer
Department of Trade in Services
Ministry of Trade and Industry

Lebanon

Mr. Fouad Fleifel
Representative of the Minister of Economy and
Trade

Mr. Malik Awada Asi
Head of the Foreign Trade Department
Ministry of Economy and Trade

Ms. Lama Oueijan
Head of WTO Unit
Ministry of Economy and Trade

Ms. Rima Younes El-Khatib
Trade in Services Coordinator
Ministry of Economy and Trade

Ms. Silvana Dandash
Control Assistant, Department of Commerce
Ministry of Economy and Trade

Ms. Soumayya Shhab
Control Assistant, Department of Commerce
Ministry of Economy and Trade

Oman

Mr. Saeed bin Amer Al Riyami
Economist
Directorate General of Organizations and
Commercial Relations
Ministry of Commerce and Industry

Oman (continued)

Mr. Salem bin Mohammed Al Hajri
Economic Researcher
Directorate General of Economic Affairs
Ministry of National Economy

Palestine

Mr. Raafat Ryan
Director of the UN and International
Organizations Department
Palestinian National Authority (PNA)
Ministry of National Economy

Qatar

Ms. Moza al-Naimi
First Researcher
International Cooperation and Trade Agreements
Department
Ministry of Business and Trade

Saudi Arabia

Mr. Ahmed Mohammed Al-Shodari
Economic specialist
Ministry of Finance

The Sudan

Mr. Omar Mustafa Hassan Ahmed
Deputy Director
General Directorate of International Relations
Ministry of Foreign Trade

Salah al-Din Sheikh Khodor Bakheet
Banking Affairs Manager
Central Bank of Sudan

Yemen

Mr. Fadel Moukbel Mansour
Director General of Trade and International
Relations
Ministry of Industry and Trade

B. INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AS OBSERVERS

League of Arab States

Mr. Mohammed Al-Nousour
Chief of the Department of Greater Arab Free
Trade Area

Mr. Bahjat Mohammed Abu Al-Nasr
Head of Economic Research and Studies Section

General Union of Chambers of Commerce,
Industry and Agriculture for Arab Countries

Mr. Adam Al-Mulla
Economic Researcher
Beirut, Lebanon

Islamic Development Bank

Mr. Mustafa Ait Omar
First Expert on World Trade Affairs
Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

Arab Planning Institute

Mr. Ahmed Kawaz
Economic Adviser
Safat, Kuwait

Saudi Fund for Development

Mr. Abdullah bin Mohammed Alshaya
Adviser for Economic Research and Studies
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Saudi Export Program

Mr. Mohannad Bin Ali Al-Zughaibi
Legal advisor
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Arab Organization for Agricultural Development

Mr. Samir Al-Shami
Director General of the Ministry of Agriculture,
a.i.
Representative of the Arab Organization for
Agricultural Development
Beirut, Lebanon

World Trade Organization (WTO)

Mr. Abdel Hamid Mamdouh
Director of the Trade in Services Division
WTO
Geneva, Switzerland

C. EXPERTS

Mr. Mohsen Helal
Consultant on International Trade and WTO Issues
Cairo, Egypt

Annex II

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

Title	Item	Symbol
Information note		E/ESCWA/EDGD/2011/IG.2/INF.1
Provisional agenda and annotations	3	E/ESCWA/EDGD/2011/IG.2/L.1
Organization of work	3	E/ESCWA/EDGD/2011/IG.2/L.2
Progress of the negotiations of the Doha Development Round in the area of services over the last ten years: a regional perspective	4	E/ESCWA/EDGD/2011/IG.2/3
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Implementation of the recommendations made by the Committee at its sixth session	5 (a)	E/ESCWA/EDGD/2011/IG.2/4(Part I)
Activities related to liberalization of foreign trade under ESCWA programme of work	5 (b)	E/ESCWA/EDGD/2011/IG.2/4(Part II)
Activities related to economic globalization and financing for development under ESCWA programme of work	5 (c)	E/ESCWA/EDGD/2011/IG.2/4(Part III)
Financing for development: Progress achieved in implementing the Monterrey Consensus and mitigating the impact of the global financial and economic crisis on development in ESCWA member countries	6	E/ESCWA/EDGD/2011/IG.2/5
Proposed programme of work for the biennium 2012-2013 in the fields of liberalization of foreign trade, economic globalization and financing for development	7	E/ESCWA/EDGD/2011/IG.2/6