

CARS 21: a competitive automotive regulatory framework

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The Commission presents a Commission Staff Working Document on progress during 2009 at the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).

In accordance with the CARS 21 Communication of 7 February 2007, this Commission staff working document sets out the major automotive-related developments that have occurred during 2009 at the UNECE with a view to informing the European Parliament, the Council and the public about progress achieved at UNECE and of the respect observed by the Commission with the political orientations set out in the relevant European Union legislation.

The 2009 Commission staff working document is the third annual report on these activities.

To recall, UNECE was established by the United Nations Economic and Social Council in 1947 in order to promote regional economic integration through dialogue and cooperation on economic and sectoral issues. It provides analysis and policy advice to governments in consultation with key stakeholders and provides a framework for norms, standards and conventions to facilitate international cooperation for various sectors. UNECE brings together 56 countries located in the European Union, non-EU Western and Eastern Europe, South-East Europe and Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and North America.

The report states that during 2009 significant progress on the harmonization of vehicle standards continues to be achieved through the EU's participation at UNECE. A considerable proportion of this work is now linked to the important role that UNECE Regulations will play in the area of motor vehicle safety through the EU General Safety Regulation. In addition, the UNECE can also provide the framework for important complementary measures, such as the defining of test methodologies for vehicle emissions or, where appropriate, as a first step in taking additional new measures for type-approval in the EU (e.g., electric vehicles).

The resultant close links between EU legislation and UNECE Regulations will mean that European vehicles will be increasingly manufactured in accordance with UNECE technical standards. At the same time, the development of common UNECE standards or test procedures will reduce the development and deployment costs for manufacturers and regulators / test laboratories. As highlighted by the CARS 21 mid-term report, this regulatory simplification and international harmonisation is welcomed by stakeholders and will ensure that the European automotive industry remains competitive around the world.

Lastly, appropriate efforts are being made to encourage the interest shown in the 1958 and 1998 Agreements by the emerging economies, particularly those with a significant automotive manufacturing capability (e.g., India and China). This should help further to bring about acceptance by the major economies of the world that the UNECE standards are truly global standards for the automotive industry.