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**Meeting of Senior Officials from Centres of Government on Public Sector Modernisation:
the Role of the Central Agencies**

Synthesis note

Madrid, 6-7 November 2003

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**ANNUAL MEETING OF SENIOR OFFICIALS FROM CENTRES OF GOVERNMENT ON
'MODERNISATION OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR: THE ROLE OF THE CENTRAL AGENCIES'
MADRID, 6-7 NOVEMBER 2003**

SYNTHESIS NOTE

Participants

1. The 2003 Meeting of Senior Officials from Centres of Government was held on 6 and 7 November 2003 in Madrid, under the chairmanship of Mr. Julio Gómez-Pomar, Secretary of State for the Civil Service of Spain. Twenty five OECD countries¹ were represented plus the European Commission, while observers from Brazil, Chile and Slovenia participated for the first time. The meeting was opened by Mr. Julio Gómez-Pomar and Mr. Richard Hecklinger on behalf of the OECD. Mrs. Julia García-Valdecasas Salgado, Minister of the Civil Service hosted a formal dinner while Mr. Javier Arenas Bocanegra, Vice-President of the Spanish Government and Minister of the Presidency received members of the Centre of Government network at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers.

Modernisation of the public sector: the role of the central agencies

2. Participants agreed that the main challenge for Centres of Government in modernising the public sector was how to steer effectively when other agencies are doing the rowing. The politicisation of the civil service was a topic of concern for several countries. Modernisation requires Centres of Government to adapt their procedures and communication in order to build a shared culture of 'authoritative collegiality' within a devolved management environment.

3. Discussions highlighted the importance of workable performance management systems, given the need for political and administrative accountability to ensure public trust. Relying primarily on quantifiable performance measures runs the risk of distortions and raises the question of whether we are measuring what is important or simply what we can measure? A balance with qualitative measures must be found. Participants agreed that international benchmarking may help in setting goals and measuring performance and identified a role for the OECD in this area.

4. The Centre of Government and the central budget agency were seen to have complementary roles in managing public expenditures, with the former providing strategic input and the latter acting as problem-solver for line ministries and agencies. Among the main challenges identified were how to improve coordination among key actors involved in the budget process and how to ensure professional capacities to deliver on policy objectives in key departments. Effective political leadership from the

¹ Australia, Austria, Canada, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxemburg, Mexico, Norway, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States of America.

government was needed in setting and achieving budgetary targets. Participants emphasised that it is the government, not the central budget agency, which is responsible for decision-making in this field.

5. Participants recognised that the processes of devolution and decentralisation underway in many countries have given considerable impetus to public sector modernisation. However, these processes have also raised challenges of coordination and accountability across levels of government and must be balanced with the strategic needs of the centre. Decentralisation has both limits and negative consequences, such as the loss of economies of scale (e.g. in service delivery and procurement). The centre of government continues to play a key role in terms of the evaluation and monitoring of local authorities' performance, dissemination of good practice and in promoting and maintaining the impetus for reform.

Future meetings

6. Members of the network of Senior Officials from Centres of Government expressed their interest in making greater use of this unique forum. They suggested holding an interim meeting in Paris in spring 2004, organised by the Secretariat and led by the troika of host countries past, present and future (currently, Spain, Turkey and Portugal). On this occasion, they would welcome a meeting with the Secretary General.

7. The next meeting will be hosted by Turkey and held in Istanbul in autumn 2004. It will focus on governance issues related to the use of new tools for decision-making at the Centre of Government and their impact on information, communication and organisation. Portugal offered to host the meeting in Lisbon in 2005.