

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
Ninety-ninth Meeting
Geneva, 4 July 2018

EXCOM/CONCLU/99

CHAIR'S CONCLUSIONS

Meeting of the Executive Committee
4 July 2018

FORMAL SEGMENT

Item 1 – Adoption of the agenda.

1. The revised provisional draft agenda for the 99th meeting was adopted.

Item 2 – Chair’s conclusions from the last meeting.

2. The conclusions from the 98th meeting of EXCOM (EXCOM/CONCLU/98) were adopted.

Item 3 - Matters relating to the Committee on Environmental Policy.

(a) Meeting with the Chair of the Committee on Environmental Policy.

3. The Vice-Chair of the Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP), Ms. Gordana Petkovic, made a presentation to EXCOM on the achievements of CEP over the past year and its plans for the future.

4. The representative of the Russian Federation welcomed the CEP’s efforts to expand regionally accumulated experience in implementing national policies such as economic incentives for environmental protection. He said the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators should complement the efforts of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment, whose importance had been reaffirmed at the 8th Environment for Europe Conference in Batumi in 2016. He welcomed the committee’s efforts to support the implementation of the multilateral environmental agreements and thought it important to avoid politicizing this work. He stated that too strong an emphasis on peace and security issues under the Water Convention could be counterproductive and said this would not facilitate sustainable development in the region. He inquired when the next CEP session would take place and when the results of the 2017 work of the CEP would be published. He said the Russian Federation supported new approaches to resolving pressing environmental issues, including new nature-like technology that would coexist with nature in harmony. The international community has discussed developing a new industrial structure based on nature-like and conversion technology for sustainable development for several years, but breakthroughs in material science and genomics and broad interdisciplinary research are needed. He concluded by inviting delegations to a global forum on the topic to be held in Sochi on 28-29 September 2018 hosted by the Russian Federation under the auspices of UNIDO. He expressed support for the decisions tabled under item 3b.

5. The representative of the European Union and its member States attached high importance to the work of the CEP and the five UNECE multilateral environmental agreements. He noted with interest the recommendations in the Environmental Performance Review of Mongolia and the accession by Chad to the Water Convention and similar interest by other African countries. He expressed satisfaction at the collaboration between the CEP, EU member States, the European Environment Agency and other EU institutions. In this context, he highlighted the extrabudgetary project on strategic environmental assessment and transboundary environmental impact assessment in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, to be

presented under Item 8 of the agenda and financed by the European Union's Directorate-General for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations. He noted the CEP's efforts to support SDG implementation through sharing information among member States and with other sectoral committees. He welcomed the CEP's recommendation to EXCOM to consider the mapping of sectoral committees' activities aimed at supporting SDG implementation, and thought this would help the sectoral committees address the SDGs in an integrated manner. He commended the success of the MEAs and highlighted the support of the Aarhus Convention secretariat to the negotiations of the Escazú Agreement.

6. The representative of Switzerland noted that the CEP's environmental conventions and other instruments played a driving role in coordinating efforts to implement relevant SDGs in the region and commended its close cooperation with other organizations that dealt with similar issues. He pointed out that countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia benefited greatly from CEP's activities and counted on the recommendations from the Environmental Performance Reviews and the UNECE support to implement them. He said the efforts towards transboundary environmental cooperation in that subregion were particularly important given the complex challenges it faces, including the implementation of the One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative. Recognizing the significant development opportunities offered by this initiative, Switzerland supported a systematic evaluation, in the EPRs of these countries, of the environmental challenges raised by OBOR. He expressed support for the decisions tabled under item 3b.

7. The representative of Belarus appreciated the technical assistance from CEP to Belarus and expressed interest in cooperating in the Western Dinar River Basin on infrastructure construction improvement. He expressed support for the decisions tabled under item 3b.

8. In response to the question by the representative of the Russian Federation, the secretary of the CEP informed the next CEP session was planned for 29-31 January 2019. He explained that the publication of the report of the previous session had been delayed due to changes in secretariat staff but that all the decisions taken at the session, on which the CEP based its work, were available on the UNECE website.

9. The Chair concluded that EXCOM thanks the Chair of the Committee on Environmental Policy for the comprehensive report. EXCOM appreciates being informed about the activities and achievements of the Committee and being kept aware of future directions of its work.

(b) Decisions on matters related to the Committee on Environmental Policy.

10. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves:

- i. the programme of work of the Environment subprogramme for the period 2018-2019, as contained in ECE/CEP/2017/7;
- ii. the renewal of the mandate and terms of reference of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators for 2018 –2021 as contained in document ECE/CEP/2017/12.

Item 4 - Matters relating to the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business.

(a) Meeting with the Chair of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business.

11. The Chair of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT), Ms. Sue Probet, made a presentation to EXCOM on the achievements of the Centre over the past year and its plans for the future.

12. The representative of the Russian Federation expressed interest in continued progress in trade facilitation and the recommendations, standards and tools developed by UN/CEFACT. He thought the UN should stimulate and reduce the cost of international trade, increase economic growth, efficiency of labor and employment. He found UN/CEFACT's activities particularly important in light of the 2030 Agenda and the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. He welcomed the plans to focus on blockchain and Internet of Things. He called on countries to support UN/CEFACT's work and supported the decisions tabled under Item 4b.

13. The representative of the European Union and its member States stated that UN/CEFACT delivered many and highly useful products, often on a global scale, and noted with satisfaction the focus on new technologies such as blockchain and Internet of Things. He highlighted the close collaboration between UN/CEFACT and the EU on sustainable fisheries and the development of the Fisheries Language for Universal Exchange. The European Union and its member States would follow with interest the discussions on possible funding from the European Commission for the development of a traceability framework in the garment sector by UN/CEFACT and the International Trade Centre. He said the European Union and its member States would remain engaged in and supportive of UN/CEFACT.

14. The representative of Belarus informed that his country would soon submit an application for a representative of Belarus to participate in the work of UN/CEFACT and hoped it would be approved. He found the Centre's work particularly important in light of Belarus's negotiations to enter the World Trade Organization. He highlighted the development of recommendations for SMSEs, the expansion of supply chains and agricultural products as areas of interest and looked forward to the report on sustainable tourism.

15. The Chair concluded that EXCOM thanks the Chair of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business for the comprehensive report. EXCOM appreciates being informed about the activities and achievements of the Centre and being kept aware of future directions of its work.

(b) Decisions on matters related to the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business.

16. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the programme of work of the Team of Specialists on Sustainable Fisheries for the period 2018-2019, as contained in ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2018/22.

INFORMAL SEGMENT

Item 5 - Repositioning of the United Nations Development system.

The Executive Secretary informed member States about General Assembly resolution 72/279 on the Repositioning of the United Nations Development system adopted on 31 May. She explained that the review process was undertaken in two phases and highlighted in

particular the regional dimension: First, agreed measures would be implemented to optimize functions and enhance collaboration at the regional and subregional levels. She noted that, in the UNECE region, practice of UN inter-agency cooperation were already advanced and provided a solid foundation for taking additional steps and for further integrating activities and structures. The second phase would consist of providing options, on a region-by-region basis, for longer-term reprofiling and restructuring of the regional assets of the ECOSOC. As end date the Operational Activities for Development segment of the 2019 ECOSOC session was foreseen. She stressed that the modalities of the review and the proposals related to the Regional Commissions were still evolving and expected that more information would become available during her visit to UN Headquarters during the High Level Political Forum. The Executive Secretary expressed the hope that member States would engage with UNECE in the coming months to discuss the implications for the organization and the region, and support UNECE during the deliberations at headquarters.

17. The representative of the Russian Federation welcomed the General Assembly resolution and the agreement on modernizing the UN Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs). He thought it essential to affirm the decisive role of governments in the development sector, including in the UNDAFs. He appreciated the assignment of the collective ownership of the Development Operations Coordination Office to the UN Development Group and the establishment of a new office on system wide evaluation. He expressed concern regarding the proposed combined model of financing for the UN Development System, which he felt would not allow for an acceptable degree of predictability in financing and could discourage new donors, especially those from the private sector. He inquired how the resolution would affect UNECE and which actions UNECE expected to take to implement paragraphs 18 and 19 of the resolution. He sought clarification as to what was meant by the term “longer-term reprofiling and restructuring of the regional assets of the ECOSOC”. He confirmed the Russian Federation’s readiness to participate in discussions on the implications for UNECE and the region.

18. The representative of Switzerland opined that the resolution language on revamping the regional dimension was rather vague and wondered what this process would consist of and what next steps UNECE envisaged. He asked if the Regional Commissions had discussed the issue among themselves and what they considered to be the opportunities and risks of the reform. He hoped to cooperate closely with UNECE on the issue.

19. The representative of the European Union and its member States stood ready to engage on the topic. He noted that the resolution recognized the need to account for the specificities of each region in the reform process. In this context, he said UNECE’s normative capacity was rather unique, with a number of products being used beyond the region, and thought this should be highlighted. He supported the Secretary-General’s reform process, and said all member States and members of the UN Development System had a joint responsibility to implement it.

20. The Executive Secretary appreciated the support from member States during the first phase of the reform and the negotiations of the resolution, and hoped this would continue during the second phase. She reiterated that UNECE was already engaged in many of the collaborative initiatives highlighted in the resolution under the first phase, such as the UNDAFs, interactions with UN Resident Coordinators etc. In response to the Russian Federation’s question on the new model of financing, she explained that this concerned only the Resident Coordinators and not the Regional Commissions. She also explained that a transition team was being established at UN Headquarters to coordinate the implementation of

the resolution across the UN system and that members of the UN Development Group had been invited to second staff to this team. She said that this would be difficult for UNECE given its resource constraints but that she was looking into different options to participate. Regarding the second step of the reform process, she reiterated that the process was evolving and that modalities were still uncertain. She hoped member States would engage strongly to elaborate their visions and mandates for UNECE, and that the messages would be communicated from the Geneva missions to their New York counterparts who could voice support for UNECE at headquarters.

21. The Chair concluded that EXCOM takes note of the information provided and looks forward to further exchanges on the topic.

Item 6 - 2019 Regional Forum for Sustainable Development.

22. The Executive Secretary briefed EXCOM on the results of the survey on the 2018 Regional Forum for Sustainable Development (RFSD), as contained in informal document 2018/18. She said the secretariat was proceeding with the preparations for the 2019 RFSD. The Forum would once again be aligned with the SDGs that will be under review at the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) – in this instance SDGs 4, 8, 10, 13 and 16. Switzerland had generously provided the conference venue again, and a tentative reservation had been made for 21-22 March 2019 to ensure room availability. She hoped EXCOM could confirm these dates. She recalled with appreciation that Switzerland had provided generous support to fund travel of participants at the 2019 Regional Forum within the 2-year extrabudgetary project approved previously by EXCOM. The secretariat would cooperate closely with other entities of the regional UN system on the event and was ready to start preliminary discussions with these partners. She suggested that the secretariat could initiate preliminary discussions with partner organizations, and organize informal consultations with member States starting in mid-September 2018 to discuss the format, modalities and content of the Forum and the renewal of the mandate to convene the Forum after 2019.

23. The representative of the Russian Federation said the RFSD was an important event and that the 2018 edition had featured a useful, constructive exchange of views on many key issues, with strong participation by experts. He supported the proposed dates and the alignment of the topics to the HLPF. He welcomed UNECE's readiness to work with partner organizations on the RFSD and said the Russian Federation would engage in informal consultations as suggested by the Executive Secretary.

24. The representative of Switzerland noted that the survey showed overall satisfaction with the 2018 RFSD and an appreciation by the participants of the opportunity to exchange views and network. He praised the good communication with the secretariat before and after the event. He thought the survey showed a need for further work on the organization of the round tables, and sought more details on why 20 per cent of participants had not highly rated the structure of the event. He hoped the RFSD could be more interactive in the future and include the private sector even more. As the SDGs under review at the 2019 HLPF were not closely linked to UNECE's mandate, he thought it would be key to have efficient collaboration with relevant partner organizations. He expressed his readiness to engage in informal consultations.

25. The representative of the European Union and its member States agreed with the proposed dates and supported an event of one and a half days duration. He appreciated Switzerland's financial support to the RFSD. He supported the proposed informal consultations

and discussions with partner organizations. He hoped the secretariat would provide EXCOM with a debriefing on the 2018 HLPF.

26. The Executive Secretary informed that such a briefing was scheduled for 25 July 2018 and invited member States to attend.

27. The Chair concluded that EXCOM takes note on the evaluation of the 2018 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development and invites the secretariat to keep in mind the lessons learnt while preparing the 2019 edition. EXCOM decides to hold the 2019 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development on 21 and 22 March 2019. EXCOM requests the secretariat to initiate preliminary discussions with partner organizations to explore options for the 2019 Regional Forum. EXCOM also requests the secretariat to organize informal consultations for interested delegations, starting in mid-September 2018, on the format, organizational and substantive modalities of the 2019 Regional Forum and the extension of the mandate of the Regional Forum beyond 2019.

Item 7 - Important new developments: briefing by the Executive Secretary

28. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM that the secretariat had started brainstorming on the 2019 Commission session. She hoped for strong ministerial-level participation at that event. She said the secretariat wished to make the session useful and interesting for member States and asked delegations to indicate which topics they would like to see covered. She also encouraged delegations to be represented at ambassadorial level at the following meeting of EXCOM, where the Commission session would be discussed in more detail.

29. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM about the following recent meetings:
- i. 23-25 May, St. Petersburg: Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum
 - ii. 28 May, Haifa: MASHAV's 30th International Women Leaders Conference
 - iii. 29 May, Geneva: High-level ceremony to celebrate the accession of the Republic of Chad to the Water Convention
 - iv. 30-31 May, Pennsylvania State University Energy Days
 - v. 5 June & 14 June, Brussels: Mission to Brussels for European Development Days and bilaterals with European Commissioners
 - vi. 18-20 June, Geneva: 66th session of the Conference of European Statisticians
 - vii. 21-22 June, Astana: Ministerial Roundtable on Forest Landscape Restoration and the Bonn Challenge in the Caucasus and Central Asia
 - viii. 28-29 June, Belgrade: Ministerial Conference on the Occasion of 70 Years of the Belgrade Convention and 90th Session of the Danube Commission
 - ix. 2 July, Rome: 41st Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission.
30. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM about the following upcoming events:
- i. 9-18 July, New York: High-level Political Forum
 - ii. 10 August, Geneva: 1st meeting of the Advisory Board of the Road Safety Trust Fund

Item 8 – Extrabudgetary projects (for approval)

31. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the extrabudgetary projects contained in informal documents 2018/19, 2018/20 2018/21 and 2018/22/Rev.1.

Item 9 – Other business

32. The Chair informed EXCOM that the next meeting would be held on 21 September 2018.
