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Achieving energy for sustainable development

Note by the Secretariat

In its most recent session (26-28 September 2017), the Committee on Sustainable Energy recommended to strengthen UNECE's and the Committee's role as a neutral platform for policy and technology dialogues on the attainment of the Sustainable Development goals and targets and to continue to collaborate with the other Regional Commissions for accelerated progress. It also requested "the active participation of the Committee and the sustainable energy subprogramme in the 2018 review process on progress of Sustainable Development Goal 7 in the HLPF" (ECE/ENERGY/113, para 38).

In light of these decisions and the review of SDG 7 scheduled to take place at the 2018 High-level Political Forum (HLPF), the Bureau of the Committee on Sustainable Energy has endorsed the position paper presented in the Annex of this document. The paper calls attention to the shortfalls in the region's progress towards SDG 7 and lists a series of recommendations for the consideration of the HLPF on how this progress can be accelerated.

EXCOM is invited to request the Chair of the Executive Committee to transmit the position paper on SDG7 to the President of the Economic and Social Council as UNECE input to the 2018 High-level Political Forum.

Annex

Achieving Energy for Sustainable Development

A UNECE Position Paper Prepared for the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

• KEY MESSAGES

• Progress in the UNECE region is falling short

Attainment of SDG 7 is falling short in the ECE region, except for the target on 100% access to electricity, and if “access” is defined more broadly, challenges remain on access to heating services and on reliability, affordability and quality of service. The region has specific climatic, economic, environmental and political circumstances leading in parts of the region to inefficient use of energy, power cuts, increasing energy costs, and unsustainable and unaffordable heating in winter. UNECE falls short as well on the other energy-related SDGs that support improving quality of life. On current trends, energy will not deliver needed support to the 2030 Agenda, notably in the area of climate.

Access: UNECE officially has achieved 100% access to power networks and 98% access to clean cooking fuels, but there are significant quality and affordability challenges. Access to distributed generation sources or to alternative energy networks must be considered.

Efficiency: The rate of progress in improving energy intensity is insufficient to meet the 2030 goal. Improvements in energy intensity in the region recently have been around -2% per annum since 2012.

Renewable Energy: Annual renewable energy investments in the region need to more than double to achieve the 2030 target. The UNECE region has an increasing share of renewable energy in TFC, but certain sub-regions have low and declining investment rates.

The carbon intensity of the world’s energy has remained flat over the past twenty years. Additions of renewable energy capacity have not led to the expected degree of de-carbonization. Recent studies show no correlation between additions of solar and wind power and the carbon intensity of energy. For many countries, the current political, regulatory, and industrial infrastructure is not ready for transformation as the impact of transformative technology and the implications for critical raw materials are not clear.

80% of today’s energy mix is fossil-based, including coal for power generation and industry, petroleum products for transportation, heating, and off-grid power generation, and natural gas for heating, electricity generation, transportation, and industry. Many countries, communities, and people depend on fossil energy for incomes and livelihoods. Fossil energy will remain important, a reality that makes it imperative to address the environmental footprint of fossil fuels.

• How to accelerate progress: Recommendations for the HLPF

1. The vital importance that energy plays as an enabler must be recognised. Links to other sectors such as water, climate, health, infrastructure, and agriculture, need to be explicit and strengthened. Without energy, attainment of all other SDGs is at risk. Energy cannot be considered in isolation.
2. The SDG 7 indicators/targets reflect a limited view of energy’s contribution. Indicators with explicit links to other sectors and SDGs need to be developed to track movement towards the desired target - a low-carbon energy system that provides affordable access to sustainable energy services for all.
3. Data sources and data gathering/analytical capacity of countries do not meet requirements. The tracking reports of the regional commissions in collaboration with the World Bank and the IEA have highlighted the short-comings. The reports provide important information for policy-makers. The reports should be updated regularly on a three-year cycle.
4. Stronger concertation/collaboration among stakeholders, including the organizations of the larger United Nation system, is needed. If UN Energy could be extended to include the International Energy Agency and the World Bank, then it could be re-conceived to take a lead role in advancing the energy-related SDGs. UNECE stands ready to engage.
5. To understand the strategic options countries have to achieve global objectives and national commitments, UNECE has initiated a project to explore alternative pathways countries might consider to support a high-level political dialogue among member States. The dialogue may improve mutual understanding to a point at which countries can make stronger national commitments to collective outcomes. The project, entitled *Pathways to Sustainable Energy*, is an important vehicle for understanding both the gaps that exist in meeting the energy-related objectives of the

2030 Agenda and the opportunities available to close the gaps. We recommend that the other regional commissions undertake similar assessments and interested agencies to join our process.

6. Some options for addressing energy for sustainable development are valid economically, environmentally, and socially under all circumstances and should be pursued aggressively and diligently. Often referred to as low hanging fruit, these include sustainable resource management, energy efficiency improvements in buildings, industry, and transport and methane management in the extractive industries.