

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
104th Meeting
Geneva, 11 March 2019

EXCOM/CONCLU/104

CHAIR'S CONCLUSIONS

Meeting of the Executive Committee
11 March 2019

FORMAL SEGMENT

Item 1 – Adoption of the agenda.

1. The provisional draft agenda for the 104th meeting was adopted.

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

2. The conclusions from the 103rd meeting of EXCOM (EXCOM/CONCLU/103) 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 Chair of the Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP), Ms. Elisabete Quintas da Silva, made a presentation to EXCOM on the achievements of CEP over the past year and its plans for the future. She invited EXCOM to approve the renewed mandate and terms of reference of the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews for the period 2019–2022 as contained in document ECE/CEP/2019/12.

4. The representative of the Russian Federation placed great importance on the activities of UNECE in the area of environmental protection, including those on formulating effective tools for economic stimuli for environmental protection, and thought the CEP played a significant role in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). He favoured the strengthening of UNECE in the context of the multilateral environmental agreements and supported the decision tabled for approval. He recalled the decision taken at the January 2019 session of the CEP asking the secretariat to include SDG 16 in the list of priority SDGs of UNECE and to update the UNECE website accordingly. He noted that EXCOM had spoken in favour of UNECE’s efforts to align its work with the 2030 Agenda at its 98th meeting and achieved a shared understanding that UNECE should focus its efforts on the SDGs where it has comparative advantage and can create maximum added value, namely SDGs 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15. This understanding was reflected in the draft high-level statement expected to be adopted at the 68th session of the Commission. The Russian Federation therefore disassociated itself from the decision of the CEP and believed that the latter should not entail a review of the mandate of UNECE.

5. The representative of the European Union (EU) and its member States said that the EU attached great importance to the work of the CEP and to the multilateral environmental agreements, and provided financial support as well as expert contributions to the same. He took special note of the 8th Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention and saluted the accessions to the Convention by Chad and Senegal as well as the expressions of interest by 20 other countries. The Council of EU adopted conclusions on water diplomacy in November 2018 which mention the Water Convention, and highlight that water is a prerequisite for human survival and dignity and a fundamental basis for the resilience of both societies and the environment. He also mentioned recent industrial accidents which highlight the importance of the UNECE Industrial Accidents Convention. The latter, as well as the Water Convention,

provide recommendations for authorities and for operators of tailings management facilities for practical measures to limit accidents and the severity of their consequences. He was also pleased to see continued cooperation between CEP and other organizations such as UN Environment, the World Health Organization, and EU institutions such as the European Investment Bank and the European Environment Agency.

6. The representative of Switzerland appreciated the work of the CEP in 2018. He noted that Switzerland provides significant financial and expert support to the CEP, with a focus on countries that fall within its voting bloc at the Global Environment Facility, Central Asia and Azerbaijan, and on the areas of pressure on resources in SDG implementation, transition to a green economy and the environmental element of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative. He emphasized the usefulness of the UNECE multilateral environmental agreements in this context. Switzerland likewise provided financial and in-kind support to the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews. He had no objection to the decision put before EXCOM.

7. The representative of Belarus supported the work of the CEP and appreciated the technical assistance provided to countries. He thanked the CEP for its support to the November 2018 peer learning workshop in Minsk titled “Policies for implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: exchange of best practices on the basis of UNECE Environmental Performance Reviews”. He supported the decision tabled for EXCOM’s approval.

8. In response to the Russian Federation, the Chair of the CEP said the CEP had no intention to request a new mandate or revise existing mandates. Noting that the criteria for selecting the priority SDGs for UNECE had been comparative advantage and value added, the CEP had agreed that the Aarhus Convention and its contributions to SDG 16 met these criteria and had thus requested the secretariat to consider including SDG 16 in the priority list.

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 on Environmental Policy 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 the renewed mandate and terms of reference of the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews for the period 2019–2022 as contained in document ECE/CEP/2019/12.

INFORMAL SEGMENT

Item 4 - Annual report on evaluation 2018

11. The Executive Secretary presented the Annual Evaluation Report for 2018, prepared pursuant to a request made by EXCOM at its 91st meeting and contained in informal document 2019/9/Rev.1. She reiterated that UNECE believed in the potential of evaluations as learning tools for enhancing effectiveness, accountability and transparency, and stressed its commitment to implementing the recommendations arising from evaluations to improve performance.

12. The representative of the Russian Federation noted that regular evaluation reports enhanced effectiveness and transparency. He found the section on recommendations and their implementation informative and was satisfied to note the constructive nature of these recommendations.

13. The representative of the European Union and its member States appreciated the report, as well as the fact that the recommendations arising from internal and external evaluations in 2018 had been implemented and closed within deadlines. He commended the work of the Programme Management Unit, particularly in the last quarter of 2018, and took note of various UN-wide evaluation initiatives such as the ones on preparedness vis-à-vis the SDGs and the UN System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

14. The representative of Switzerland commended the report and said Switzerland attached great importance to evaluations and worked closely with its multilateral partners on this topic. He was likewise satisfied with the timely implementation of the recommendations in 2018. He noted that the staffing shortage in the Programme Management Unit (PMU) had been addressed. He asked the secretariat for examples of organizational practices having been improved pursuant to evaluations. He also inquired to what degree past recommendations were taken into account in planning.

15. The head of the PMU said that, now that the staffing shortage had been addressed, PMU was able to handle the topic more systematically. As for the examples requested by Switzerland, this would be the focus of the work in 2019. PMU would shortly organize an exchange of experiences between the project managers who had conducted evaluations in 2018 and obtain their views on how these evaluations could be improved and how their recommendations had led to improvements in the past and could lead to changes in the future. She looked forward to sharing the examples obtained from such exchanges with member States.

16. The Chair concluded that EXCOM takes note with appreciation of the annual report on evaluations for 2018 and looks forward to future updates on this issue.

Item 5 - 2019 Regional Forum for Sustainable Development

17. Briefing EXCOM on the preparations for the Regional Forum, the Executive Secretary informed EXCOM that the Deputy Secretary-General would deliver opening remarks. The keynote speaker would be Ms. Eeva Furmanis, Director of the Environmental Policy Centre at the Finnish Environment Institute SYKE, who was also part of the independent group of scientists drafting the Global Sustainable Development Report. The Forum would be chaired by Ms. Ogerta Manastirliu, Minister of Health and Social Protection of Albania. 16 side events had been confirmed. The Forum would be preceded by several pre-meetings: a civil society pre-meeting to coordinate the inputs of civil society, a youth pre-meeting organized for and by young people, a regional consultation on volunteerism, a regional preparatory meeting for the 2019 VNR countries.

18. The representative of the Russian Federation thanked the secretariat for the work done on the preparations and the regular updates. He drew attention to the Regional Forum side event

“Eurasian Economic Commission: View on Inclusive Growth and Sustainable Development” and encouraged participation by delegations.

19. The representative of Switzerland thanked the secretariat for the work done on the preparations and the regular updates, and noted that Switzerland would participate actively, including on the roundtables on SDGs 4 and 13. Switzerland was a co-sponsor for the side events “A Sustainable Future for All by Fostering Labour Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities” and “Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value”.

20. The Chair concluded that EXCOM thanks the secretariat for the information on the status of preparations for the 2019 Regional Forum for Sustainable Development, and looks forward to a successful event.

Item 6 - Preparations for the 2019 Commission Session

21. The Executive Secretary introduced informal documents 2019/10 and 2019/11, containing draft decisions to be submitted to the Commission for consideration at its 68th session. She reported that Belarus had submitted its candidatures for chairmanship of the Commission for 2019-2021, and Switzerland and Romania for vice-chairmanship. The representative of the United Kingdom had indicated readiness to serve as the rapporteur of the 68th session. She also informed EXCOM that Latvia, as Chair of the Commission, would host an evening reception on 9 April.

22. The representative of the Russian Federation supported the draft decision in informal document 2019/11 but not the one in informal document 2019/10 on the renaming of subprogramme 4. He noted that a name change had not been discussed at the Committee on Competitiveness, Innovation and Public-Private Partnerships (CICPPP) and thought it incorrect for EXCOM to pre-empt a relevant CICPPP decision. He also noted that facilitating economic cooperation and integration was a key goal of UNECE, and that promoting innovation and public-private partnerships were important in this context but not the sole means of achieving this goal. The scope of subprogramme 4 was broader than the activities of CICPPP and also covered support for the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia and technical assistance. In case difficulties arose from the dissonance between the names of the subprogramme and the Committee, he preferred a return to the previous name of the Committee: Committee for Economic Cooperation and Integration. This would of course have to be discussed first by the Committee before consideration by EXCOM.

23. The Chair concluded that EXCOM welcomes the update on the status of the preparations for the 2019 Commission session, and looks forward to a successful event. EXCOM decides to submit the draft decision contained in informal document 2019/11 to the Commission for consideration at its sixty-eighth session under agenda item 6 “Other issues calling for decision by the Commission.”

Item 7 - Repositioning of the United Nations Development System: Region-by-Region review

24. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM about the 21-21 February meeting of the Internal Review Team on the reform of the UN Development System (UNDS) in New York, and introduced Mr. Philip Schönrock and Ms. Juanita Olarte from CEPEI, a Latin American think-tank supporting the reform process.

25. Mr. Schönrock introduced CEPEI, noting that it was an independent research organization working with the UN under a partnership agreement, with the task of undertaking a mapping of the regional assets of the UNDS to obtain a better understanding of the value proposition of the UN at the regional level. Following the mapping, CEPEI would provide the Secretary-General with recommendations for improving collaboration and coordination between the different regional actors of the UN system, as well as between the latter and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, building on existing structures rather than creating new layers of bureaucracy. CEPEI was visiting each region and consulting different non-UN stakeholders such as governments, the private sector, civil society and academia, in order to form a comprehensive and inclusive picture. The recommendations would be finalized in mid-April. He noted that CEPEI looked forward to hearing the views of UNECE member States to inform the review process.

26. The representative of the Russian Federation said that UNECE played a key role in facilitating the achievement of the SDGs in the region, and placed great importance on the regulatory contributions of UNECE legal instruments and technical assistance projects. He said it was fundamental that the reform would not cause a negative impact on this aspect of UNECE work.

27. The representative of the European Union and its member States said that UNECE was the only Regional Commission endowed with a standard-setting, normative capacity, which often produced outputs with global reach that underlined their particular usefulness. He said this specificity and value-added should not be overlooked. Within the broader context of the reform, the European Union and its member States aimed for reductions in overlaps, efficiency gains, and putting the comparative advantages of each regional actor to best use.

28. The representative of Azerbaijan said UNECE was a useful organization whose concrete outputs helped address many sustainable development challenges in the region. She also noted that UNECE products were increasingly in demand at a global level, concluding that this was the best example for demonstrating UNECE's importance. She found the constant trend of budget cuts imposed on UNECE very unfortunate.

29. The representative of Italy said that many of UNECE's outputs were becoming global in scope and noted that this often had practical repercussions on the resources of the organization. He inquired what practices CEPEI had encountered in the other regions on the issue of striking a balance between addressing regional needs and expanding scope to other regions where necessary and opportune.

30. Mr. Schönrock reiterated that the reform did not intend to change the Regional Commissions or to abolish them, but to enhance their collaboration and better show their added value in terms of convening power and addressing transboundary issues. He noted a need to take a medium- and long-term view in the reform process, in order to avoid having to repeat the exercise often. He also said that, in the repositioning of the UNDS, the Secretary-General was ambitious and wanted to strengthen the delivery of regional public goods that can be translated to the global level. This would require strong engagement by both the UN system and Member States.

31. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM that, in addition to the region-by-region review, UNECE had engaged a consultant to carry out an internal review of working methods,

activities, strengths and areas that needed improvement. The objective of this review was to find a way to balance the growing demands from member States with the consistent downward trend in the budget. The results of the review would be presented to EXCOM once completed.

32. Mr. Schönrock asked EXCOM what it would see as the best case and worst case scenarios for UNECE in the context of the reform.

33. In response to Mr. Schönrock, the Chair reiterated the observation made by the Russian Federation that the reform should do no harm to UNECE.

34. The Chair concluded that EXCOM thanks the secretariat for the information on the latest developments in the reform of the UN Development System, and looks forward to future updates.

Item 8 - Important new developments: briefing by the Executive Secretary

35. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM that UNECE was in discussions with the Standardization Administration of the People's Republic of China (SAC) in order to study the implementation of a possible Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) focusing on Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business. SAC was already participating in UN/CEFACT and had hosted the Centre's Forum in Hangzhou in October 2018. The MoU would help align national standards in China and those of UN/CEFACT, in a principle of international supply chain interoperability. It would also encourage the use of UN/CEFACT standards in projects along the Belt and Road Initiative. The Executive Secretary also informed EXCOM about a possible MoU with Ukraine about a Specialist Centre on e-government, data security and accountability in PPP projects to be hosted in Kiev, and noted that this proposal had arrived too late to be put to the EXCOM Bureau and was thus not mentioned on the agenda.

36. The representative of the United States of America noted that UNECE standards were free, voluntary and available online. Therefore, she saw no need for an MoU for any country to adopt these standards and inquired as to the necessity of the proposed MoU. She said that, if China was requesting technical assistance to adopt UNECE standards, the MoU should be clear on the extent of UNECE's involvement, targeted in scope and focused only on such adoption rather than on the Belt and Road Initiative. She expressed concern that the MoU might be used to promote projects by one country which did not adhere to UNECE standards and were outside the scope of UNECE's mandate, and said that such partnerships could risk the reputation of the UN system and its development work. She asked the secretariat to share the final text of the MoU if the negotiations on it progressed.

37. The Executive Secretary recalled that, following past practice, the secretariat always kept EXCOM informed of its partnership activities pursuant to the mandates given by member States and noted that the operationalization of these mandates was within her authority. She invited further discussion with interested delegations to provide additional context.

The Chief of the Public-Private Partnerships Unit, Mr. Geoffrey Hamilton, clarified that the aim of the MoU was to broaden the reach of UNECE's normative work. He observed that China was a large market and was investing in countries of the UNECE region and opined that it would be in the interest of member States for these investments to conform to UNECE standards.

38. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM about the following recent meetings and events:

- i. 21 January – 8 February, Geneva: Audit of UNECE
- ii. 19-22 February, Geneva: 81st session of the Inland Transport Committee
- iii. 20-22 February, New York: Meeting of the internal review team on the UN Development System reform.

39. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM about the following upcoming events:

- i. 14-15 March, Bucharest: 8th European Summit of Regions and Cities
- ii. 21 March, Geneva: International Day of Forests
- iii. 21-22 March, Geneva: Regional Forum for Sustainable Development
- iv. 25-27 March, Geneva: 13th session of the Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships
- v. 1-5 April, Geneva: 33rd UN/CEFACT Forum
- vi. 8-9 April, Geneva: 25th session of the UN/CEFACT Plenary
- vii. 8 April, Geneva: Day of Cities
- viii. 9-10 April, Geneva: 68th session of the Commission

Item 8 – Extrabudgetary projects (for approval)

40. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the extrabudgetary project contained in informal documents 2019/14, 2019/15, 2019/16, 2019/17/Rev.1 and 2019/18.

Item 9 – Other business

41. The Chair informed EXCOM that the next meeting would be held on 29 May 2019.
