

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
105th Meeting
Geneva, 29 May 2019

EXCOM/CONCLU/105

CHAIR'S CONCLUSIONS

FORMAL SEGMENT

Item 1 – Adoption of the agenda.

1. The provisional draft agenda for the 105th meeting was adopted.

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

2. The conclusions from the 104th meeting of EXCOM (EXCOM/CONCLU/104) were adopted.

Item 3 - Matters relating to the Inland Transport Committee.

(a) Meeting with the Chair of the Inland Transport Committee

3. The Chair of the Inland Transport Committee (ITC), Mr. Kristof Schockaert, made a presentation to EXCOM on the achievements of ITC over the past year and its plans for the future. He invited EXCOM to approve the renewal of mandate of three expert groups.

4. The representative of the Russian Federation said the 81st session of the Committee in February 2019 had carried historic significance. He welcomed the adoption of the ITC Strategy until 2030 and supported the resolutions on automation and on inland water transport. He also highlighted the adoption of the Convention on the Facilitation of Border Crossing Procedures for Passengers, Luggage and Load-Luggage carried in international Traffic by Rail and its potential to help implement the 2030 Agenda and foster greater competitiveness for passenger transport in the region, streamline customs procedures, reduce delays at borders, and enhance security and service quality. He thought accession would be in the interest of all Member States. The Russian Federation hoped to complete national accession procedures by the 74th session of the General Assembly. He hoped for increased cooperation between UNECE and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). He welcomed the decision of ITC to hold consultations with UNECE and ESCAP member States on sustainable transport connectivity and the prospect of establishing an international committee on transport between Europe and Asia. The Russian Federation was ready to support these consultations, including financially.

5. The representative of the European Union (EU) and its member States noted ITC’s extensive work and the worldwide benefits thereof, including the recent accessions by Argentina, Qatar and Saudi Arabia to the TIR Convention. He took note of the ITC Strategy until 2030 and also mentioned A/RES/72/271 and the establishment of the Road Safety Trust Fund, which the EU and its member States have actively supported. He said the planned activities for 2019 and beyond and the implementation of the ITC Strategy would make the work of ITC more accessible and attractive, especially for countries who stand to benefit the most from the adoption of the UN Transport Conventions.

6. The representative of Switzerland supported the ITC Strategy and welcomed the Committee's ability to adapt to changing circumstances including digitalization, as exemplified by the e-TIR and e-CMR. He said the global scope of the ITC was important and that the Committee's work was greatly appreciated by industry in Switzerland, especially on vehicle technologies and the transport of dangerous goods. Land planning, traffic and health issues, road safety and transport safety were also topics of importance. He appreciated the work done on intermodal transport, including the Unified Railway Law, and thought that the UNECE region could be an example in this field. He said that cooperation between the Regional Commissions was necessary to meet sustainable development challenges. He supported the decisions tabled for EXCOM's approval.

7. The representative of Belarus supported the work of the ITC, the adoption of the ITC Strategy until 2030 and the decisions tabled for the approval of EXCOM.

8. The Chair of the ITC hoped Member States would sign the Convention mentioned by the representative of the Russian Federation so that it could promptly enter into force. He said the consultations with UNECE and ESCAP member States were being discussed by the ITC Bureau with a view to organizing them in a cost effective and efficient manner.

9. The Chair concluded that EXCOM thanks the Chair of the Inland Transport Committee 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 Inland Transport Committee.

10. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the renewal of the mandates of the Group of Experts on Benchmarking Transport Infrastructure Construction Costs until June 2020, as contained in document ECE/TRANS/288; the Group of Experts on Road Signs and Signals until June 2019, as contained in document ECE/TRANS/288; and the Group of Experts on AETR until June 2021, as contained in document ECE/TRANS/288.

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 Probert, made a presentation to EXCOM on the achievements of UN/CEFACT over the past year and its plans for the future. She invited EXCOM to approve the programme of work of UN/CEFACT for 2019-2020 and the mandates and terms of reference of three of its subsidiary bodies.

12. The representative of Belarus expressed satisfaction at the cooperation between Belarus and UN/CEFACT on Single Window and the relevant seminar organized in Minsk in December 2018. He appreciated the roundtable on data sharing and Single Window in the Eurasian Economic Union, held during UNCTAD Week. He looked forward to future cooperation and supported the decisions tabled for EXCOM's approval.

13. The representative of the Russian Federation attached great importance to UN/CEFACT in light of the 2030 Agenda and the entry into force of the World Trade Organization Trade Facilitation Agreement. He appreciated the focus on topical issues such as blockchain, smart containers, Internet of Things and sustainable tourism and hoped to be kept informed of work in these areas. He thought it necessary to strengthen the participation of countries in the work of UN/CEFACT. While noting that the region has achieved successes in facilitating trade, he noted that the countries of Central Asia and Eastern Europe in particular had to work to implement further measures. He had no objections to the decisions tabled for the approval of EXCOM.

14. The representative of the European Union (EU) and its member States expressed satisfaction at the positive developments in the areas of the Trade Facilitation Implementation Guide, sustainable fisheries and sustainable procurement. He took note of future activities, including those on traceability in the garment, footwear and other sectors.

15. The Chair concluded that EXCOM thanks the Chair of the UN/CEFACT 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 United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) for the period 2019–2020, as contained in documents ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2019/21 and ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2019/21/Add.1. EXCOM approves the revised mandate and terms of reference of the Advisory Group on the United Nations Code for Trade and Transport Locations of the UN/CEFACT, as contained in document ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2017/17/Rev.1, and the extension of its mandate for another two-year period; the revised mandate and terms of reference of the Team of Specialists on Sustainable Fisheries of the UN/CEFACT, as contained in document ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2017/16/Rev.2, and the extension of its mandate for another two-year period; the mandate and terms of reference of the Advisory Group on Advanced Technologies in Trade and Logistics of the UN/CEFACT, as contained in document (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2019/22/Rev.1) for a two-year period.

INFORMAL SEGMENT

Item 5 – Update on the repositioning of the United Nations Development System

17. The Executive Secretary recalled the Secretary-General's recent report on the repositioning of the UN Development System and the recommendations therein that relate to the regional level. She noted that some of these recommendations needed to be implemented keeping the specificities of the UNECE region in mind. As one example she noted that the UNECE region already had advanced cooperation between UN entities, several of whom moreover provided normative and policy support to high- and middle-income countries that

did not have Resident Coordinators or UN Country Teams. She thanked the delegations whose counterparts had expressed support for UNECE at the ECOSOC Operational Activities for Development Segment, and hoped member States would continue to emphasize the importance of a region-specific approach. She informed EXCOM that the Internal Review Team would be continued and would next discuss the region-specific roll-out of the recommendations. A technical track would be established in New York for interaction with Member States on the regional review. The Secretary-General envisioned releasing another report in October 2019 with findings on the region-by-region review.

18. The representative of the Russian Federation said his country would keep underscoring in New York the importance of taking into account the specificities of UNECE in the reform. The Russian Federation consistently spoke in favour of preserving the functioning of UNECE and the well-oiled mechanism of regional coordination in the region. He expressed doubts about the need to establish a platform for regional cooperation to be located in Istanbul as a new coordination mechanism. He believed that effective coordination would only be possible in Geneva, where both Member States and the majority of UN entities had representation.

19. The Chair called on all delegations to be attentive to the matter, as the topic of regional coordination interested both beneficiary and donor countries. The Chair concluded that EXCOM thanks the secretariat for the information on the reform of the UN Development System, and looks forward to receiving further updates as the discussions continue.

Item 6 - ECE budget management efforts to address liquidity

20. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM of recent communications from the UN Controller stating that the Regular Budget of the United Nations secretariat was facing an imminent cashflow challenge due to delayed contributions from a number of Member States. In order to support overall budget management efforts, UNECE had been requested to take immediate measures to address this liquidity issue. These included the postponement of regular budget-financed activities of the programme of work which have not yet been financially committed to in the third quarter of 2019. In particular, these efforts may impact posts and non-posts funded by the Regular Budget of UNECE under Section 20 and 23. She anticipated that the current cash flow issue would be further clarified by the UN Controller in the coming months. She highlighted that extrabudgetary funds were not affected and hoped all UN Member States would aim for timely Regular Budget contributions for a smooth delivery of mandates. She said UNECE was following the situation on a daily basis and would do its best to minimize impact.

21. The Chair concluded that EXCOM thanks the secretariat for the information provided and requests to be kept informed of further developments.

Item 7 - Annual report on technical cooperation activities

22. The Executive Secretary introduced the annual report on technical cooperation activities for 2018 as contained in informal document 2019/21/Rev.1. She highlighted the 4.2 per cent increase in overall extrabudgetary contributions in 2018 and said that the nexus approach, once operationalized, would be reflected in future reports.

23. The representative of the United States thanked the secretariat for the report, noting the importance of accountability and transparency.
24. The representative of the Russian Federation expressed appreciation for the Annual report on technical cooperation activities, noting that it helps to assess the scope of the Commission's technical assistance activities aimed at supporting SDGs.
25. The representative of Switzerland welcomed the grouping of activities in the report according to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). He said Switzerland was one of the biggest donors, which reflected the country's commitment to UNECE in a number of priority areas as well as its excellent cooperation with the organization.
26. The representative of Belarus supported the work carried out by the Project Management Unit.
27. The representative of the European Union and its member States appreciated the detailed overview of activities and the grouping according to the SDGs. He noted that the European Union and its member States together consisted of the biggest donor to UNECE. He encouraged continued annual issuance of the report.
28. The Chair concluded that EXCOM thanks the secretariat for providing the annual report on technical cooperation activities for 2018 and takes note of the information therein.

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

29. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM that her appointment had been extended by one year.
30. The Executive Secretary introduced UNECE's 2018 annual report, highlighting its streamlined format and focus on concrete impacts. She said the report could be a good resource for delegations discussing UNECE at relevant deliberations in New York.
31. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM about the following planned Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs):
 - i. An addendum to the MoU signed with the University of Geneva in January 2018 relating to the establishment of a Centre of Excellence for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing, and similar MoUs on the establishment of Centres of Excellence with the city of Nur-Sultan, Housing Europe and the city of Trondheim;
 - ii. An MoU with the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the World Customs Organization and the International Organization for Standardization, related to periodic maintenance and update of the IMO Compendium on Facilitation and Electronic Business;
 - iii. An MoU with the Kyrgyz Ministry of Economy, Kyrgyz Economic University and the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, related to promotion of the World Trade Organization Trade Facilitation Agreement, the Single Window Facility, international standards and cross-border paperless trade tools and digital transport corridors, with a view to supporting SDG implementation.

32. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM about the following recent meetings and 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 and 8-9 April, 25th session of the UN/CEFACT Plenary
- vi. 8 April, Geneva: Day of Cities
- vii. 9-10 April, Geneva: 68th session of the Commission
- viii. 12 April, Washington DC: World Bank Spring Meetings
- ix. 15 April, Bucharest: High Level Conference on Central Asia: Connectivity for Sustainable Development
- x. 16 April, Bucharest: 2030 Agenda: Partnerships for Sustainable Development
- xi. 24-26 April, Beijing: 2nd Green Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation
- xii. 20-21 May, Istanbul: Meeting of the Regional UN System
- xiii. 27 May, Bratislava: OSCE Environmental and Economic Forum

33. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM about the following upcoming events that she would attend:

- i. 6-8 June: St. Petersburg International Economic Forum
- ii. 18-19 June, Brussels: European Development Days

Item 9 – Extrabudgetary projects (for approval)

34. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the extrabudgetary project contained in informal documents 2019/22, 2019/23, 2019/24, and 2019/25.

Item 10 – Other business

35. The Chair briefed EXCOM about an initiative related to national SDG coordinators as mentioned in a letter he and the Executive Secretary had sent to delegations. The proposal entailed gathering brief information about each country's coordinator. This would help the secretariat understand the institutional structure in each country and contact the appropriate persons, and would also allow the national coordinators to establish contact and exchange experiences. He noted that this initiative was voluntary and informal and did not entail the establishment of a formal structure or financial implications. He encouraged interested delegations to send the requested information to the secretariat by mid-June.

36. The representative of the Russian Federation supported the creation of a network of national SDG coordinators, believing this would help strengthen the coordinating role of UNECE in achieving the SDGs in the region and enrich the work of the Commission with a vital aspect of coordination between countries.

37. The representative of the European Union and its member States said that UNECE could facilitate and promote sharing of best practices between national SDG coordinators, as also

mentioned at the high-level statement adopted at the 68th Commission session. However, he preferred to avoid using the term “network” in this context as this could suggest a structure and resource implications, which the EU and its member States could not support. He said the proposed initiative should indeed remain voluntary as outlined by the Chair and not replace the mechanisms in place at the Regional Forum for Sustainable Development.

38. The representative of Switzerland supported the proposal and said it could allow for more effective cooperation between countries, help overcome future challenges and speed up the implementation of the SDGs.

39. The representative of Azerbaijan found the proposal useful and was ready to provide the requested information.

40. The next EXCOM meeting will be held on 8 July 2019.
