

**ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE**  
**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**  
106<sup>th</sup> Meeting  
Geneva, 8 July 2019

**EXCOM/CONCLU/106**

**CHAIR'S CONCLUSIONS**

**Meeting of the Executive Committee**  
8 July 2019

**FORMAL SEGMENT**

Item 1 – Adoption of the agenda.

1. The provisional draft agenda for the 106<sup>th</sup> meeting was adopted.

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

2. The conclusions from the 105<sup>th</sup> meeting of EXCOM (EXCOM/CONCLU/105) were adopted.

Item 3 - Matters relating to the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards.

(a) Meeting with the Chair of the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards

3. The Vice-Chair of the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards (SCTCS), Mr. Dmitry Fomchenko, made a presentation to EXCOM on the achievements of SCTCS over the past year and its plans for the future. He invited EXCOM to approve the programme of work of the Trade Subprogramme for 2020 and the revised terms of reference and programme of work for the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (WP.7).
4. The representative of Belarus supported the work of the SCTCS on reducing regulatory barriers to trade and on agricultural quality standards. He noted with appreciation that SCTCS was working to develop a project for technical assistance to Belarus on these topics. He had no objection to the decisions tabled for EXCOM’s approval.
5. The representative of the European Union (EU) and its member States took note of new and revised standards by WP.7 as mentioned in the report and of the efforts to address food loss and food waste.
6. The representative of the Russian Federation supported the alignment of the work of SCTCS with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and said the latter could only be achieved through fair and just cooperation, without restrictive measures being applied to individual participants in international trade. He underlined the need, in country studies, of analysing the impact of non-tariff barriers on economic transformation processes in addition to trade. He hoped the secretariat would keep this in mind in the development of future country projects, including those financed by the Russian Federation. He had no objection to the decisions tabled for EXCOM’s approval.
7. The Chair concluded that EXCOM thanks the Chair of the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards for the comprehensive report. EXCOM appreciates being informed about the activities and achievements of the Steering Committee and being kept aware of future directions of its work.

(b) Decisions on matters related to the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards.

8. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the Programme of work of the Trade Subprogramme for 2020, as contained in document ECE/CTCS/2019/10; the revised terms of reference of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards, as contained in document ECE/CTCS/2019/12; and the revised programme of work of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards for 2019–2020, as contained in document ECE/CTCS/2019/11.

Item 4 - Matters relating to the Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships.

(a) Meeting with the Chair of the Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships:

9. The Chair of the Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships (CICPPP), Ms. Sedef Yavuz Noyan, made a presentation to EXCOM on the achievements of CICPPP over the past year and its plans for the future. She invited EXCOM to approve the programme of work of the Economic Cooperation and Integration Subprogramme for 2020 and the renewal of the mandate of the Team of Specialists on Innovation and Competitiveness Policies.

10. The representative of Belarus appreciated the Committee's work on the recommendations of the second Innovation for Sustainable Development Review of Belarus and associated training seminars. He thanked the secretariat for assisting in the organization of an international conference on improving well-being to take place in Minsk in September 2019, as well as for its participation in a forum on regional cooperation in Minsk in July 2019.

11. The representative of the United States expressed concern about the activities related to the Belt and Road Initiative, noting that it was inappropriate for UNECE and other UN agencies to promote the foreign policy initiatives of one country. She requested the cessation of such activities in order to protect the reputation of UNECE as a neutral, multilateral organization.

12. The representative of the Russian Federation said the activities of the Committee, including on technical assistance, were important for the achievement of the SDGs. He welcomed the report on the impact of the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution and noted the work on developing standards for public-private partnerships (PPPs) in accordance with international best practice. He supported the Committee's readiness to expand cooperation with other international organizations and hoped this would include the Eurasian Economic Union, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and could cover the development of an evaluation mechanism for innovation and PPPs. He had no objection to the decisions tabled for EXCOM's approval.

13. The representative of the European Union and its member States took note of the various standards issued for PPPs in areas such as railways and renewable energy. He said the EU and its member States would continue their engagement in activities such as the implementation of guidelines and standards on healthy policy, water and sanitation and urban rail.

14. The Chair concluded that EXCOM thanks the Chair of the Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships 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 Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships.

15. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the programme of work of the Economic Cooperation and Integration subprogramme for 2020 as contained in document ECE/CECI/2019/10 and the renewal of the mandate of the Team of Specialists on Innovation and Competitiveness Policies for an additional two years until 2021 as contained in document ECE/CECI/2019/2.

## INFORMAL SEGMENT

Item 5 – Twenty-five-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action: regional process.

16. The Executive Secretary introduced the draft provisional agenda for the Beijing+25 Regional Review Meeting as contained in informal document 2019/28/Rev.1, finalized following informal consultations with member States, and hoped EXCOM would be in a position to adopt it. She clarified that the official document symbol for the related meeting agenda would be ECE/AC.28/2019/1.

17. The representative of the United States concurred with the deletion by the Russian Federation of the term “sexual and reproductive health” in paragraph 13 and supported the use of the term “sex-aggregated data” rather than “gender-aggregated data” in paragraph 12. She objected to the phrase “gender transformative” in paragraph 11 and request that this be deleted, to be replaced possibly by language such as “policies for social protection and public services that can transform the status of women. *(These comments refer to an earlier version of the document that was further revised during informal consultations).*

18. The Chair noted that these concerns had been addressed in the version contained in 2019/28/Rev.1.

19. The representative of Switzerland was satisfied with the consensus on the draft agenda. He noted that this topic was important for Switzerland, who had volunteered to hold the co-presidency of the Regional Review Meeting.

20. The representative of the European Union and its member States was likewise satisfied with the agenda and looked forward to the Meeting.

21. The representative of the Russian Federation appreciated the constructive and flexible approach of member States at the informal consultations to finalize the draft agenda, and looked forward to continuing this cooperation. He thanked the representative of the United States for supporting the position of the Russian Federation on the above-mentioned issues and thought

the version tabled for adoption addressed these concerns in a satisfactory manner. He hoped the draft agenda would not prejudice the outcomes of the Meeting.

22. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the annotated provisional agenda for the Beijing +25 Regional Review Meeting, entitled “From commitments in Beijing to transformative results by 2030-Gender equality in the ECE region”, as contained in document ECE.AC.28/2019/1.

#### Item 6 - Update: possible Legally Binding Agreement on Forests in Europe

23. The Executive Secretary presented a letter, contained in informal document 2019/29, which she had received from the co-chair of the Forest Europe process, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic, Ms. Gabriela Matecna. The letter contained the Ministerial Decision on Resuming the Negotiations on a Legally Binding Agreement (LBA) on Forests in Europe. Paragraph 9 of this Decision invited UNECE, “with the support of FAO, to convene and service jointly further negotiations on a legally binding agreement of forests in Europe by setting up a negotiating process in an appropriate format based on the parameters contained in this decision.” She proposed that member States take note of this information and request the secretariat to convene informal meetings to consider the matter further.

24. The representative of Belarus supported the proposal of the Executive Secretary.

25. The representative of the United States accepted the proposal for informal consultations. She said the preference of the United States vis-à-vis options for Finalizing pan-European LBA negotiations was for a Forest Europe Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC), so as not to divert efforts from the work of organizations, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) or UNECE, that serve broader purposes. The United States did not believe it would be appropriate for any legally binding agreement on forests in Europe to be formally adopted by or under a UN body, and similarly favoured a Secretariat outside of the UN system. Regarding the specific request to UNECE under discussion, she said any servicing arrangement should ensure that there are not adverse impacts on the programs and budgets of the institutions involved, in order to ensure their continued capacity to fulfil their mandate and support all members. In considering options for servicing arrangements, the United States believed it would be most appropriate for organizations with a regional mandate and focus. For this reason, UNECE would be more appropriate to have a lead role with respect to LBA discussions. However, taking on this role should not detract from the core work of UNECE. Links with FAO must remain focused on the regional bodies: the UNECE Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry and the FAO European Forestry Commission. Any involvement with the LBA must be supported only by extrabudgetary resources. The United States would continue to engage in this process at UNECE, including informal consultations, to ensure the integrity of core work on forests by UNECE and FAO in the region.

26. The representative of Azerbaijan supported the proposal for informal consultations. She expressed interest in the possible LBA in light of Azerbaijan’s cooperation with UNECE and FAO on forests and the need to sustain efforts under the Bonn Challenge.

27. The representative of the European Union welcomed the Ministerial Decision and the proposal for informal consultations building on all the parameters included in the former. He

expressed readiness to engage in these consultations as early as September 2019, with a view to presenting outcomes to EXCOM before the end of the year. He invited the secretariat to liaise closely with FAO in servicing further negotiations and to provide additional information on the process and its timelines to all the parties listed in the Annex of the Ministerial Decision. He encouraged the secretariat to share the draft modalities of the negotiation process as soon as possible.

28. The representative of the Russian Federation supported the proposal for informal consultations. He expressed confidence that member States would achieve a shared understanding by working together in the negotiations, despite the complex and challenging nature of the topic.

29. The representative of France aligned with the representative of the European Union and its member States. France thought it important that the negotiations take place under the aegis of UNECE, in close cooperation with FAO.

30. The Chair concluded that EXCOM takes note of the information provided on a possible legally binding agreement on forests in Europe and requests the secretariat to organize informal consultations to consider the matter further.

#### Item 7 - Important new updates: briefing by the Executive Secretary

31. The Executive Secretary introduced to EXCOM Mr. Kire Ilioski, who had joined UNECE for a period of six months at the D-1 level in the Office of the Executive Secretary to support her in covering her representational and travel obligations.

32. The Executive Secretary recalled the discussions on the liquidity crisis faced by the secretariat from the previous meeting of EXCOM. This continued financial challenge had impacted UNECE under both Sections of its Regular Budget (Section 20 and 23). As 95 per cent of UNECE funding under Section 20 related to posts, there was little flexibility within UNECE to manage such cash flow limitations. Furthermore, discrepancies between the actual vacancy rate and the planned budget vacancy rate used to calculate the appropriation had led to payroll deficiencies in the 2018-2019 biennium. UNECE would continue to review all Regular Budget commitments going forward and would work to minimize any impact on mandate implementation. Monitoring priorities within the programme of work across the organization was an immediate requirement for all subprogramme managers. On this basis, UNECE continued to work with the Controller's Office to seek the release of currently restricted budgets within these focused areas, and had just received the full 2019 budget under Section 23 of the Regular Budget for the Regional Programme of Technical Cooperation. The Programme Management Office was working with all Regional Advisors to ensure a speedy resumption to full mandate delivery in this area. The cash flow situation would not impact extrabudgetary activities.

33. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM about the following planned Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs):

- i. An MoU with the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Azerbaijan, updating a 2010 MoU related to the National Policy Dialogues on Integrated Water Resources Management and Water Supply and Sanitation which

- support Azerbaijan in implementing the Water Convention and the Protocol on Water and Health and achieving the water and sanitation related SDGs.
- ii. An MoU with the Executive Secretariat of the 9th World Water Forum, which has invited UNECE to be a strategic partner for the priority topic of transboundary cooperation. The MoU set possible thematic areas and modalities for this cooperation and ultimately aimed to increase accession to the Water Convention and to foster the development of agreements and the establishment of institutions on shared rivers or aquifers in line with the Convention
  - iii. An MoU with the Organization of American States, aiming to provide a general framework for deepening existing collaboration on transboundary water cooperation in the region in the context of the globalization of the Water Convention.

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

- i. 6-8 June: St. Petersburg International Economic Forum
- ii. 18-19 June, Brussels: European Development Days
- iii. 24-25 June, New York: UN Special Thematic Session on Water and Disasters
- iv. 1-3 July, Dalian, China: World Economic Forum Annual Meeting of the New Champion

35. Regarding the UN Special Thematic Session on Water and Disasters, the representative of Switzerland appreciated the support of UNECE to a side event in New York presenting the Water Convention. She noted that the side event had proven extremely successful and given visibility to the Convention.

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

- i. 9-18 July, New York: High-level Political Forum
- ii. 13-15 August, Turkmenistan: 1st Caspian Economic Forum
- iii. 11-13 September, Prague: OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum

37. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM that the dates for the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development 2020 had been confirmed as 19 and 20 March 2020. Switzerland had signed the contract with the International Conference Center of Geneva to host the meeting. The Executive Secretary recalled the significant growth and success of the Regional Forum in the past two years. She underlined that, in light of the ending of the current extrabudgetary project to finance the event, new financial contributions were needed to maintain this growth. UNECE hoped to secure enough donors and introduce a new extrabudgetary project at the following EXCOM meeting. She encouraged member States to consider contributions.

#### Item 8 – Extrabudgetary projects (for approval)

38. Regarding the project “Improve understanding of the UNECE member States on the role, potential and challenges of nuclear energy in achieving sustainable development and climate change goals” contained in informal document 2019/33, the representative of the European Union and its member States requested further information on the following questions:

- i. How could member States be assured that there would be no conflict of interest, given that the donor was the World Nuclear Association, which was a worldwide umbrella of private companies building and selling nuclear reactors?
- ii. What would be the actual outcome of the project, and how would this outcome be used?
- iii. What was the purpose of the “deep dives” mentioned in the project?

39. Expressing support for the questions raised by the European Union, the representative of Switzerland further inquired if this project proposal had been discussed by the Bureau of the Committee on Sustainable Energy at its 24 June meeting.

40. The representative of the United States seconded the above-mentioned questions, especially with respect to the prospective donor.

41. The Executive Secretary explained that this project would be a part of a larger, existing one called “Pathways Project”, which had already been approved by EXCOM some time ago. The goal of the Pathways Project was to examine, in different deep dives, options available to member States to achieve the Paris Agreement and the energy and climate-related SDGs using various energy mixes. UNECE did not intend to work on nuclear energy but would simply consider it as one of many sources used in the energy mix of many member States. She noted that the World Nuclear Association was a non-governmental organization accredited with the Economic and Social Council and had an MoU with the International Atomic Energy Agency. UNECE had carried out a due diligence review of this donor in line with the relevant procedure adopted by EXCOM in September 2017 and the Executive Secretary had declared it to be a suitable partner based on this review. Three quarters of project funds would, in fact, come from state-owned entities in France, Czechia, the Russian Federation and Spain, who were members of the World Nuclear Association. The project would be managed by UNECE in accordance with all relevant UN rules and regulations.

42. The Director of the Sustainable Energy Division further explained “deep dive” concept mentioned in the project related to taking a comprehensive look at the potential of various energy sources to help achieve the SDGs, and noted that this exercise had taken place before, for example for gas. He said that the outcome of the extrabudgetary project would be an advisory report what would undergo a public review process.

43. The representative of the European Union and its member States thanked the secretariat for the clarifications but said the European Union was not yet in a position to put forward a position on the project.

44. The Chair raised the question if a silent procedure could be used for the approval of this project following the EXCOM meeting.

45. The representative of the European Union and its member States inquired whether EXCOM had an agreed process regarding silent procedures.

46. The Secretary of the Commission noted that a silence procedure was currently not a standing practice for XB approval by EXCOM. She noted, however, that this extrabudgetary project had been tabled at EXCOM and that an initial discussion on it had been held. If there was consensus, member States could consider agreeing on a silent procedure in this particular



instance and could clarify that this was not meant to set a precedent for future approval modalities. The secretariat would be guided by member States.

47. The representative of the European Union and its member States opposed the use of the silent procedure.

48. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the extrabudgetary project contained in informal documents 2019/30, 2019/31, 2019/32, 2019/34, 2019/35, 2019/36 and 2019/37.

Item 9 – Other business

49. The Chair informed EXCOM that the next meeting would take place on 14 October 2019.

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