

**ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE**  
**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**  
125th Meeting  
Geneva, 30 November 2022

**EXCOM/CONCLU/125**

**CHAIR'S CONCLUSIONS**

## FORMAL SEGMENT

### Item 1 – Adoption of the agenda

1. The provisional draft agenda for the 125th meeting was adopted.

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

2. The conclusions from the 124th meeting of EXCOM (EXCOM/CONCLU/124) were adopted.

### Item 3 - Update on Special Procedures during the COVID-19 period and meeting servicing arrangements

3. The Secretary of the Commission informed that, since the last meeting of EXCOM, fourteen (14) silence procedures had been concluded related to formal meetings with remote participation, namely the 85th meeting of the Global Forum for Road Traffic Safety, the 14th session of the Working Party on Automated/Autonomous and Connected Vehicles, the 124th session of the Working Party on General Safety Provisions, the 161st session of the Working Party on Customs Questions affecting Transport, the 28th session of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) Plenary, the 31st session of the Committee on Sustainable Energy, the 66th session of the Working Party on Inland Water Transport, the 117th session of the Working Party on Road Transport, the 65th session of the Working Party on Intermodal Transport and Logistics, the 87th session of the Working Party on Lighting and Light-Signaling, the 79th session of the Working Party on the Transport of Perishable Foodstuffs, the 112th session of the Working Party on the Transport of Dangerous Goods, the 188th session of the World Forum for Harmonization of Vehicle Regulations and the 76th session of the Working Party on Rail Transport. The silence had not been broken for these procedures and their respective decisions were thus considered adopted. Full details were available on the UNECE website.
4. The Chair recalled that the special procedures during the COVID-19 period were currently set to expire on 30 December 2022. He proposed that they be extended until 15 May 2023 as outlined in ECE/EX/2022/L.15, to ensure business continuity, taking into account a potential continuation or resumption of COVID-mitigation measures.
5. The representative of the European Union and its member States expressed appreciation for the continuation of the special procedures. He also encouraged further reflection on future modalities for UNECE meetings, considering virtual, in person and hybrid formats. He added that such a reflection should acknowledge the practical and environmental benefits of virtual and hybrid meetings, while recognizing the challenges these might pose for a constructive group dynamic.
6. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the decision to extend until 15 May 2023 the Special Procedures during the COVID-19 period, as contained in

Item 4 - Matters relating to the Committee on Sustainable Energy:

a) Meeting with the Chair of the Committee on Sustainable Energy

7. The Chair welcomed the Chair of the Committee on Sustainable Energy, Mr. Jürgen Keinhorst (Germany), who made a presentation to EXCOM on the achievements of the Committee over the past year and its plans for future work. EXCOM was invited to approve the programme of work of the sustainable energy subprogramme for 2023, as well as the extension of the mandates of two task forces.
8. The representative of European Union and its member States appreciated the Committee's work, in particular on sustainable resource management and coal mine methane. He also welcomed the key discussions on renewable energy as well as on energy resilience, especially in the current context of unprecedented high gas prices and market volatility. He pointed out that this situation has been since exacerbated by Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine and its weaponization of gas through subsequent cuts in gas supplies in recent months, which casts a dark shadow on the work done by the Committee and its subsidiary bodies. He requested that particular attention be paid by the secretariat when drafting reports, in particular when referring to interventions delivered by members regarding the unjustified and unprovoked aggression of Russia against Ukraine.
9. The representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland welcomed the work of the Committee in accelerating the global transition from coal to clean power and supporting countries to use a diverse net zero energy mix. She commended UNECE for its contribution to COP 27 and its leadership on the important and sometimes overlooked issue of critical raw material management. The United Kingdom government is contributing, through the British Geological Survey, to UNECE advancement of the UN Framework for Resource Classification and Resource Management System. She expressed support for the comments made by the European Union on the impact of Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine on energy resilience in the region and worldwide.
10. The representative of the Russian Federation rejected the points made by the European Union and the United Kingdom with regards to the attacks on energy infrastructure in Ukraine. She stated that the energy supply crisis was not the result of the special military operation in Donbass and in Ukraine, but the result of a mistaken energy policy led by Western countries for many years. She expressed support to the Committee's efforts to put in place a rational use of energy through sustainable sources and welcomed the UN Framework for Resource Classification and Resource Management System.
11. The representative of Ukraine expressed gratitude to all member States who support Ukraine in this difficult time of unjustifiable Russian aggression against his country and who had imposed sanctions. These hostile acts had led to catastrophic effects, not only on Ukraine but also on its neighbors and people across the globe, exacerbating already rising food and energy prices. Russia's actions were the most significant factor inflating the global prices. Russian missile attacked not only military infrastructure, but agriculture enterprises, food and petroleum depots, energy and water supply

infrastructure. This caused electricity blackouts, and heating and water supply disruption.

12. The representative of Moldova appreciated the reporting from the Committee Chair and the assistance received by her country, including the training provided by the ECE secretariat in January 2022 on energy efficiency and renewable energy hard talks. She supported a shift in the sustainable energy program of work, as the most pressing issue faced by Moldova and several member States from the region was accessibility of energy. She explained that, further to the missile attacks on neighboring energy infrastructure in Ukraine in October and November, the Republic of Moldova had twice faced massive electricity blackouts. This situation had exacerbated the ongoing struggle to secure sufficient energy supplies after a sharp reduction of natural gas deliveries and ahead of a harsh winter.
13. The Chair concluded that EXCOM thanks the Chair of the Committee on Sustainable Energy 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 relating to the Committee on Sustainable Energy

14. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the programme of work of the sustainable energy subprogramme for 2023, as contained in document ECE/ENERGY/2022/1. EXCOM approves the extension of the mandates of the Task Force on Industrial Energy Efficiency and the Task Force on Digitalization in Energy under the Group of Experts on Energy Efficiency, as contained in document ECE/ENERGY/143, for the period 2023–2024.

Item 5 - Matters relating to the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT):

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

15. The Chair welcomed the Chair of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT), Ms. Sue Probert (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland), who made a presentation to EXCOM on the achievements of the UN/CEFACT over the past year and its plans for the future. She invited EXCOM to approve the programme of work of the UN/CEFACT and the extension of the mandate of one team of specialists.
16. The representative of Kyrgyzstan thanked UNECE for its support, particularly the technical assistance aimed at the strengthening the capacity of the National Trade Facilitation Council to implement the WTO/TFA. More than 100 experts of the Kyrgyz Center had been trained on business process analysis, on export of textile products and import of pharmaceutical products to and from the Russian Federation. He highlighted his country's strong interest in the ongoing EU-funded UNECE project for enhancing the sustainability and circularity of the textile industry in Kyrgyzstan.
17. The representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

recognized the importance of UN/CEFACT standards in supporting the digitization of trade documents and processes, facilitating cross-border trade and improving traceability along international supply chains. The contribution of UN/CEFACT had been highlighted in a recent WTO/World Economic Forum report entitled *The Promise of trade tech, Policy approaches to harness trade digitalization*, which emphasized the importance of promoting wider use of semantic libraries such as that developed by UN/CEFACT. She commended the UN/CEFACT work on practical tools for the circular economy, theme of the 69th session of the Commission, and noted the ongoing relevance of this work in the context of the upcoming 70th session on *Digital and green transformations for sustainable development*.

18. The representative of the United States of America also commended UN/CEFACT for its tireless efforts to facilitate trade and reduce cross-border transaction costs. He reiterated a point already made in the UN/CEFACT plenary, namely that while there was an infinite amount of work to do on trade facilitation, the secretariat resources were not equally infinite. He suggested informal consultations between the UN/CEFACT Bureau, the secretariat and interested member States to discuss UN/CEFACT strategic direction in more detail and ensure that UN/CEFACT could continue to provide important contributions, such as the one previously discussed in the case of Kyrgyzstan.
19. The representative of the European Union and its member States highlighted the relevance of the UN/CEFACT continued work on trade facilitation and electronic business, especially in a context of supply chain problems and trade barriers. He added that UN/CEFACT contributions were highly relevant for the green and digital transitions, theme of the upcoming session of the Commission in April. He welcomed the UN/CEFACT SPECA programme activities as well as the intersectoral cooperation on sustainable mobility and smart connectivity within UNECE.
20. The representative of the Russian Federation expressed his delegation's satisfaction with the implementation of the UN/CEFACT project funded by the Russian Federation in Kyrgyzstan. He welcomed the fact that UN/CEFACT is contributing its expertise to the cross-cutting theme of the 70th session of the Commission on the question of digital and green transformations for sustainable development. He supported the plans of UN/CEFACT to continue to assess the problems of digitalization and dematerialization of processes.
21. The representative of Azerbaijan reported on the conclusions of an international conference held in Baku in October 2022 that had been attended by the ECE Executive Secretary, among other high-ranking officials, entitled *Digitalization of information exchange and supply chains using UN standards*. It highlighted that the SPECA region would greatly benefit from a solid assessment of the state of digitalization of transport routes and procedures. The conference had also noted the benefits of launching a project for fostering digital trade in Azerbaijan. She invited interested donors to support this pilot project as a good investment into future sustainable connectivity of the Euro Asian region.
22. The Chair of the UN/CEFACT welcomed the proposal by the representative of the United States for informal consultations on UN/CEFACT priorities. She also highlighted the need for succession planning in UN/CEFACT, as the Chair's position and that of four vice-chairs were up for renewal in November 2023. She raised a final point of concern regarding the implementation of the UN/LOCODE system. The number of requests had

grown so large that a new system was needed to address them. Related questions regarding ICT security remained unresolved. She called for support from interested donors.

23. 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 relating to the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT)

24. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the programme of work of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) as contained in document ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2022/21/Rev.1, for the period 2023-2024. EXCOM approves the extension of the mandate of the Team of Specialists on Environmental, Social and Governance Traceability of Sustainable Value Chains in the Circular Economy of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT), as contained in document ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2021/23/Rev.1, for the period 2023-2025.

Item 6 - Matters relating to the Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry:

a) Meeting with the Chair of the Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry

25. The Chair welcomed the Chair of the Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry (COFFI), Mr. Peter Blombäck (Sweden), who remotely made a presentation to EXCOM on the achievements of the Committee over the past year and its plans for the future. He invited EXCOM to approve the latest programme of work of the Forests and the Forest Industry Subprogramme, as well as the renewal of the mandate of a Working Party.

26. The representative of the European Union and its member States emphasized the key role of forests for climate change mitigation and adaptation. Urban forests, one of the thematic focus areas of the 80th session of the Committee, had particular relevance as a nature-based solution and were part of the essential infrastructure needed to deliver on sustainable development, climate action, disaster risk reduction, biodiversity conservation and sustainable cities.

27. The representative of the Russian Federation noted with satisfaction the quality of the work of UNECE and the committee regarding forestry, both during the session and in technical cooperation projects. She regretted that this year, it had not been possible to agree on a joint statement on the Committee's work.

28. The representative of Moldova expressed gratitude for UNECE support provided in assessing the potential for the production of regeneration material in the context of national plans for reforestation and forest landscape restoration. This assistance was needed to support the modernization of the network of forest nurseries in her country, while maintaining and preserving natural forest ecosystems to ensure ecological

regeneration, reconstruction, and replacement of invasive species with native ones.

29. The Chair concluded that EXCOM thanks the Chair of the Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry 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 relating to the Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry

30. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the programme of work of the Forests and the Forest Industry Subprogramme for 2023, as contained in document ECE/TIM/2022/6. EXCOM approves the renewal of the mandate of the Joint ECE/FAO Working Party on Forest Statistics, Economics and Management, as contained in document ECE/TIM/2022/2, for the period 2022–2026.

### **INFORMAL SEGMENT**

#### Item 7 - Preparations for the seventieth session of the Economic Commission for Europe

31. The Secretary of the Commission said that member States had convened five informal consultations and that, thanks to the flexibility shown by all delegations, agreement had been reached on a number of documents, including the provisional annotated agenda and several draft decisions that are proposed to EXCOM for onward transmission to the Commission for its consideration.
32. The Chair concluded that EXCOM decided to adopt the provisional annotated agenda for the seventieth Commission session as contained in informal document 2022/45. EXCOM decided to submit the draft decisions contained in informal document 2022/42/Rev1 to the seventieth session of the Commission for consideration under agenda item 7 “Other issues calling for decision by the Commission.” EXCOM also agreed to the draft decision, as contained in informal document 2022/44, as amended in the room.
33. The Chair requested the secretariat to inform the Budget Office of the revised text and submit to the next EXCOM the accompanying oral statement on the related Programme Budget Implication that will allow EXCOM to transmit the issue to the Commission for consideration under item 7 “Other issues calling for decision by the Commission.”

#### Item 8 – Preparations for the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development 2023

34. The Executive Secretary informed of recent informal consultations on the preparation of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development and proposed to EXCOM to approve the onward submission to the seventieth session of the Commission of a draft decision on the extension of the mandate for the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (RFSD) and an evaluation prepared pursuant to decision C(69) of the Commission. She also invited EXCOM to approve the draft agenda for the 2023 RFSD. She explained that no extrabudgetary project covering the funding needs for the Forum was being tabled at the 125th meeting of EXCOM. She thanked those Missions who were actively trying to

mobilize funding for the Forum in their capitals and she appealed again to all member States to explore the possibility of a financial contribution. She added that an XB project would be submitted at the 126th meeting of EXCOM.

35. The representative of the European Union and its member States expressed their appreciation for the work of the Secretariat on the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development.
36. The Chair concluded that EXCOM agrees to submit to the consideration of the 70th session of the Commission the draft decision on the extension of the mandate to convene the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, as contained in informal document 2022/34, and the evaluation of the Regional Forum as contained in informal document 2022/35. EXCOM approves the provisional agenda of the seventh session of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the ECE Region to be held on 29 and 30 March 2023.

#### Item 9 – Extrabudgetary projects (for approval)

37. The representative of Ukraine expressed support for the overall road safety goals but stated that project XB 37 (*Global Road Safety Campaign*) needed further improvement. In particular, he questioned if social media channels were appropriate for the identified target audience (i.e. children aged 6 to 8) and how they would be reached. Additionally, he expressed doubts about the chosen character for producing a public service announcement video clip. Finally, the issue of the use of copyright under the auspices of UNECE needed to be explained in more detail. He requested EXCOM to postpone the review of this project to the next meeting.
38. The Executive Secretary stated that, with regard to the extrabudgetary project contained in informal documents 2022/41, a due diligence process had been undertaken. In the spirit of full transparency, she wished to inform that the risk connected to this particular donor had been assessed as “medium” and highlighted some findings of the assessment. Upon request, interested delegations were welcome to consult the due diligence report in the secretariat offices in person. In response to some clarifications sought by member States, the Deputy Executive Secretary added that as part of the risk mitigation approach considered for this project, relevant findings would be kept under close review during the implementation phase, in as much as they related to the project scope.
39. The representative of the European Union and its member States took note of the Ukrainian remarks and stated they would not object to the proposal to postpone the consideration of project 2022/37. In light of the new information brought to the table, he also proposed to further consider project 2022/41 at the next EXCOM meeting.
40. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the extrabudgetary projects contained in informal documents 2022/38, 39 and 40. EXCOM will further consider the extrabudgetary projects contained in informal documents 2022/37 and 41.

#### Item 9 - Briefing by the Executive Secretary: Important new developments and key upcoming



events.

41. Regarding cooperation with other organizations, the Executive Secretary informed EXCOM of a Memorandum of Understanding under preparation, on behalf of the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Road Safety, with the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP). IACP was an international organization with members in 168 countries, focused on cultivating the policing profession around the globe, with significant experience implementing road safety projects. The expected outcomes were: (i) in-country coordination with IACP network for engagement of high-level members of the police force, (ii) information sharing on local road safety situations, (iii) alignment of in-country follow-up action, as well as planning of events and capacity building activities, as possible, focusing on developing countries.
42. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM of her attendance to the following recent meetings and missions:
  - **3 October, San Marino:** 83rd Session of the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land management
  - **5-7 October, Nicosia:** 9th Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference and Special Session of the Committee on Environmental Policy
  - **10-11 October, Kiyv, Ukraine**

The Executive Secretary explained that she had travelled to Ukraine to discuss a number of official requests for UNECE assistance from the Ukrainian government. She had met with **Deputy Minister of Communities and Territories Development**, and the Chair of the State housing agency. Another meeting had been with the **Deputy Minister of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources for European integration** when assessment of the environmental damage caused by the war was discussed.

Additional planned meetings with the Minister of Energy and the Vice Prime Minister had to be cancelled, as Kiyv had been under rocket attack on the day of the Executive Secretary visit. She added that she had joined the Secretary-General in his urgent call for an immediate cessation of hostilities, the full applications of the General Assembly resolutions on Ukraine's territorial integrity and the upholding of the principles of international law and expressed her solidarity with the people of Ukraine.

- **12-14 October, Moscow:** Russia Energy Week

The Executive Secretary stated that, in the lead up to COP 27, she had taken part in discussions at the Russian Energy Week in Moscow on 13 October on fostering international cooperation on hydrogen (H<sub>2</sub>). She said she had called on the Russian Federation to take its share of responsibility in the collective effort to deliver carbon neutrality and to limit global warming.

During her intervention, she had called for the application of the resolutions of the General Assembly on Ukraine's territorial integrity, respect for the principles of the UN Charter and adherence to international law, and had reiterated the UN Secretary General's urgent calls for an immediate cessation of hostilities.

She had also spoken at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations repeating the call for respect for the principles of the UN Charter and adherence to international law, She had stressed in front of students and the rector that: "There is no Sustainable Development without peace, and no peace without Sustainable Development."

- **17 October, Geneva:** Towards COP27: UNECE Regional forum on Climate Initiatives to Finance Climate Action and the SDGs
- **19-20 October, Venice:** Meeting of the Regional Collaborative Platform for Europe and Central Asia (RCP-ECA)
- **21 October, Geneva:** Biannual ES Ambassadorial Meeting (COP27 and 6th MoP Water)
- **25-28 October, New York City:** Second Committee meeting with RECs, Chief Executives Board (CEB)
- **31<sup>st</sup> October, Baku:** SPECA International High-level Conference on Digital transformation of Information Exchange in Supply Chains Using United Nations Standards
- **2-4 November, Geneva:** 80th session of the ECE Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry
- **7-13 November, Sharm-el-Sheikh:** UNFCCC COP 27
- **16-18 November, Geneva:** 6th session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Water and Health
- **16-17 November, Almaty:** SPECA Economic Forum and Governing Council

The 17th SPECA Governing Council and the SPECA Economic Forum were held in Almaty on 16-18 November, chaired by Kazakhstan. UNECE had been represented by the Deputy Executive Secretary. A new level of ambition emerged from the deliberations of the participating countries. The negotiations on the final decisions were to be finalized by mid-December. The Executive Secretary thanked Kazakhstan for its leadership in SPECA this year and welcomed Azerbaijan as the incoming chair in 2023.

- **18-19 November, Malta:** Summit on Digital Diplomacy and Governance
- **21-22 November 2022, Geneva:** 15th meeting of the Standing Working Group on Ageing
- **28 November - 6 December, Geneva:** ECOSOC Sub-Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods (61st session)
- **29 November – 1<sup>st</sup> December:** 12th meeting of the Conference of the Parties of the Industrial Accidents Convention (30th anniversary)

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

- **5-6 December, Geneva:** 39th UN/CEFACT Forum
- **12-16 December, Geneva:** 42nd Executive Body of the Air Convention
- **13-16 December, Geneva:** 77th meeting of the Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee
- **15-17 December, Montreal:** Convention on Biodiversity COP 15
- **20 December – virtual youth consultation.** After UNECE 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, the organization will hold virtual discussions on the future of the ECE region with youth representatives UNECE member States have been invited to designate. The Executive

Secretary also encouraged Permanent Missions to include youth delegates in their delegations for the 70th session of the Commission.

- **21-24 February 2023, Geneva:** 85th session of the Inland Transport Committee. The topic of next year's Ministerial meeting is "**Actions of the inland transport sector to join the global fight against climate change**". The Executive Secretary thanked Switzerland for its generous support for this event and invited other member States that may be interested to support it to contact the ITC secretariat.

The High-level segment will finish with the adoption of the Ministerial Declaration: "**Harnessing the full potential of inland transport solutions in the global fight against climate change**". She called for record numbers of UNECE member States supporting this very important document.

40. The representative of the United States of America thanked the 36 other member States who expressed support for the content of the joint letter sent to the Executive Secretary. He summarized the content of the letter, which shared the concern of a large group of member States about the Executive Secretary's mission to Moscow to attend the Russian Energy Week, a multi-day event broadcast on Russian state media and headlined by President Putin's speech. He stated that the Executive Secretary's participation had created the false and harmful impression that the United Nations did not object to Russia's war against Ukraine or Russian energy policies, which were causing immense harm to energy markets, countries, and populations globally. He noted that this event was not part of the previous EXCOM key upcoming events' list. He hoped that, in the future, the updates by the Executive Secretary would include any potential events where head of State or Minister level participation was expected, even if unconfirmed on UNECE side.
41. The representative of Sweden, on behalf of the European Union member States who signed the aforementioned letter, questioned the appropriateness of the Executive Secretary's participation in the Russian Energy Week, at a time of great destruction of Ukraine's critical energy infrastructure by Russia. He supported the proposal by the United States that member States were informed and consulted in advance of any intent to attend an event in which Head of State or ministerial level representatives were expected to participate. He suggested that the EXCOM agenda should contain the item past and future missions and meetings or relevance.
42. The representative of Ukraine thanked the Executive Secretary for her brave visit to Kyiv, amid the bombings. He shared his surprise regarding the Executive Secretary's subsequent visit to Moscow. He expressed support for the statements made by the representatives from the United States and Sweden, on behalf of the European Union member States.
43. The representative of Montenegro notified of his country's support for the aforementioned letter. He explained that the Permanent Mission had not been able to communicate this support in time, due to massive cyber-attacks on his government IT infrastructure.
44. The representative of the Russian Federation categorically rejected the accusations leveled against her country regarding plans to conduct strikes on energy infrastructure. She thanked the Executive Secretary of UNECE for attending the Russian Energy Week in Moscow. She stated that the Russian Federation very much valued the

committed and independent position of the Executive Secretary and her desire for UNECE to be preserved as a non-politicized forum for discussion of topical social, economic and environmental issues. She called upon UNECE member States to respect the remit of the Executive Secretary and to avoid any politicized statements and hindrance of the work of the UNECE. She expressed the hope that this period of turbulence could be rapidly overcome in order to return to a degree of professionalism in the interregional relations.

45. The representative of the United Kingdom expressed support and aligned with the comments from the United States and Sweden, on behalf of the European Union member States. She added that the United Kingdom was a signatory to the joint letter cited by the United States of America. She reiterated the United Kingdom unequivocal condemnation of Russia's illegal and unjustified attacks against Ukraine, which had set back the cause of sustainable development in the region significantly.
46. The Executive Secretary thanked delegations for the frank exchange. She noted that in her actions she was strictly aligned with the UNECE mandate. She considered it critically important for the United Nations to gain and maintain the confidence and cooperation of all its member States in order to operate independently and effectively, especially in situations that are politically charged. The oath of office committed her to the principles of the United Nations Charter. She recalled that Article 101 referred to the highest standards of integrity in UN personnel. According to Staff Regulation 1.2 on the basic rights and obligations of staff, *“the concept of integrity includes, but is not limited to, probity, impartiality, fairness, honesty and truthfulness in all matters affecting their work and status.”* She concluded by quoting former Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld who had once said: *“If the international civil servant knows himself to be free from such personal influences in his actions and guided solely by the common aims and rules laid down for, and by the Organization he serves and by recognised legal principles, then he has done his duty, and then he can face the criticism which, even so, will be unavoidable. As I said, at the final last, this is a question of integrity, and if integrity in the sense of respect for law and respect truth were to drive him into positions of conflict for this or that interest, then that conflict is a sign of his neutrality and not of his failure to observe neutrality – then it is in line, not in conflict with, his duties as an international civil servant.”*

#### Item 10 – Any other business

47. The representative of Belarus reiterated the position of her delegation regarding the further extension of the Memorandum of Understanding between the European Commission services and UNECE of 2009 for the period from 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2024. This memorandum concerned the implementation of the European Agreement concerning Work of Crews of Vehicles engaged in International Road Transport by non-EU contracting parties to AETR. This year, the AETR contracting parties had not been able to reach an agreement on the further extension of the memorandum because of its alleged intentional violations by the European Commission services. She stressed that the secretariat extended the memorandum on behalf of non-EU AETR contracting parties and by the agreement of all AETR contracting parties. Therefore, Belarus did not recognize the legitimacy of the vote or the associated decision by the Working Party on Road Transport on the matter. She expressed the hope that the secretariat would not take a one-sided position and would provide a platform for dialogue and finding a pragmatic solution on the matter.

48. The representative of the Russian Federation aligned with the statement made by Belarus. She expressed disappointment at the politicized decision taken by those involved in its implementation. Refusal to cooperate with Russian and Belarusian carriers has jeopardized their fulfillment of obligations under the AETR. She called on the UNECE Secretariat not to sign the related extension, which affected countries which were not European Union member States, until a solution acceptable to all AETR Contracting Parties is found.
49. The representative of the European Union and its member States declared that the decision had been taken in the relevant Working Party SC.1 in line with its procedures and should be respected.
50. The UNECE secretariat, through the Director of the Sustainable Transport Division, Mr. Yuwei Li, explained that, in the past, contracting parties of the AETR agreement reached consensus and authorized the secretariat to sign the Memorandum of Understanding and its extensions with the European Commission to certify the operation of the AETR system. Unfortunately, the contracting parties of the AETR agreement had not been able to reach consensus this year and subsequently, the issue was further raised at the level of the Working Party on Road Transport (SC.1). There, through voting, SC.1 had adopted a decision to authorize the secretariat to sign the extension with the European Commission and the Joint Research Center. He added that, as it was an unusual situation, the secretariat was still reviewing its legal implications. The secretariat respected the decisions of intergovernmental bodies, including the one from SC.1, and needed to complete the legal review and internal formalities.
51. The Chair informed EXCOM that its next meeting would take place on 13 January in the morning and wished delegations happy holidays, thanking them for the good collaboration throughout the year.

\*\*\*\*\*