

**ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE**  
**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**  
126th Meeting  
Geneva, 13 January 2023

**EXCOM/CONCLU/126**

**CHAIR'S CONCLUSIONS**

## FORMAL SEGMENT

### Item 1 – Adoption of the agenda

1. The provisional draft agenda for the 126th meeting was adopted.

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

2. The conclusions from the 125th meeting of EXCOM (EXCOM/CONCLU/125) 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, four silence procedures had been concluded related to formal meetings with remote participation, namely the 77th session of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards, the 6th session of the Working Party on Public-Private Partnerships, the 72nd session of the Working Party on Passive Safety and the 5th session of the Group of Experts on Legal Instrument on Automated Vehicles. 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 Secretary of the Commission informed that UNOG had decided to adjust its COVID-19 response and lift the remaining measure in place. Participants and personnel were no longer required to wear masks on all UN Geneva premises. She reminded, nevertheless, that special procedures during the COVID-19 applicable to EXCOM were still valid until 15 May 2023 as outlined in ECE/EX/2022/L.15, to ensure business continuity, and also taking into account a potential continuation or resumption of COVID-mitigation measures.

### Item 4 - Matters relating to the Conference of European Statisticians:

#### a) Meeting with the Chair of the Conference of European Statisticians

5. The Chair welcomed the Chair of the Conference of European Statisticians, Mr. Padraig Dalton (Ireland), who made a presentation to EXCOM on the achievements of the Conference over the past year and its plans for the future. He invited EXCOM to approve the latest programme of work of the statistics subprogramme, as well as the terms of reference of five teams of specialists.
6. The representative of Belarus noted the high practical relevance of the work undertaken by the Conference of European Statisticians, especially the support to countries of the region regarding systems of national accounting or research work for measuring globalization, digitization, well-being, informal economy and communication. She commended the support Belarus received to create its gender statistics web portal.

7. The representative of Serbia expressed great appreciation for the capacity building support rendered to the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia. He highlighted the preparation and conduct of the 2022 population census, which was the first fully digital census in Serbia where data was collected by mobile devices and integrated geospatial and statistical data. Serbia also noted his country's involvement in unity projects such as the machine learning project undertaken between 2020 and 2022, which empowers Serbian IT teams to create, develop and deploy machine learning algorithms for the population census. With support from UNECE, the Statistical Office of Republic of Serbia had organized a global workshop on the modernization of official statistics in 2022.
8. The representative of Switzerland commended UNECE and its Statistical Division for their achievements, which have allowed official statistics to modernize, to address emerging challenges and to strengthen evidence-based policy making. He recalled the fact that, in June 2022, the Conference of European Statisticians had been able to convene in person in Geneva, which allowed for more exchanges and enhanced cooperation in the region. He noted also the joint session held by the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management with the ECE region.
9. The representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland noted that its Office of National Statistics is closely engaged in the work of the Conference. She emphasized the need for modern statistics, which not only help to drive domestic innovation around big data and automation, but also are essential to a well informed and democratic society. She also emphasized the importance of statistical legislation.
10. The representative of the European Union and its member States appreciated the work of the Conference, in particular in response to the COVID 19 crisis and the data measurement issues associated with it. He welcomed the important discussions on geospatial information as well as on forms of employment and international migration.
11. The representative of Albania thanked the UNECE Statistics Division for its efforts to assess progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and to strengthen official statistics at the national and international levels for evidence-based policy making.
12. The representative of Norway commended the Chair of the Conference of European Statisticians and the secretariat for the work carried out over the past year, from the core statistical conceptual developments to the organization and modernization of the national statistics offices in the region. She welcomed the efforts to ensure coordination with other regional actors in this field, namely the OECD and Eurostat. She recognized the important role of the Conference in the methodological work on official statistics that are implemented also in other regions and at the global level. In particular, she noted the generic statistical business process model that Norway utilized in their own development cooperation efforts.
13. The representative of the Russian Federation commended the technical assistance provided by the Conference. She highlighted UNECE support in organizing and conducting censuses in countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) that had been particularly fruitful in bolstering the capacities of national statistical departments, for instance on migration, poverty and inequality. She noted that the relevance of statistical material depended on how complete and how representative its underlying data was and emphasized the importance of an impartial and objective

approach to the work of the Conference.

14. The Chair concluded that EXCOM thanks the Chair of the Conference of European Statisticians for the comprehensive report. EXCOM appreciates being informed about the activities and achievements of the Conference and being kept aware of future directions of its work.
15. The Executive Secretary thanked the Director of the Statistics Director, Ms. Lidia Bratanova, for her leadership and achievements. Wishing her all the best in her upcoming retirement, she recalled that Ms. Bratanova had joined UNECE in 1996 and had been Director of the Division since 2009.
16. The representative of Bulgaria joined the Executive Secretary in recognizing Ms. Bratanova's expertise and contributions to the work of UNECE.

b) Decisions on matters relating to the Conference of European Statisticians

17. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the programme of work of the Statistics subprogramme for 2023 as contained in documents ECE/CES/2022/16 and ECE/CES/2022/16/Add.1. EXCOM approves the terms of reference, for the period 2023–2027, of the following teams of specialists established under the Conference of European Statisticians:
  - (a) Steering Group on statistical legislation;
  - (b) Steering Group on consumer price indices;
  - (c) Steering Group on statistics for SDGs;
  - (d) Steering Group on measuring poverty and inequality;
  - (e) Steering Group on population and housing censuses.

Item 5 - Matters relating to the Committee on Environmental Policy

a) Meeting with the Chair of the Committee on Environmental Policy

18. The Chair welcomed the Chair of the Committee on Environmental Policy, Ms. Elisabete Quintas (Portugal), who made a presentation to EXCOM on the achievements of the Committee over the past year and its plans for the future. She invited EXCOM to approve the latest programme of work of the Environment subprogramme and renew/extend the mandate of three subsidiary bodies.
19. The representative of the European Union and its member States stated that the visible effects of climate change, the energy crisis and the dramatic effects of the Russian aggression on Ukraine, including on the environment, all highlighted the environmental challenges faced by the UNECE region and the importance of the UNECE work on the environment. He further noted highlights of this year, such as the declaration of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference in Nicosia, progress in the globalization of the water Convention and towards better management of technological risks of accidents triggered by natural hazards, as well as the landmark election of Mr. Michel Frost as the world's first special rapporteur on environmental defenders. One important UNECE contribution would be the assessment of the environmental consequences of the military aggression against Ukraine for both the country and the surrounding region. He welcomed

the good cooperation with the European Environment Agency and the European Commission and suggested to further develop such cooperation on the ground, including through EU delegations in partner countries. For 2023, he looked forward to the implementation of outcomes of the Nicosia Ministerial Conference, in particular the development of a proposal on a region-wide approach to sustainable infrastructure.

20. The representative of Georgia expressed the utmost concern regarding the devastating effect caused by the unprovoked military aggression against Ukraine and reiterated his support to the people of Ukraine. He noted that Georgia considered air pollution a key concern and his government had taken steps to reduce it, including through the framework of the UNECE Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution. He thanked UNECE for the organization with the Georgian Ministry of Environment of the National Dialogue on Clean Air in October 2022 and stated that his government was discussing possibilities to ratify the key protocols of the Convention.
21. The representative of the Russian Federation expressed her disappointment about the format of the 9th Ministerial Conference on the Environment for Europe, in particular the failure to invite the Russian Federation to that event. The Russian Federation had actively taken part in preparations for the conference, even with voluntary contributions for research on tourism in Central Asian countries. She stated that without the participation of the Russian Federation in the conference, the outcomes of the Conference could not be considered as objective or universal. Referring to letters sent on behalf of the Chair of the Bureau of the Espoo Convention regarding the situation in Ukraine, she stated that such letters were not consistent with the mandate of the Bureau of the Convention. She called for an examination to be carried out into the legal aspect of this matter and the compatibility of these actions with the functions of the Chair of the Bureau of the Convention. She expected a reply to be provided to the Russian Federation.
22. The Chair of the Committee on Environmental Policy, Ms. Elisabete Quintas (Portugal) thanked delegations for their comments and stated that related issues would be reviewed further.
23. 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 Centre and being kept aware of future directions of its work.

b) Decisions on matters relating to the Committee on Environmental Policy

24. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the programme of work of the Environment subprogramme for 2023, as contained in document ECE/CEP/S/2022/6. EXCOM approves:
  - a) the extension of the mandate and terms of reference of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment, as contained in document ECE/EX/2017/L.2, until 31 December 2023, as well as
  - b) the extension of the mandate and terms of reference of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators, as contained in the annex to document ECE/CEP-CES/GE.1/2021/3, until 31 December 2023 and
  - c) the revised mandate and terms of reference of the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews for 2023–2026, as contained in document ECE/CEP/S/2022/9, annex.

## Item 6 - Matters relating to the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management

### a) Meeting with the Chair of the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management

25. The Chair welcomed the Chair of the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management, Ms. Doris Andoni (Albania), who made a presentation to EXCOM on the achievements of the Committee over the past year and its plans for the future. She invited EXCOM to approve the latest programme of work of the Housing and Land Management Component of Housing, Land Management and Population Subprogramme, as well as the extension of the mandate and the revised Terms of Reference and Programme of Work of the Real Estate Market (REM) Advisory Group.
26. The representative of Albania expressed appreciation for the activities undertaken by the Committee and its secretariat. His country attached great importance to the establishment of the UNECE Forum of Mayors in view of the role of decentralization and locally elected officials in addressing the challenges of sustainable development and in achieving the SDGs, which are particularly at risk bearing in mind the negative impact of the pandemic, the war in Ukraine and climate change.
27. The representative of the European Union and its member States appreciated the work of the Committee, especially on reconstruction of Ukrainian cities, and welcomed the plans for the continuation of the Forum of Mayors. He also highlighted the Committee's work on affordability through the #Housing2030 programme, and on the local transition to a sustainable economy, supported through the voluntary local reviews of the SDGs and the initiative for smart sustainable cities.
28. The representative of the Russian Federation appreciated the work of the Committee, highlighting especially activities related to smart cities. She commended the establishment of shared approaches and best practices in the field of land management, including the use of latest technologies. She expressed the hope that the next Forum of Mayors for the ECE region, as a subsidiary body of the Committee, would be universal and depoliticized.
29. The representative of Belarus welcomed the formalization of the Forum of Mayors, as it represented an innovative and important instrument in delivering on the global Agenda 2030. She expressed the hope that it would be a constructive and unifying platform. In view of the new status of the Forum of Mayors, she called on the secretariat to seek out resources for interpretation into all official languages of the UNECE.
30. The Chair concluded that EXCOM thanks the Chair of the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management 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 Urban Development, Housing and Land Management

31. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the programme of work of the Housing and

Land Management Component of Housing, Land Management and Population Subprogramme for 2023, as contained in document ECE/HBP/2022/9. EXCOM approves:

- a) the extension of the REM Advisory Group on climate-neutral, energy-efficient and sustainable buildings and cities for 2023-2024,
- b) the revised Terms of Reference of REM Advisory Group for 2023-2024, as contained in document ECE/HBP/2022/7, and
- c) the programme of work of REM Advisory Group on climate-neutral, energy-efficient and sustainable buildings and cities for the period 2023-2024, as contained in document ECE/HBP/2022/8.

c) Matters related to the Forum of Mayors

32. The Chair concluded that EXCOM decides to continue the Forum of Mayors beyond 2022 and further decides that the Forum of Mayors:

- a) Is established as a subsidiary body of the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management (CUDHLM) in the form of a Team of Specialists (provisions contained in document ECE/EX/2/Rev.1, namely the Guidelines for the establishment and functioning of teams of specialists within UNECE apply);
- b) Will be convened annually in Geneva immediately prior to the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management (CUDHLM)'s session. EXCOM approves the mandate and Terms of Reference of the Forum of Mayors, as well as other elements, as contained in the annex below, for the period 2023-2024.

Item 7 - Matters relating to the Committee for Sustainable Energy

33. The Chair recalled that at its last meeting, the Executive Committee had decided to transmit an Energy draft decision with budgetary implications to the Commission for its consideration. An accompanying oral statement from the Budget Office had been circulated to member States on 27 December 2022 that is also available on the EXCOM website. She informed that in consultation with UN Headquarters, and with reference to the ECOSOC Rules of procedure, the title of the draft ECE decision contained in document E/ECE/L.5/Rev.1, had been revised to ensure that it is "stated in terms of the objectives to be achieved" in line with rule 31(2). There were no comments on this matter.

34. The Chair thus concluded that EXCOM decides to submit the draft decision related to the "Request to strengthen the role of the ECE secretariat in supporting member States in building resilient energy systems and modernizing resource management systems", as contained in the annex of document E/ECE/L.5/Rev.1, to the seventieth session of the Commission for its consideration. EXCOM takes note of the oral statement on the programme budget implications related to this draft decision, as contained in the memorandum issued by the Programme Planning and Budget Division dated 22 December 2022.

Item 8 - Matters relating to the ECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters

35. The Chair informed that, in consultation with UN Headquarters, and with reference to the ECOSOC Rules of procedure, the title of the draft ECE decision contained in document E/ECE/L.6/Rev.1, was revised in order to ensure that it is "stated in terms of the objectives

to be achieved” in line with rule 31(2). An accompanying oral statement from the Budget Office had been circulated to member States on 27 December 2022 that is also available on the EXCOM website.

36. The representative of the Russian Federation stated that the issue of creating an additional secretariat position to service the rapid response mechanism for the protection of environmental defenders under the Aarhus Convention had been discussed in detail during informal consultations in preparation for the seventieth session of the Commission. The arguments presented by the secretariat had not convinced her delegation, as the Aarhus Convention was among the best staffed legal instruments of the Commission. Further, she recalled that not all UNECE member States were parties to the Aarhus Convention and that the number of parties had actually decreased. She stated that the Russian Federation did not support the decision and objected to transmitting it to the seventieth Commission session for its consideration.
37. The representative of Ireland supported the decision to transmit draft decision E/ECE/L.6/Rev.1 to the Commission for its consideration. He stated that his country would support a more sustainable funding model, as the current funding mechanism of voluntary annual contributions from parties might have been adequate 25 years ago but was not anymore. He recalled the massive changes that took place over the last decades, such as the increase of the world population by some 2 billion or the acceleration of negative human impacts on the natural environment. Today citizens were more likely to express their environmental concerns to their representatives, which was at the core of the Aarhus Convention. He added that the Aarhus Convention had an important function in being a role model for non-parties and for other regions outside of the UNECE. He stated that the exceptional devotion of the secretariat had made the most of the available resources, which were no longer commensurate to the tasks.
38. The representative of the United States of America informed that, while not a party to the Aarhus Convention, his delegation recognized the importance of public participation in decision making and the ability to petition one's government free from any concerns of persecution. He expressed support to the onward transmission of draft decision E/ECE/L.6/Rev.1 to the Commission for its consideration.
39. The representative of the European Union and its member States supported the onward transmission of draft decision E/ECE/L.6/Rev.1 to the Commission for its consideration. He stated that environmental defenders were vital to the preservation of the environment across the globe and noted that safe, effective and inclusive public participation in decision making was at the core of the 2030 Agenda, especially in Goal 16. For these reasons, the establishment by the parties to the Aarhus Convention of a rapid response mechanism for the protection of environmental defenders was not only a landmark decision to ensure the implementation of their commitments under the Convention, but also a clear support to advance the United Nations Secretary General's Call for to Action for Human Rights, and the implementation of the Paris Agreement and the Convention on Biological Diversity. He concluded that it was thus fully justified to request the Secretary-General to strengthen the secretariat's capacity.
40. The representative of Belarus stated that the proposal to assign further resources from the regular budget to the special rapporteur mechanism on environmental defenders established under the Aarhus Convention in 2021 was not warranted. She expressed concern by the wording of the draft decision, which claimed that the number of parties to



the Convention was gradually rising. This was not consistent with reality, as the last ratification of the Convention dated back to 2014 and as of 2022, the Convention had lost one of its parties. Belarus observed degradation of the Convention's fundamental principles, as well as disregard for international law and damage to multilateralism at the Convention's forum. Her delegation did not support the onward transmission of draft decision E/ECE/L.6/Rev.1 to the Commission for its consideration.

41. The representative of Germany supported the onward transmission of draft decision E/ECE/L.6/Rev.1 to the Commission for its consideration. He said that the Aarhus Convention played a very important role in ensuring that environmental information was made available to the public. He emphasized the need for a rapid response mechanism for environmental defenders to ensure protection against unjustified discrimination. He added that in 2022, Germany had made a one-time payment to strengthen the rapid response mechanism.
42. The representative of Norway supported the onward transmission of draft decision E/ECE/L.6/Rev.1 to the Commission for its consideration. The establishment of the rapid response mechanism under the Aarhus Convention and the appointment of the Special Rapporteur were an important step towards environmental democracy. She underlined the key role of environmental human rights defenders, who faced threats to their life, including violence and even killings, and that they were allies in the common efforts to address the triple climate and environmental crisis.
43. The representative of Georgia voiced his support to the onward transmission of draft decision E/ECE/L.6/Rev.1 to the Commission for its consideration.
44. The representative of Switzerland supported the onward transmission of draft decision E/ECE/L.6/Rev.1 to the Commission for its consideration. He declared that environmental policy and access to information were important Swiss priorities. He commended the work of the secretariat of the Aarhus Convention.
45. The representative of Lithuania supported the onward transmission of draft decision E/ECE/L.6/Rev.1 to the Commission for its consideration. She mentioned that the safety of environmental defenders was paramount to democratic processes, furthering effective and inclusive public access to information, which was especially important in the light of the Russian war against Ukraine.
46. The representative of Czechia supported the onward transmission of draft decision E/ECE/L.6/Rev.1 to the Commission for its consideration. He welcomed the establishment of the rapid response mechanism under the Aarhus Convention and stated that it needed additional resources to become operational.
47. The representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland supported the onward transmission of draft decision E/ECE/L.6/Rev.1 to the Commission for its consideration. She stated that the establishment of the rapid response mechanism was critical to ensure that environmental defenders were not subject to further persecution, penalization and harassment. She stated that the decision to adequately fund the rapid response mechanism was a fundamental decision to advance the protection of environmental democracy.
48. The Chair stated that there was no consensus on the issue and welcomed comments from member States on the way forward.

49. The representative from Norway suggested to take a vote.
50. The representative of Armenia requested a technical break, which was granted by the Chair.
51. After resuming the meeting, the Chair recalled the Rules of Procedure (RoPs) relevant to a vote by show of hands and noted that, further to rule 15 of the RoPs of EXCOM, the meeting had a quorum with more than one third of the members of EXCOM present.
52. Subsequently, a vote was taken by show of hands.
53. The onward submission of draft decision ECE/EX/2023/L.6/Rev.1 to the Commission for its consideration was adopted by 32 votes to 2, with 1 abstention.
54. The Chair concluded that EXCOM decides to submit the draft decision related to the “Implementation of the rapid response mechanism for the protection of environmental defenders under the Convention on Access to information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention)”, as contained in the annex of document E/ECE/L.6/Rev.1, to the seventieth session of the Commission for its consideration. EXCOM takes note of the oral statement on the programme budget implications related to this draft decision, as contained in the memorandum issued by the Programme Planning and Budget Division dated 22 December 2022.

## **INFORMAL SEGMENT**

### Item 9 - Preparations for the seventieth session of the Economic Commission for Europe

55. The Secretary of the Commission informed that member States had convened eight times for informal consultations and that, thanks to the flexibility shown by delegations, agreement had been reached on a number of documents, including several draft decisions that were proposed to EXCOM for onward transmission to the Commission for its consideration under item 7, “Other issues calling for decision by the Commission.” She recalled Rule 3 of the RoPs of the Commission (E/ECE/778/Rev.5) that stipulated documentation timelines for the transmission of basic documents ahead of the opening of the session. Items considered today could still be processed in time for issuance 42 days prior to the meeting. The draft decision related to the digital and green transformations in support of the sustainable development in the region of the Economic Commission for Europe, as contained in informal document 23/9, had undergone a 48-hour silence procedure after the last informal consultations, which had been upheld.
56. The representative of Austria did not oppose the onward transmission of the aforementioned draft decision to the Commission for its consideration. He expressed disappointment, however, regarding the gender language contained in paragraph 10. While he recognized the need to cite specific initiatives on digital cooperation to bridge the digital divides, he hoped that an appropriate way to solve this issue could be found before the session of the Commission in April.
57. The representative of Luxembourg supported the statement made by Austria.
58. The Chair concluded that EXCOM decides to submit the draft decision related to the digital

and green transformations and support of the sustainable development in the region of the Economic Commission for Europe as contained in informal document 2023/9 to the seventieth session of the Commission for consideration.

59. The Executive Secretary commended the spirit of cooperation shown by delegations at the informal consultations. She also thanked the Secretary of the Commission for her dedication to support member States in their deliberations and advance the preparations for the upcoming session. She respectfully called on all member States to respond to the invitation to the Commission session, encouraging gender balance and the inclusion of a youth representative in the delegations. She hoped for strong and senior level representation, which could be facilitated by the remote participation options, i.e. video connection or pre-recorded messages. She said that she planned to reach out to the designated Heads of Delegation to encourage Ministers to participate and make voluntary commitments to concrete actions in support of digital and green transformation that could be announced at the session of the Commission. She also encouraged active participation of member States to co-create the programme of the session and of the virtual side-events to take place on 3, 4 and 5 April, respectively, on circular economy and the sustainable use of natural resources (day 1), digital and green transformations (day 2) and horizon scanning (day 3).
60. The Chair called on delegations to continue their deliberations with a view to reaching agreement on additional issues in time for the next EXCOM (16 March). Recalling rule 3 of the RoPs of the Commission (“...basic documents relating to each item appearing on the provisional agenda of a session shall be transmitted no less than 42 days before the opening of the session...”), she informed that basic documents would be issued by 7 March 2023. With the next EXCOM taking place after this date, she concluded that member States agreed that further basic documents would be receivable in line with relevant provisions of the RoP that stipulate that “... in exceptional cases the Executive Secretary, may for reasons to be stated in writing, transmit such documents not less than twenty-one days before the opening of the session.” This would be on 28 March 2023.
61. With regard to item 8 of the provisional agenda of the Commission, the election of officers, she recalled Rule 12 of the RoP of the Commission that stipulates:

The Commission shall, at each biannual session, elect a country from among its members, the chair for the period of the biennium. The representative of the elected country will be the chairperson. The Commission will also at the same meeting, elect two countries whose representatives will become the vice chairpersons for the period of the biennium. The chairperson and vice chairpersons of the Commission will also serve as the chairperson and vice chairpersons of the executive committee for the period of the biennium.”

She invited delegations to indicate their interest in serving on the Bureau through Note Verbale by 28 February 2023 and requested the secretariat to issue a call for nominations. *(A note to member States was circulated on 23 January 2023.)*

#### Item 10 - Proposed Programme Budget 2024

62. The Executive Secretary presented the ECE proposed programme budget for 2024 to EXCOM for comments, noting that the format, structure and the content followed the annual format introduced in 2020, confirmed by the General Assembly in its recent resolution 77/267 of 30 December 2022. She added that the document also reflected

recommendations under the sequential review procedure of the programmes of work of UNECE subprogrammes, as agreed by EXCOM on 5 March 2021. She recalled that deliberations on it would take place at the Committee for Programme and Coordination, the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the 5th Committee of the General Assembly. She concluded by saying that the final submission to the Office of Programme Planning Budget and Finance would happen in February 2023, upon receipt of the instructions issued by the Controller and expected in January 2023.

63. The representative of the Russian Federation stated that, while no decision was expected from EXCOM on this issue, she wished to provide comments on the draft prepared by the secretariat. She stated that her delegation could not agree with the presence, in the list of mandates of the programme budget, of the Ministerial Declaration of the Ninth Conference of Ministers of Environment for Europe and the Nicosia Ministerial Declaration on issues of education on sustainable development. Russia had not received an invitation to take part in the Nicosia Conference and Russian comments were ignored during the preparatory process. Therefore, the Russian Federation opposed the implementation of the outcome decisions of the conference in UNECE. She expressed disappointment at the fact that, in the section on Subprogramme 1: Environment, only the Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders had been mentioned, while there were many other achievements to be singled out in the water, industrial safety and air pollution domains. She requested the secretariat to clarify why the results of those activities had not been reflected in the document. Finally, she noted that in times of growing needs and lack of funding to implement technical assistance, the secretariat had to ask for additional financial resources for 13 additional temporary positions. She opined that this might be linked to the absence of the traditional annual contribution from the Russian Federation. The decision not to make an annual voluntary contribution to UNECE for 2022 had been taken by the Russian Federation in response to the destructive policy of the United States, the European Union and countries allied to them, aimed at blocking Russian-funded projects and the participation of Russian experts in ECE subsidiary bodies. This policy had inflicted damage on countries in need of technical assistance and on efforts of the secretariat to render such support. She stated that amending the Russian decision depended on the further evolution of the situation.
64. The representative of the United States of America requested more information about the request for additional temporary resources addressed to the Secretary-General regarding the support to Ukraine. He suggested the organization of an information briefing on this topic.
65. The representative of the European Union and its member States supported the efforts of UNECE to help with the reconstruction and recovery activities in Ukraine, as well as the request made by the United States of America.
66. The Acting Chief of the Programme Management Unit provided information in response to questions raised by delegations: He stated that the inclusion of decisions from the Nicosia Ministerial Conference in the mandate list was consistent with past practice to include previous decisions from the Environment for Europe Conferences. The decision to seek additional temporary resources for the ECE secretariat had been triggered by multiple requests from the government of Ukraine and the neighboring countries to use UNECE instruments, experience and mandates to respond to urgent needs and support longer term recovery. In the spirit of transparency, the secretariat has decided to brief the Executive Committee at its last opportunity before the 2024 Proposed programme budget

was issued. It was worth noting, however, that the budget process was only at its beginning: the Secretary-General would decide on the level of the support and best legislative vehicle before seeking the approval of the General Assembly. The secretariat would keep EXCOM informed of further developments.

67. The representative of France welcomed the initiatives to bolster the financial support to the secretariat. Nevertheless, he suggested a collective reflection on how to streamline the requests received by UNECE and ensure no exaggerated requests would jeopardize the current mandates implementation.
68. The representative of the Russian Federation reiterated that her country did not agree to the inclusion of the Nicosia Ministerial Conference mandate in the proposed programme budget 2024. She also reiterated that she did not understand why the only achievement mentioned in the provisional programme budget 2024 under the Subprogramme 1: Environment was related to the Special Rapport on Environmental Defenders. She supported the idea of holding a briefing regarding the additional resources requested by UNECE to the Secretary-General regarding the support to Ukraine.
69. The Executive Secretary stated that the Environment for Europe process is a whole of a continent process and is very important to UNECE. She indicated that all the requests received related to assistance for Ukraine were fully aligned with UNECE mandates and sought to take advantage of the Commission's experience in transboundary issues, in the areas of environment, transport, statistics, public-private partnerships, innovation, sustainable energy, trade, housing and population.
70. The acting Chief of the Programme Management Unit noted that the budget format presented to member States was consistent with the budget format, structure and content introduced in 2020, confirmed by the General Assembly in its recent resolution 77/267 of 30 December 2022. He stated that this new format allowed the secretariat to select for each subprogramme illustrative examples of past and future results. For 2022 performance of Subprogramme 1: Environment, the document referenced (i) Result one on *Improved information for strengthening transboundary water cooperation*, (ii) Result 2 on *Strengthening industrial safety governance in Eastern and southern Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia* and (iii) Result 3 on *Increased number of new UN member states becoming parties to multilateral environmental agreements*. The secretariat remained available for any further inquiries.
71. The Chair concluded that EXCOM takes note of the Proposed Programme Budget for 2024.

#### Item 11 - 2024 Evaluation Plan (for approval)

72. The Executive Secretary presented UNECE Evaluation Workplan for 2024 for approval. She stated that in 2024, three subprogramme-level evaluations were proposed, and the respective sectoral Committees and Bureaux had been informed accordingly:
  - (a) Implementation of the Inland Transport Committee Strategy until 2030 (subprogramme 2);
  - (b) Supporting member States in statistics for the Sustainable Development Goals (subprogramme 3);
  - (c) Sustainable resource management: regular budget activities on the United Nations Framework Classification for Resources and the United Nations Resource

## Management System (subprogramme 5).

73. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the 2024 Evaluation Plan, as contained in Informal Document 2023/6.

### Item 12 – Extrabudgetary projects (for approval)

74. EXCOM considered three extrabudgetary projects presented for approval today, as contained in informal documents 2023/7, 8 and 2022/41/Rev1. The Chair noted that supplementary information had been provided by the secretariat on the latter project in response to questions raised at the previous meeting of EXCOM.
75. The representative of the European Union and its member States appreciated the additional information provided related to project 41/rev.2 and stated that he assumed that the membership would be informed should there be need for any risk mitigation measures to be taken in the course of the project. He supported the approval of all three projects.
76. The representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland supported the approval of all three projects. She also announced her country had been able to secure funding to support the 2023 Regional Forum for Sustainable Development. The British contribution would support roundtables on SDG 7 and 9, which are priorities for her government. She thanked the secretariat for the hard work already done to prepare for this event in this era of multiple crises from Russia's war against Ukraine to the cascading food, energy and finance crises.
77. The representative of Tajikistan stated that his delegation fully supported extrabudgetary project 2023/7. He emphasized the importance for his country of the sustainable and digital transition of the cotton and textile industry planned in the project, as this transition would improve access to international markets and investment opportunities as well as contribute to the develop and trade and create jobs in rural areas.
78. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the extrabudgetary projects contained in informal documents 2023/7, 2023/8 and 2022/41/Rev1.

### Item 13 - Briefing by the Executive Secretary: Important new developments and key upcoming events.

79. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM of her attendance to the following recent meetings and missions:
- **1 December, Geneva:** 7th session of the Advisory Board of the UN Road Safety Fund
  - **5 - 6 December, Geneva:** 39th UN/CEFACT Forum
  - **6 December, Berlin:** Critical Raw Materials Forum, European Council on Foreign Relations
  - **12 - 16 December, Geneva:** 42nd Executive Body of the Air Convention
  - **13 - 16 December, Geneva:** 77th meeting of the Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee
  - **10 - 12 December, Ashgabat:** International Conference “Dialogue is the Guarantee of Peace” (attendance of MFA)
  - **15 - 17 December, Montreal:** Convention on Biodiversity COP 15

The Executive Secretary stated that she had travelled to COP15, in her capacity as Coordinator of the five Regional Economic Commissions. She presided over a high-level event of the United Nations Regional Commissions, who had issued a joint statement on how they would support member States' implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

- **20 December:** Virtual youth consultation

The Executive Secretary noted the success of the event, with over 300 participants sharing their views, ideas, solutions, and innovations to discussions on issues that were important to them. She thanked all the Missions who had supported the engagement of youth representatives in this event.

Finally, the Executive Secretary recalled that UNECE had held the coordination role for the five regional Commissions in 2022, which as of 1 January 2023, had been passed along to ESCAP. The past year had been very successful to showcase the expertise that the regional level, and the expertise of Regional Commissions, brings to global processes at Headquarters and to UN system-wide initiatives. She shared a few examples, such as global joint submissions on climate action, financing for development and biodiversity. She noted that UNECE had built support and additional capacity for overarching portfolios, such as the New Urban Agenda, Road Safety, and circular economy and the sustainable use of natural resources.

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

- **18 January, Davos:** World Economic Forum
- **31 January - 3 February 2023, Geneva:** 55th session of the Implementation Committee (Espoo Convention)
- **2 February, New York:** ECOSOC Coordination Segment
- **6 February 2023, Geneva:** 95th session of the TIR Executive Board
- **16 - 17 February 2023, Geneva:** 15th meeting of the Implementation Committee of the Water Convention
- **21-24 February 2023, Geneva:** 85<sup>th</sup> session of the Inland Transport Committee

The Executive Secretary recalled the foreseen adoption, at that meeting, of the Ministerial Declaration entitled "*Harnessing the full potential of inland transport solutions in the global fight against climate change*". She reminded delegations of the note sent by the Secretariat, in which EXCOM members were invited to consider favourably Draft 1 of the Ministerial Declaration and the possibility of being added to the list of countries endorsing the Ministerial Declaration. She reiterated her invitation to confirm member States' high-level participations, in order to ensure appropriate speaking opportunities and protocol arrangements.

- **16 March 2023, Gothenburg:** Forum for International Cooperation on Air Pollution

#### Item 10 – Any other business

40. The representative of Greece commended the achievements of the Secretariat in 2022

and expressed his delegation's support of the proposals for the activities planned for 2023.

41. The representative of Switzerland informed of his country's support, co-funding and co-chairing, of the Regional Forum for Sustainable Development 2023. He announced the expected high-level representation of his delegation at the Forum, likely at the level of Secretary of State, and encouraged all member States to express interest in co-chairing the Forum with Switzerland.
42. The Chair informed EXCOM that its next meeting would take place on 16 March in the afternoon.

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