



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
25 February 2013

Original: English

Economic Commission for Europe

Sixty-fifth session

Geneva, 9–11 April 2013

Item 6 of the provisional agenda

Report on activities of the Executive Committee

Report on activities of the Executive Committee

Note by the Chairman*

I. Background

1. The rules of procedure of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) require basic documents to be prepared in relation to the agenda items as appropriate. This document is being submitted to support the discussions under item 6 at the sixty-fifth session of ECE.

II. Functions of the Executive Committee

2. The Executive Committee (EXCOM) was established by ECE member States as a result of the Reform of 2005. According to the Work Plan on ECE Reform (E/ECE/1434/Rev.1), the EXCOM acts on behalf of the Commission between the biennial sessions of the latter and can seize itself of all matters related to ECE activities in conformity with its Terms of Reference. The implementation of the overall guidance set by the Commission is entrusted to the EXCOM.

3. The EXCOM has the following main functions:

- (a) Preparing the sessions of the Commission;
- (b) Ensuring programmatic coherence and oversight: approving the programme of work of the Sectoral Committees and reviewing its implementation; approving groups under the Sectoral Committees; reviewing the strategic framework and programme narratives; avoiding duplication and overlap in ECE activities; and exchanging views with the Chairs of the Sectoral Committees;
- (c) Addressing any emerging issues calling for a decision in between the biennial sessions of the Commission;

* This document has been submitted after the official documentation deadline due to the need to await the completion of the intergovernmental process of the Executive Committee.

(d) Overseeing the work of the secretariat.

4. At its sixty-third session in 2009, ECE decided that the Chairperson and Vice-chairpersons of the Commission would also serve as the Chairperson and Vice-Chairpersons of the EXCOM for the period of the biennium.

5. At its sixty-fourth session, the Commission elected Serbia as its Chair and Israel as its Vice-chair. Subsequently, the EXCOM at its forty-second session in June 2011 elected Romania as a second Vice-chair. Serbia thus also chaired the EXCOM in the period April 2011 to April 2013, with Israel and Romania serving as Vice-chairs.

6. The EXCOM meets on an ad hoc basis and the agenda of each meeting is set by the Chairperson in consultation with the Vice-chairpersons and the Executive Secretary.

7. The Chairs of the Sectoral Committees – or the Vice-Chairs – are invited to the meetings of the EXCOM to report on the work of their respective Committees. At each meeting, the Executive Secretary briefs the EXCOM on the latest developments and major activities carried out by the secretariat.

III. Main achievements

8. The EXCOM welcomed Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon who participated in the meeting of the EXCOM in October 2011. The Secretary-General referred to the five priorities set out for his second term and underlined that ECE was well placed to contribute to each of them and, in particular, sustainable development. He recognized the value of ECE's products, especially its norms and standards which are used not only in the ECE region but, increasingly, beyond.

9. Throughout the reporting period, the EXCOM was largely seized with the review of the 2005 ECE Reform launched at the 2011 session of the Commission. As an initial step, the EXCOM reached an agreement in July 2011 on the Modalities of the review (ECE/EX/6), which laid the foundation for this important intergovernmental process.

10. The EXCOM then started with the review of subprogrammes of ECE in the autumn of 2011, based on information prepared by the secretariat in consultation with the Sectoral Committees. The information requested by the EXCOM included: current mandates of the Sectoral Committees and their subsidiary bodies, value added of activities vis-à-vis activities of other United Nations bodies or international organizations, input in terms of human and financial resources, output in terms of results achieved, future work priorities and projected outputs, etc. The overall objective was to reach conclusions on the future work priorities of the ECE and an improved allocation of resources by identifying within each subprogramme:

- Priority areas of current work and results achieved
- Possible new and emerging issues, and expected results
- Possibilities for streamlining and synergizing activities within each of the expected results
- Ways of improving efficiency and methods of work
- Expected results and related activities that may need to be reoriented/refocused to better reflect priority demands of member States
- Possible optimization of the structure of the programme of work
- Ways of improving communication and outreach

11. In June/July 2012, after the conclusion of the review of subprogrammes (with the exception of the Sustainable Energy subprogramme), the EXCOM Chair launched an informal consultation process among the 'Friends of the Chair' to go into a more detailed discussion on each subprogramme, including a review of substantive activities that were under the direct guidance of the EXCOM (ageing and gender), as well as the outputs of the Office of the Executive Secretary. The Sustainable Energy subprogramme underwent its own separate process of informal consultations facilitated by the Vice-chair (Romania).

12. The discussions in EXCOM meetings and informal consultations that took place in the course of the review process have provided a good opportunity to thoroughly review ECE subprogrammes, specific activities, results achieved and possible directions of future work. The review also generated a considerable amount of useful information on the availability and use of human and other resources, both from the Regular Budget as well as extrabudgetary sources.

13. One specific tangible result achieved as part of the review process was an agreement on the "Guidelines on procedures and practices for ECE bodies" which is expected to further harmonize and rationalize procedures and working methods of ECE Sectoral Committees and their subsidiary bodies.

14. In addition to the review process, the EXCOM carried out other important functions:

(a) It contributed to the preparation of the ECE regional input to the Rio +20 Conference;

(b) It reviewed technical cooperation project proposals funded from extrabudgetary resources. In total, 27 projects were endorsed with an overall funding of about 9.1 million United States dollars;

(c) It followed up on progress made in the implementation of its recommendations concerning UN/CEFACT, with the final report on this matter having been considered at its meeting on 10 December 2012;

(d) It guided the secretariat in the preparations of the 2013 session of the Commission.

15. During the reporting period, the EXCOM bade farewell, in January 2012, to Mr. Ján Kubiš, then Executive Secretary of ECE, who left to take up his duties as Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), and in April 2012 welcomed the incoming Executive Secretary of ECE, Mr. Sven Alkalaj.

16. All in all, since the last Commission session until the time of submission of this report, the EXCOM held 19 meetings and 43 informal consultations and has one more formal meeting planned to be held before the Commission session.

IV. Challenges

17. The EXCOM, in its capacity as governing body, acting on behalf of the Commission in the intersessional period, needs to ensure that the strategic directions established by the Commission are implemented. It also needs to provide the guidance required to adjust those strategic directions to developments in the areas of ECE's mandate. It should continue with a transparent and consultative style of work to ensure both a comprehensive understanding of the issues as well as holistic and efficient approaches to deal with those issues. This will need to be based on compromise and consensus in order to respect possible diverse interests and expectations. To do so, the EXCOM will have to work in a climate of confidence and trust among member States and with the secretariat.

18. Following the adoption of the outcome of the review of the 2005 ECE Reform, the EXCOM will no doubt be involved in overseeing its implementation. It will also have to play an active role whenever its own actions are expected in that implementation. In particular, it will need to ensure that the “Guidelines on procedures and practices for ECE bodies” are complied with and that the Rules of Procedure of the Sectoral Committees and other subsidiary bodies are in line with the Guidelines and are consistent with one another.

19. An area that continues to need further reflection is how the EXCOM can better interact with the Chairpersons and bureaux of Sectoral Committees in order to ensure dialogue and coherence between the different levels of intergovernmental bodies whilst at the same time exercising its oversight and governance over the work in different sectors.
