

Economic Commission for Europe
Committee on Sustainable Energy

Group of Experts on Gas

Seventh session

Geneva, 22–25 September 2020

Item 13 of the provisional agenda

Adoption of Conclusions and Recommendations

Draft Conclusions and Recommendations
arising from the seventh session of the Group of Experts on Gas

Draft for discussion

Agenda item 1: Adoption of the agenda

1. The Group of Experts on Gas noted that the unprecedented circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic had resulted in the seventh session being postponed to 22-25 September and in a different and reduced format in collaboration with the Group of Experts on Renewable Energy. The Expert Group decided to postpone discussions on agenda items 5, 8 and 10 to the eighth session and adopted its agenda (ECE/ENERGY/GE.8/2020/1).

Agenda item 3: Election of officers

2. The Group of Experts elected a new Bureau to serve for a term of two years from the close of the seventh session. The members are: Mr. Francisco de la Flor (Spain) as Chair and Mr Florian Marko (Austria), Mr. Matin Talishly (Azerbaijan), Mr. Boris Maksijan (Croatia), Mr. Uwe Wetzel (Germany), Mr. Torstein Indrebø (Norway), Mr. Dmitriy Shvedov, (Russian Federation), Ms. Denise Mulholland (United States), and Mr. Luis Bertran (International Gas Union) as Vice-Chairs.

Agenda item 4: Activities and priorities of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and its Executive Committee

3. The Group of Experts noted with appreciation that the Committee on Sustainable Energy had extended its mandate until 31 December 2021 and approved the Group's 2020-2021 work plan, as presented in ECE/ENERGY/2019/10.

4. The Group of Experts supported that an International Year of Methane be proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly as soon as practically possible and offered its support in implementing any agreed outreach and activities.

Agenda item 5: Gas and the Sustainable Development Goals

5. The Group of Experts concluded that the efforts by ECE member States to attain the objectives of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda could be further accelerated by advocating the use of gas in all sectors, notably in transport and power generation as a practical alternative to solid and liquid fuels. In particular, the ECE member States that cope with degrading urban air quality might benefit from an increased share of natural gas in the total primary energy supply.

6. The Group of Experts welcomed the European Union's Green Deal initiative to become the first climate-neutral by 2050 and offered its assistance in discussing key policies of the European Green Deal with other ECE member States.

7. Acknowledging that currently there are many initiatives—public, private or in partnership—that seek to reduce methane emissions, the Group of Experts concluded that it would stay engaged in this important climate-mitigating activity. In this regard, the Group of Experts stressed the importance of taking an early action on methane and offered its help in catalysing collective action towards achieving emissions reductions through methane management. [Welcoming presentations of different initiatives covering from target setting to measurement, verification and mitigation, the Group of Experts committed to continue to assist in dissemination of these activities and practices.]

8. The Group of Experts thanked the Global Methane Initiative (GMI) of the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) and the Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) for effort to organize the Global Methane Forum in 2020 in Geneva [that had to be cancelled due to COVID-19 pandemic]. The Group of Experts remain committed to continue its collaboration with GMI and ECCC and to participate in a rescheduled Global Methane Forum in 2021.

9. The Group of Experts recognized that the gas sector is still not adequately addressing gender and diversity. The Group of Experts concluded that closing the gender gap is key to achieving the objectives of the United Nations 2030 agenda, particularly the transition to a clean, sustainable and socially-responsive energy sector of the future.

Agenda item 6: Decarbonization

10. Recognizing the drive towards decarbonization and electrification of the end-use, the Group of Experts reminded that that increasingly decarbonized gaseous fuels would remain the key energy vector for the foreseeable future.

11. The Group of Experts concluded that the synergies between renewable energies (electricity and gas) could be harnessed by utilizing the gas infrastructure as the backbone of a low-carbon energy system. With that in mind, the Group of Experts on Gas and the Group of Experts on Renewable Energy organized on 23 September 2020 a joint workshop that discussed policies that accelerate uptake of renewable, decarbonized and low- and zero-carbon gases in the UNECE region.

12. The Group of Experts thanked the World Energy Council for co-organizing the Hydrogen Innovation Forum on 25 March in Geneva. The Group of Experts concluded that the first practical step was developing a catalogue/inventory of regulations and standards on how hydrogen—pure or mixed with methane—could be injected into pipelines or used for various mobility, industrial and residential applications within and beyond the UNECE region.

13. The Group of Experts offered to facilitate international and cross-sectoral collaboration that increases awareness and public acceptability of hydrogen and accelerates the transition towards a future hydrogen economy in the ECE region and beyond.

14. The Group of Experts recognized the critical role of gas in the decarbonisation of the energy sector and achievement of carbon neutrality by 2050. With that in mind, the Group of Experts acknowledged that the concept of gas should be broader and include not only natural gas but also low-carbon, decarbonized and renewables gases. The technological development, together with the economies of scale will foster the use of progressively more decarbonized and renewable gases. The combination of natural gas and carbon capture (use) and storage CC(U)S could lead to the same desired outcomes.

15. The Group of Experts further acknowledged that among the gases that could have a significant contribution are the biogas/biomethane and hydrogen. Biogas/biomethane brings additional benefits due to its relationship with the circular and rural economy and the valuation of waste. Hydrogen would also progressively increase its contribution, with all potential sources of hydrogen production maintained.

16. The Group of Experts concluded that gas infrastructure (existing and new one), notably transmission, distribution and underground storage, but also facilities to manage liquefied gases, is the backbone of the future low-carbon energy system that contributes cost-efficiently to the overall decarbonisation.

17. The Group of Experts concluded that a future decarbonized energy system could be an optimal combination of “electrons and molecules”, in which the electricity and gas sub-systems are progressively more interlinked, increasing the share of renewable energy, either as electricity or as gas.

18. The Group of Experts on Gas and the Group of Experts on Renewable Energy offered support to ECE member states to disseminate best practices in the achievement of the interlinked model and to develop effective policies to support, when necessary, the technological developments and to accelerate the decarbonisation of the energy system.

Agenda item 7: Gas value chain: gas for transport and other end-uses

19. The Group of Experts concluded that switching to compressed or liquefied natural gas (CNG or LNG) from petrol and, particularly, from diesel, represents the most realistic pathway to reducing pollution from road and maritime transport. The Group of Experts offered to assist interested member States in improving their capacity to reap environmental and economic benefits of natural gas vehicles in road and maritime transport.

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20. The Group of Experts welcomed the start in June 2020 of the project “Improving capacities of the UNECE member States to decarbonize the transport sector”. The Group of Experts noted that the project will enhance the capacity of ECE member States to develop infrastructure for affordable, sustainable and clean natural gas, and help them harness the benefits of natural gas in transportation, as a viable low-carbon alternative fuelling options.

21. The Group of Experts took note of the dialogue “99 minutes of LNG - trends, developments, and innovative end-uses” held on 25 June 2020. The online dialogue explored the current state of LNG supply and demand, imports and exports, and prices, and discussed the impact of COVID-19 pandemics. Participants learned about several new opportunities for LNG in water and road transport, electricity and heat generation, and other innovative end-uses.

Agenda item 9: Update on implementation of the work plan for 2020-2021 and the preparation of the work plan for 2022-2023

22. The Group welcomed the progress in its implementation of its 2020-2021 workplan (ECE/ENERGY/2019/10), despite the difficulties caused by the pandemic.

23. The Group requested that the Bureau, in cooperation with the secretariat, start preparations of the 2022-2023 work plan and present a draft for discussion by the Group of Experts at its 2021 annual session.

Agenda item 10: Presentation of results and recommendations of the project “Pathways to Sustainable Energy”

24. The Group of Experts contributed to the Pathways to Sustainable project that sought to help countries develop, implement and track national sustainable energy policies. The Group of Experts endorsed finding of this project.

25. The Group of Experts noted the initiation of the new project on “Enhancing understanding of the implications and opportunities of moving to carbon neutrality in the UNECE region across the power and energy intensive industries by 2050” (1 June 2020 – 31 May 2022) under the Group of Experts on Cleaner Electricity Systems and recognized that this project represents a unique opportunity for the Group of Experts to contribute to a dialogue on a sustainable energy system of the future and the role of natural gas and decarbonised gases therein. The Group of Experts requested the Bureau to engage in the project and contribute to it.

Agenda item 11: Preparations for the eighth session of the Group of Experts on Gas.

26. The Group of Experts recommended the following topics for the substantive portion of its eighth: (to be decided at the meeting).

27. The Group of Experts recommended that the eighth session of the Group of Experts be held in Spring 2021 in Geneva.

14. Adoption of the report and close of the meeting.

28. The report of the meeting was adopted, including the conclusions and recommendations, subject to any necessary editing and formatting.
