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Committee on Sustainable Energy

Group of Experts on Cleaner Electricity Production from Fossil Fuels

Thirteenth session
Geneva, 26-27 October 2017

Report of the Group of Experts on Cleaner Electricity Production from Fossil Fuels

I. Introduction

1. The thirteenth session of the Group of Experts on Cleaner Electricity Production from Fossil Fuels was held on 26-27 October 2017.

2. This report summarizes the discussions of the Group of Experts at its thirteenth session. All the documents and presentations of the session are available on the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) website[1].

II. Attendance

3. The meeting was attended by experts from the following ECE member States: Austria, Canada, Czech Republic, Kazakhstan, Poland, Russian Federation, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America.

4. Experts from Brazil, Colombia and Côte d'Ivoire participated under Article 11 of the Commission's Terms of Reference.

5. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) were also represented.

[1] Official documents of the session are available at http://documents.un.org/. Unofficial room documents and presentations delivered at the meeting are available on the ECE website at: https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=45363.

6. The following international organization was represented: International Energy Agency (IEA) Clean Coal Centre (IEACCC).

7. Representatives of the following non-governmental organizations participated: Assocarboni General Association of Coal Operators, Association of Mining Towns in Donbass, World Coal Association and the Zero Emissions Technology Platform.

8. The private sector and academia were also represented.

III. Adoption of the agenda (agenda item 1)

Documentation: ECE/ENERGY/GE.5/2017/1

9. The provisional agenda as contained in the document ECE/ENERGY/GE.5/2017/1 was adopted without amendment.

IV. Opening remarks (agenda item 2)

10. In his opening remarks, the Chair informed the participants about the changes in the Unites States energy policy introduced following the 2016 presidential elections. The "war" on coal in the United States seems to be over, and the country remains a fossil fuel-driven economy. The domestic production and exports of fossil fuels – both natural gas and coal – have increased dramatically. With liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports reaching an all time high, the United States is on track to become a net exporter of fossil fuels. Taking this into consideration, the notion of using fossil fuels more cleanly has become more important and more pressing than ever.

11. The Director of the ECE Sustainable Energy Division noted that the share of fossil fuels in the total primary energy supply in the ECE region is still above 80 per cent. He then emphasized that the focus and role of the Group of Experts was not to promote a renewed reliance on coal but rather the sustainable management and environmental-friendly production and consumption of fossil fuels as a critically important component for attaining the objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. With this in mind, the Committee at its twenty-sixth session, 26-28 September 2017, had requested the Group of Experts to explore possible additional activities, such as development of standards, recommendations for financing new and retrofitted coal-fired power plants, and other activities to enhance the overall efficiency of the electricity system.

V. Election of officers (agenda item 3)

12. The Group of Experts elected a new Bureau to serve for a term of two years starting from the close of the thirteenth session. The new members are: Mr. Barry K. Worthington (United States of America) as Chair, and Mr. Vladimir Budinsky (Czech Republic), Mr. Sergey Katyshev (Kazakhstan), Mr. Leon Kurczabinski (Poland), Mr. Sergey Shumkov (Russian Federation), Mr. Aleksandar Puljevic (Serbia), Ms. Mücella Ersoy (Turkey), Mr. Borys Griadushchyi (Ukraine), and Mr. Jon Gibbins (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) as Vice-Chairs.

VI. Workshop: sustainable management of fossil fuels in electricity generation (agenda item 4)

13. The Group of Experts concluded that a focus on increasing the flexibility and efficiency of coal-fired electricity generation, decreasing emissions from the power sector, and development and deployment of carbon capture and storage (CCS/CCUS) would be critically important to enhance the overall efficiency of the electricity systems of ECE member States.

14. In response to the Committee on Sustainable Energy's request to explore possible additional activities, the Group of Experts concluded that a number of important emerging issues, such as development of standards and guidelines for cleaner electricity production, or recommendations for financing new and retrofitted coal-fired power plants should be part of the Group of Experts' core activities. The Group requested that the Bureau oversee finalization of the text.

15. The Group of Experts discussed principles for financing clean fossil fuel project developments in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Some of the principles could include:

(a) Deployment of High Efficiency Low Emissions (HELE) technologies with CCUS replaces investments that would otherwise take place in non-HELE fossil or biomass technology;

(b) Development of new fossil fuel technology is conceived as a way of accelerating the uptake of low- or no-carbon technology;

(c) Investment in HELE technology with CCUS enhances total energy system efficiency in a carbon neutral way and provides needed access to modern and sustainable energy services to support quality of life;

(d) Deployment of HELE technology is pursued in parallel with a full value chain emissions programme that yields net negative carbon emissions;

(e) Advancing HELE technology contributes to further development of net carbon neutral or carbon negative solutions (e.g., CCUS or transformation of CO_2 into methanol).

16. The Group of Experts reviewed a short summary document presented by the Director and based on the room document "Carbon Management Considerations for New Coal Projects" (CEP-13/2017/INF.4) that outlines the above-mentioned principles. The Chair invited the experts to submit their comments to the principles for financing fossil fuel projects, so that the document could be finalized within one week from the close of the meeting and subsequently presented by the Chair at the twenty-third session of the Conference of Parties (COP23) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change that will take place from 6-17 November 2017 in Bonn, Germany.

17. The Russian Federation proposed that the Group of Experts should initiate discussions on hydro energy in the context of clean electricity production. Possible issues to explore are the perspectives of small hydro power generation and the substitution of coal-fired power generation with hydro power generation. The Group could consider inviting hydro electricity industry representatives to its future meetings (e.g., representatives of the Commission on Large Dams).

18. The Group of Experts looks forward to broadening and deepening its collaboration with other subsidiary bodies of the Committee on Sustainable Energy – the Group of Experts on Renewable Energy, Group of Experts on Coal Mine Methane, Group of Experts on Gas, and the Expert Group on Resource Classification – on a range of cross-cutting

issues. The Group of Experts accepted the invitation from the Group of Experts on Coal Mine Methane to organize a joint session at the Global Methane Forum, 16-18 April 2018, Toronto, Canada, on a topic to be determined by the two Groups.

19. The Group of Experts decided to contribute, within the scope of its expertise, to the project on Transformation of the Energy Sector that is being developed under the auspices of the Committee on Sustainable Energy.

VII. Activities and priorities of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and its Committee on Sustainable Energy (agenda item 5)

20. The Director of the Sustainable Energy Division of ECE provided an update on the relevant activities and priorities of the twenty-sixth session of the Committee on Sustainable Energy, 26-28 September 2017. A number of important outcomes from the meeting were the extension of the Group of Expert's mandate and adoption of its 2018-2019 work plan.

21. The secretariat presented the project "Pathways to Sustainable Energy", highlighting the critical role of cleaner electricity from fossil fuels for the long-term development of the energy sector. Given the fact that under all plausible scenarios fossil fuels will continue to provide a significant share of the world's total primary energy supply, the Director invited the Group of Experts to take an active role in this project. The Chair committed to nominate representatives to the project's policy, technology and communications groups. The Chair also offered to help to host a workshop on "Pathways to Sustainable Energy", in 2018 in the United States.

22. In response to the Committee on Sustainable Energy's request to the Group of Experts to consider changing its name to something more broadly focused on electricity systems, the Group of Experts recommended to change its name to the Group of Experts on Clean Electricity from Fossil Fuels.

VIII. Report on implementation of the work plan for 2016-2017 (agenda item 6)

23. The Chair highlighted a number of the activities of the Group of Experts in 2016-2017, including the workshop on HELE held in Astana in June 2017 in the framework of the Eighth International Forum on Energy for Sustainable Development, the event on CCUS held during the twenty-sixth session of the Committee on Sustainable Energy, the report on flexible coal and renewable energy, the case study on PJM Interconnection LLC, as well as the recently-started work on principles for financing clean fossil fuel projects.

24. The Group of Experts noted that it has delivered on its 2016-2017 work plan.

25. The Group of Experts expressed its appreciation for the work undertaken by the Task Forces and individual experts in carrying out the 2016-2017 work plan.

IX. Work plan for 2018-2019 (agenda item 7)

26. Taking note of the Committee on Sustainable Energy's decision taken at its twenty-sixth session to approve the work plan of the Group of Experts for 2018-2019, the Group of Experts concluded that its current terms of reference and work plan for 2018-2019 encompass all additional activities discussed under Agenda Item 4.

27. The Group of Expert discussed its planned activities for 2018-2019, with a view to identifying experts willing to take the lead on delivering tangible outputs.

X. Preparations for the fourteenth session of the Group of Experts (agenda item 8)

28. The Group of Experts recommended that the substantive portion of its fourteenth session should stem from the Group of Experts 2018-2019 work plan.

29. The fourteenth session of the Group of Experts will be held in October 2018 in Geneva.

XI. Any other business (agenda item 9)

30. The Group of Experts noted the need for extrabudgetary funds to support its expanded work plan and requested the secretariat in cooperation with the Bureau to work to identify and secure such funding.

31. The Group of Experts requested that the secretariat invite UD DoE and relevant national laboratories from the United States

XII. Adoption of conclusions and recommendations (agenda item 10)

Documentation: CEP-12-2017-INF.1 - Unofficial room document: Draft Conclusions and Recommendations arising from the Group of Experts on Cleaner Electricity Production from Fossil Fuels dated 6 October 2017

32. The conclusions and recommendations were adopted and are included under the relevant agenda items highlighted in this report.

XIII. Adoption of the report and close of the meeting (agenda item 11)

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