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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

UNECE Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development

Second meeting
Geneva, 4–5 December 2006

REPORT OF THE MEETING

1. The second meeting of the UNECE Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) took place in Geneva on 4 and 5 December 2006.
2. The meeting was attended by delegates from Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Ukraine, the United States and Uzbekistan.
3. Representatives of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) participated.
4. The following intergovernmental organizations were represented: the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the World Conservation Union (IUCN).

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5. The Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC-CEE), the Regional Environmental Center for Central Asia (CAREC), the Regional Environmental Center for the Caucasus (REC Caucasus) and the Regional Environmental Center for the Russian Federation (RREC) were represented.

6. The following non-governmental organizations attended: Environmental and School Initiatives (ENSI), Citizens Network for Sustainable Development and European ECO-Forum, a coalition of environmental citizens' organizations.

I. OPENING, ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

7. Mr. Andreas Karamanos, the Chairperson of the Committee, opened the meeting. He expressed satisfaction with the implementation of the workplan for 2005–2007 (CEP/AC.13/2005/8) and said he believed this meeting would be productive.

8. Mr. Kaj Bärlund, Director of the Environment, Housing and Land Management Division of the UNECE, welcomed delegates and congratulated them on the achievements thus far in implementing ESD. Noting with appreciation that a wide range of Governments as well as stakeholders were represented at the meeting, he extended a particular welcome to UNESCO as a key partner.

9. The Steering Committee adopted its agenda (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2006/2).

II. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UNECE STRATEGY FOR EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

10. The Committee heard reports by Governments and the secretariat on recent activities (since the first meeting of the Steering Committee) to implement the workplan.

11. Reports by countries showed a clear tendency in government policies to give prominence to ESD. However, not many countries had actually introduced a conceptual transition from environmental education to ESD. Therefore, this would be a substantial task for the coming years. Regarding the translation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD into the official national languages and the establishment of focal points and a consultative mechanism for the implementation of the Strategy, the majority of the countries confirmed that these initial measures had almost been completed. Most countries had taken steps to introduce ESD into their policy and legislative documents. Many countries had started drafting their National Implementation Plans and introducing ESD into curricula and learning programmes at all levels of education. This was considered a very important step forward. Lack of resources remained a challenge for implementation in countries with economies in transition.

12. Many countries had established websites offering information relevant to ESD, and most countries supported the organization of various projects and events relating to ESD.

13. There were several good examples of subregional cooperation, including the Baltic 21E process, and the processes in the Mediterranean, Central Asian and Caucasus subregions that had resulted in a number of conferences and workshops on ESD. Throughout the region, NGOs had contributed to developing, disseminating and implementing ESD programmes, particularly in non-formal and informal education and training. To ensure better exchange of information, delegates were requested to provide the secretariat with relevant information on future events. This information would be posted in the “Events” section of the UNECE website. The same request was made with regard to other ESD-related information.

14. The Russian Federation informed the Committee about the key outcomes of the Workshop on the Implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD for Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) held in Moscow on 8–9 November 2006. The workshop had adopted a resolution in which participants identified major challenges in the implementation of ESD and proposed a number of priority activities for the subregion, including annual seminars for national focal points and stakeholders; training for national focal points and other decision makers; joint research and exchange programmes; and a digital catalogue of ESD resources and the creation of a discussion forum on the UNECE website (initially in Russian, with the possibility of eventually covering the whole UNECE region). The workshop had also decided to prepare a subregional report on the implementation of the Strategy as a complementary paper to the report on progress in the implementation of the Strategy in the UNECE region. The Committee welcomed the outcomes of the Moscow workshop and decided to consider its requests together, with those made by the Workshop on the Implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD for South-Eastern Europe (SEE) (Athens, 28 November 2005), through the workplan for Phase II of the Strategy’s implementation.

15. The secretariat reported on behalf of UNECE and UNESCO on the preparation of a compilation of good practices. The collection of good practices for the print publication had been completed and the material was being translated and formatted. The deadline for the collection of good practices to be published as a CD-ROM was 1 February 2007. The collection of good practices for the Web-based version would be ongoing. Submissions for the CD-ROM and Web-based publications would not be translated. The secretariat expressed appreciation for the active participation of Governments and stakeholders in this challenging activity.

III. REVIEW OF IMPLEMENTATION: INDICATORS AND REPORTING

16. Mr. Roel van Raaij, Chairperson of the Expert Group, reported on the progress made in developing indicators (see CEP/AC.13/2006/5 and Add.1 as well as his PowerPoint presentation (www.unece.org/env/esd/SC.Meet.htm) and introduced the final set of indicators for endorsement.

17. Delegates provided comments on the indicators. They agreed that “input” indicators were more numerous than “output” and “outcome” indicators owing to the complexity of measuring the latter. Furthermore, indicators were intended to focus on ESD, not on environmental education or on sustainable development as such. Some delegations stressed the importance of quality criteria for assessing the Strategy’s implementation.

18. The Committee expressed its appreciation for the excellent work done by the Expert Group and endorsed the set of indicators.¹

19. The Committee decided to extend the mandate of the Expert Group until the end of 2008² and requested the Expert Group to undertake the following tasks:

- (a) To revise the set of indicators as appropriate, following the pilot reporting exercise and feedback from countries on the workability and feasibility of the indicators and the requested information for reporting; and,
- (b) Further to the relevant outcomes of the Moscow workshop, to explore the possibility of developing criteria to assess success in the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD in the countries of the UNECE region, based on the indicators and on the examples submitted by countries to the UNECE secretariat.

20. The Committee strongly supported the pilot reporting as a way to assess progress in the Strategy’s implementation and as a test of the workability of the indicators. It urged Governments to use the indicators and submit timely reports to the secretariat to enable efficient preparation of the report on progress in the implementation of the Strategy.

IV. FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

21. The secretariat reported on the use of funds and expressed its appreciation for all contributions received, stressing that they had helped to make regional implementation process possible. The Chairperson brought to delegates’ attention a scheme of voluntary contributions agreed on by the High-level Meeting in Vilnius and informed them about the major outcomes of a “donors’ meeting” that had taken place at lunchtime. Delegates were informed about contributions and pledges made since the first meeting of the UNECE Steering Committee on ESD (13–14 December 2005). Thus, contributions to the UNECE trust fund (all in US dollars) had been made by the following countries: Belgium (2,369), Canada (8,790), Croatia (2,352),

¹ Finland informed the Bureau and the secretariat after the meeting that it had decided to withdraw its scrutiny reservation, originally announced at the meeting, concerning the endorsement of indicators. It requested that, within the mandate of the Expert Group (Task 1), approved by the Steering Committee, the Group revisit “output” and “outcome” indicators (e.g. Indicator 2.1; Sub-Indicator 2.1.2).

² Subject to the extension of the mandate of the Steering Committee by the session on ESD at the Sixth Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe” (Belgrade, 10–12 October 2007).

Estonia (1,000), France (6,428), Georgia (1,028), Germany (25,706), Hungary (2,000), the Netherlands (22,974) and Norway (14,618). The Netherlands and Austria had contributed in kind by organizing meetings of the Expert Group on Indicators, the Netherlands by providing a consultant to draft a report on progress in the implementation of the Strategy, and the Russian Federation by organizing the subregional workshop for EECCA countries in Moscow. The following countries had made pledges: Austria (EUR 2,000), France (EUR 15,000), Lithuania (EUR 1,500), Sweden (SEK 200,000), Greece (EUR 7,000 for 2006 and EUR 7,000 for 2007). Canada, the Czech Republic, Italy, the Netherlands and Norway had indicated their wish to provide financial support.

22. The Committee stressed the importance of stable and predictable funding for the effective implementation of the Strategy and expressed concern regarding the fact that it was not possible to use funds from the UN regular budget for the ESD programme. The Committee decided to bring the issue of funding from the UN regular budget to the attention of Ministers in Belgrade.

V. INPUT FOR THE SIXTH “ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE” MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

A. Update on communication with the Working Group of Senior Officials

23. The Chairperson referred to the original proposal on the ESD session at the Belgrade Conference (ECE/CEP/AC.11/2006/7) submitted by the Bureau to the Working Group of Senior Officials (WGSO) and informed delegates about the relevant outcomes of the second and third meetings of the WGSO (June and October 2006).

23. After extensive discussions, the WGSO had agreed that the joint session on ESD should be included on the agenda of the Belgrade Conference. Because of time constraints, the time allocated for the plenary session had been reduced to 2 hours and the time for the side event, which is scheduled to take place at lunchtime on the first day, to 1.5 hours. The third meeting of WGSO had confirmed these decisions without changes.

B. Conclusions of the Bureau’s consultation

24. In accordance with the mandate received from the Steering Committee, the Bureau had followed up on these amendments to the original proposal and held further consultations on the matter via e-mail. The Bureau members and observers who participated in consultations had agreed that “Learning from Each Other: Achievements, Challenges and the Way Forward”, should be proposed as the title for the formal session and that “Energy in relation to ESD” should be proposed as a theme for an informal panel discussion.

25. The Committee agreed to the Bureau's proposal and amended the theme for the informal panel discussion to "ESD in addressing energy production and consumption".

C. Draft statement by the environment and education ministers

26. The Chairperson informed the delegates that the secretariat had received a number of comments on the original draft of the statement and that the amended version was available to participants for their consideration. The Steering Committee felt strongly that its mandate should be extended until the end of the UN Decade of ESD and decided to reflect this in the draft ministerial statement. The Committee discussed and further amended the text of the statement at the meeting. It was decided that the draft statement would be open for further comments by 1 February 2007. Thereafter, the Bureau would prepare the final draft at its meeting on 19 February 2007 and would send it to the Steering Committee members and observers. This version would be submitted to the Belgrade session for adoption.

D. Assistance programme

27. The Chairperson introduced the paper "Learning from Each Other: Assistance Programme to Enhance Implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD" and briefed delegates on the process of developing this document. In their comments on the ministerial statement, several Governments asked for clarification of the nature and scope of a possible assistance programme. The idea had first been voiced by the Athens workshop, which had asked to develop a programme for the SEE region. Thereafter, at the first meeting of the Steering Committee, Governments had confirmed that they were ready to share experiences and resources to support each other in the implementation process. The second meeting of the Bureau (February 2006) had suggested that UNECE become a "learning region", so that member States and stakeholders would "learn from each other". The recent workshop in Moscow for EECCA countries had come up with a number of priority activities for which EECCA countries requested support. Thus, the secretariat in consultation with the Chairperson had taken the initiative to create a first draft of an assistance programme for comments by the Steering Committee. This draft was a first attempt to present in a concise and focused way the different priorities and ideas expressed by Governments and stakeholders. Given the late availability of the paper, the Committee was invited to express its views on the idea of developing an assistance programme rather than focusing its discussion on the programme's content.

28. The Committee welcomed the idea of an assistance programme in principle and agreed that it would present an important opportunity to enhance experiences and provide a "UN Decade of ESD roadmap on cooperation" for the UNECE region. The Committee decided to reflect this idea in the ministerial statement and to link it with the future workplan. It mandated the secretariat to undertake a survey of UNECE Governments' specific needs regarding the implementing ESD, in addition to those already mentioned in the Strategy and those identified by the SEE and EECCA subregional workshops. This list would provide a basis for a background document to be presented in Belgrade for information and used thereafter as the

basis of a workplan for the period beyond 2007. The workplan would be discussed by the Steering Committee at its tentatively planned 2008 meeting.

E. Officers for the session and the informal panel discussion

29. Further to the offers made by Greece and Serbia, the Committee agreed that Greece would chair the formal session and Serbia the informal panel discussion. The Committee mandated the Bureau, with the support of the secretariat, to follow up on the proposal for possible candidates for panellists for the informal session (three representatives of Governments and two representatives of stakeholders) and asked Governments and European ECO-Forum to submit their proposals to the secretariat by 1 February 2007.

30. The Chairperson urged Governments to participate actively in the Belgrade Conference and stressed that the joint session would provide a good example of cross-sectoral cooperation between the environment and education sectors, as well as between all relevant stakeholders. It would also demonstrate how policy integration could work in practice, and would set an example for other sectors. Furthermore, the session would contribute to assessing the first phase of the implementation of the UN Decade of ESD in the UNECE region.

VI. INTERLINKAGES AND POSSIBLE MUTUAL BENEFITS OF THE UNECE PROCESS AND OTHER ESD ACTIVITIES

31. Statements by delegates supported strengthening synergies between the UNECE Strategy and ESD-related activities taking place in the frameworks of the UN Decade of ESD, the European Union, the Council of Europe, the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development and the UN Commission on SD. Italy briefed the meeting about its leadership of the Task Force on Education for Sustainable Consumption established in the framework of the Marrakech Process. European ECO-Forum informed participants about its activities relating to ESD. Germany made an announcement about the upcoming Education Fair with a special section on ESD (27 February – 3 March 2007) and about future conferences on ESD to be held in May 2007 during its Presidency of the European Union. France informed the delegates about its plans to organize a conference on SD issues in October 2008, during its Presidency of the European Union. Kyrgyzstan gave a briefing on the Fifth International Central-Asian Conference on ESD held in October 2006. ENSI informed participants about its project on developing quality criteria for the implementation of ESD.

VII. CALENDAR OF MEETINGS

32. The Bureau held its third meeting on 5 December 2006 (after the meeting of the Steering Committee), and the fourth meeting is scheduled to take place on 19 February 2007. The next meeting of the Steering Committee is tentatively scheduled for spring 2008.

VIII. CONCLUDING REMARKS BY THE CHAIRPERSON AND CLOSING

33. The Chairperson summarized the decisions made and the key issues raised during the discussions. The Bureau and the secretariat were requested to follow up on the decisions of the Steering Committee. The secretariat was asked to finalize the report and the list of participants for circulation to delegates after the meeting. The Chairperson thanked all participants for their constructive contributions and closed the meeting.

Note

The texts of interventions can be found at www.unece.org/env/esd/SC.Meet.htm. For more information on events, see www.unece.org/env/esd/events.htm.