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Environmental Performance Review Programme:

overview of activities

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Self-evaluation report: assessment of procedural steps for the preparation and conducting of the environmental performance reviews

Conclusions and recommendations

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The Environmental Performance Reviews (EPR) process recently underwent a self-evaluation by the secretariat.

The present document provides conclusions and recommendations derived from the self-evaluation.

The Committee may wish to take note of the information provided.

I. Introduction

1. The main purpose of the self-evaluation was to examine the main phases of the production process in order to gauge to what extent the corresponding activities and major actors involved achieve their goals. The evaluation also aimed at providing guidance in terms of actions that could be taken to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the process. An effective and efficient organization of the EPR process, in turn, is a necessary condition for ensuring that the overall goal of the EPR programme can be achieved, namely to help reviewed countries to improve their environmental performance. The evaluation did not aim at an assessment of the quality of EPR reports and their impact.

2. The self-evaluation is mainly a tool for internal use by the EPR secretariat, but the findings may also be of interest to other stakeholders in the EPR programme, especially to members of the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews and the Committee on Environmental Policy. The self-evaluation report, therefore, was presented to the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews during the meeting held in Ashgabat on 13–15 March 2012. The Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews recommended the EPR secretariat to inform the Committee on Environmental Policy of the main outcomes of the self-evaluation.

3. As a result, this note presents the conclusions and recommendations drawn from the main report. The main report is available on the ECE website at the

following address: <http://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/areas-of-work/environmental-performance-reviews/about-epr/epr-self-evaluation.html> .

II. Conclusions and recommendations

4. The process of producing the ECE environmental performance reports has six major sequential phases. Before the central goal of one phase is achieved it is not possible to move to the next one. It is therefore important that each major actor involved in the production process is made well aware of her/his role and responsibilities during each phase to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of the process, i.e. that the targets set for each phase are achieved in terms of both quality standards and time with the available resources.

5. The record suggests that the EPR production process was well planned and managed by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) EPR secretariat. Communication with and among the members of the EPR review team was always well organized. The expected outputs during each of the major phases were produced mostly in time, despite frequent slippages in some of the phases due to factors that were outside the control of the ECE EPR secretariat. The most important slippages have occurred during the preparatory phase for the review mission. They have a negative impact on the effectiveness of activities in the next two phases, i.e. the review mission and the drafting of the report.

6. The preparation for the review mission is not only slowed down but that the EPR review team has in general spent too much time during the review mission on obtaining relevant documents and the collection of factual information. This, in turn, subtracts often too much from the time available for the assessment of the environmental performance, which is the main focus of the mission. The experts feel that in some cases, the text has to be updated because of developments that occurred in the country after the fact-finding mission. This for example applies to newly adopted laws and policies.

Recommendation 1

7. *The ECE EPR secretariat should:*

(a) *already before the preparatory mission provide the country to be reviewed with a detailed checklist of tasks to be completed within a given timeframe before, during and after the review mission;*

(b) *prepare a standard list of relevant legal and policy documents that should be supplied by the country directly to the ECE EPR secretariat at the time of the preparatory mission or, at latest, at a specified deadline before the review mission.*

Recommendation 2

8. *The ECE EPR secretariat should emphasize how important it is for the EPR review team and for the EPR report that the country under review:*

(a) *nominates qualified national experts as national focal points and ensures their availability during the fact-finding mission and its aftermath;*

(b) *answers to the questionnaires in time before the review mission; the same holds, mutatis mutandis, for additional questions that arise after the review mission;*

(c) *updates the EPR review team on new developments that take place in the country after the fact-finding mission is completed.*

9. The ECE EPR secretariat has traditionally collected relevant information and data from the reviewed country as well as other relevant information (based on own research) and made it available to all members of the EPR review team to a dedicated web-portal. This tool has been found very useful by the teams. Alternatively, the corresponding electronic files were sent to all team members via

e-mail. It is important that this support to the EPR review teams be continued given that it helps effective preparations for the review mission and drafting of the report.

Recommendation 3

10. *The ECE EPR secretariat should re-establish a dedicated web-tool and ensure that information in it is easily accessible to members of the EPR review team.*

11. After finalization of all draft chapters by the ECE EPR secretariat, the full report is sent for expert review to the ECE Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews. It is noteworthy that those members of the EPR review team that are not part of the ECE EPR secretariat do not have an opportunity to comment on the complete draft report, notably as regards the sections containing the assessment of environmental performance and associated recommendations. This appears to be an important missing part in the EPR process, a view which is supported also by the majority of team members surveyed.

12. While the ECE EPR secretariat has in the past done a very good job in preparing the consolidated draft text for expert review, there are potential benefits of a review of the draft report by all the members of the EPR review team given their wide range of expertise across the various environmental domains. The modalities for such comments, notably the platform for the comments (e-mail or dedicated web-page) and the timeframe, would have to be agreed upon. There could e.g. be a provision that in case of controversy the final decision on the text lies with either the ECE EPR secretariat and/or the ECE Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews.

Recommendation 4

13. *The ECE EPR secretariat should provide an opportunity for the EPR review team members to comment on the complete draft report before ECE Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews meetings. The corresponding modalities should be worked out by the ECE EPR secretariat, in consultation with the ECE Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews.*

14. The delivery of the draft report for expert review was, in general, within the timeframe that the members of the ECE Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews find acceptable. But on occasion, the delivery was late and made effective preparation, at least for some of the members of ECE Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews, more difficult. These delays resulted in the slippage in the delivery of drafts to the ECE EPR secretariat.

15. The time allocated to the peer review by the Committee on Environmental Policy is judged to be sufficient. The support by the ECE EPR secretariat in preparing the peer reviews is appreciated. But the interest of delegates in the peer review could be increased by making available before the meeting an executive summary of the report as well as the text of the draft recommendations. The issue of increasing the participation of Committee on Environmental Policy members in the work of the ECE Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews has been addressed by recent measures agreed by the Committee on Environmental Policy. It is outside the scope of this evaluation report.

Recommendation 5:

16. *The ECE EPR secretariat should:*

(a) *aim at submitting the draft report to the ECE Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews and the Committee on Environmental Policy three weeks before the expert review;*

(b) *supply Committee on Environmental Policy delegates with the executive summary of the draft report.*

17. One full meeting day was found by the large majority of the ECE Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews to be sufficient in order to deal with

a report of standard length in an appropriate manner. Dealing with reports that are longer than standard during a single meeting day, however, was found difficult, at least on occasion, and it can also be a source of dissatisfaction. But extending the meeting time may be difficult and costly. But the overall effectiveness of the work of the group could possibly be enhanced by organizing a pre-meeting exchange of views on recommendations contained in the report; suggestions for alternative formulations of existing recommendations, or proposals for additional recommendations. This could be done by means of telephone conferences, video-conferences, exchanges of e-mails and/or using a dedicated web-portal for the exchange of views. Such a more systematic preparation may even allow shortening the time required for dealing with reports of standard length.

Recommendation 6

18. *The ECE EPR secretariat should help the ECE Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews organizing before the expert review a pre-meeting exchange of views and comments on draft EPR review reports and their recommendations.*

19. The EPR programme currently organized launch events of its publications in countries that have been reviewed. This is one way to raise awareness on environmental matters in the country under review, while enhancing the Programme's visibility in other countries in the ECE region. Launch events organized thus far have proven highly successful and attracted senior leadership and a wide array of state and non-state stakeholders in the countries where they took place.

20. However launch events are often unduly delayed, among other reasons because of delays in the publication of translated versions of the review. This situation creates a dilemma. On the one hand, by virtue of tact and diplomacy it is understandable that reviewed countries expect launch events to be accompanied with the release of the review in their national language or in Russian, when relevant. On the other hand a time lag of one or two-years between the publication of the review in English and its launching reduces the relevance of the review, which may look increasingly outdated. Thus these delays impact adversely the visibility and relevance of the programme for the reviewed country, while limiting the opportunities for outreach and diffusion of the ideas and ideals enshrined in the report to the broader ECE region.

Recommendation 7

21. *The ECE EPR secretariat, in consultation with the ECE Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews and Committee on Environmental Policy, should strive to organizing two complementary launch events for each EPR review. The first would take the form of a high-level launch event in Geneva upon the publication of the EPR review in English. The second would continue the current practice of organizing a launch event in each reviewed country after the publication of the translated version of the country's review.*
