Summary of the outcomes of the twenty-third session and the decisions taken

(as approved by the Committee on 17 November 2017)

The Committee on Environmental Policy:

(a) Adopts the agenda for its twenty-third session (ECE/CEP/2017/4), taking into account the proposed timetable, as presented in information paper No. 1/Rev.1;

(b) Expresses appreciation to the Bureau for its good work in fulfilling the mandates assigned to it by the Committee and to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) secretariat for the support provided to the Bureau;

(c) Takes note of the developments in ECE activities linked to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda);

(d) Welcomes the information shared by representatives of Belgium, Czechia, Finland, Kazakhstan, Romania and Sweden on their national experience to date in identifying practical ways and means of approaching national implementation of the 2030 Agenda and relevant Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goals 6, 7, 11, 12, 15 and 17, from an environmental perspective, and invites Committee members to continue such exchanges of experience and good practice on that topic at its future meetings;

(e) Also welcomes the background document, prepared by the Bureau with support from the secretariat, presenting information on the role of the Committee in supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda (ECE/CEP/2017/15), and agrees to continue using the document at its next session to bolster the discussion on the contribution of the Committee in supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and:

(i) Reiterates the call to make full use of existing processes and/or mechanisms, focusing on added value, within existing available resources and avoiding any duplication of efforts;

(ii) Welcomes the initiation of the activity aimed at strengthening the cooperation with other ECE sectoral committees through the organization of dedicated discussions to exchange information and experience and, in that regard, expresses its appreciation to the chairs and other representatives of the ECE sectoral committees, including the Committee on Sustainable Energy, the Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry and the Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships, for their contributions, and appreciates the opportunity to learn about activities of these sectoral committees in adapting their work to support the 2030 Agenda;

(iii) Recommends to the ECE Executive Committee to consider asking other sectoral committees to map their activities that support the achievement of relevant Sustainable Development Goals and their targets, with a view to assist, in a more informed and efficient manner, the identification of possible areas where cooperation between the ECE sectoral committees might be enhanced to support countries’ efforts in an integrated manner in line with the 2030 Agenda;
(f) Welcomes the interactive discussion held on the ECE multilateral environmental agreements, expresses its appreciation to the chairs and other members of the bureaux of such agreements for their contributions, and takes note of the information provided with regard to efforts made thus far under each agreement to define its role in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, with a particular focus on Sustainable Development Goals 6, 11, 12 and 17 under review in 2018, and:

(i) Acknowledges that the ECE multilateral environmental agreements offer helpful frameworks to pursue different types of activities for advancing Goals 6 (clean water and sanitation), 11 (sustainable cities and communities), 12 (responsible consumption and production) and 17 (partnerships for the Goals);

(ii) Encourages its members to promote the importance of transparent and participatory decision-making in pursuing the 2030 Agenda;

(iii) Recognizes that achieving the Sustainable Development Goals implies an increase in the cooperation between the multilateral environmental agreements, and between the multilateral environmental agreements and the Committee on Environmental Policy;

(iv) Underlines the need to consider ways to further improve cooperation and synergies between the Committee and the multilateral environmental agreements;

(v) Takes note of the recent developments at the informal joint meetings between the representatives of the governing bodies of the ECE multilateral environmental agreements and the Committee;

(g) Requests the secretariat, in consultation with the Bureau, to prepare a short background note based on the discussions relevant to Sustainable Development Goals held at the present session and to submit it to the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development in the ECE region to be organized in March 2018, and encourages its members and observers to consider promoting key messages related to Sustainable Development Goals derived from the discussions at the Committee’s twenty-third session;

(h) Takes note of the document on lessons learned from the preparation, organization and running of the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Batumi Conference) (ECE/CEP/2017/17), and for future similar surveys agrees with the Bureau recommendation to prepare a short satisfaction survey to be circulated on the last day of Environment for Europe ministerial conferences. Another short survey could also be prepared, as necessary, after the mid-term reviews of conference outcomes to identify the priorities and themes for next conferences;

(i) Welcomes follow-up activities to implement the main outcomes of the Batumi Conference, and:

(i) Also welcomes the Batumi Talk Show as an effective mechanism for promoting the two Batumi initiatives — the Batumi Initiative on Green Economy (BIG-E) and the Batumi Action for Cleaner Air (BACA) — and invites interested countries and organizations to consider organizing a Batumi Talk Show at relevant events, as appropriate;

(ii) Expresses appreciation to the countries that participated in the Batumi Talk Show (i.e., Belarus, Czechia, Portugal, Switzerland and Ukraine) for sharing their experience in implementing their commitments under the two initiatives and announcing new commitments;

(iii) Invites countries and organizations participating in the Batumi Initiative on Green Economy and/or the Batumi Action for Cleaner Air to continue implementing their commitments and sharing their experience and good practice at Committee meetings;
(iv) Welcomes the increasing number of stakeholders and commitments for the two initiatives, noting with appreciation that, since the last session of the Committee, Canada has joined the Batumi Action for Cleaner Air and Ukraine and the Interstate Commission on Sustainable Development have joined the Batumi Initiative on Green Economy and Kazakhstan has submitted a new commitment to that initiative;

(v) Reiterates the invitation to countries and organizations to consider joining the Batumi initiatives and submitting additional actions to green the economy and improve air quality;

(vi) Welcomes the information provided by the Vice-Chair of the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution on activities to promote the Batumi Action for Cleaner Air, and invites representatives of the Convention to continue informing the Committee in that regard at its next meetings;

(vii) Also welcomes the information provided by ECE and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) on activities to implement the Pan-European Strategic Framework for Greening the Economy, including the promotion of the Batumi Initiative on Green Economy at national, regional and global high-level meetings and their efforts to support the initiative’s implementation;

(viii) With regard to greening the economy, stresses the importance of the active involvement of the private sector and of other stakeholders across the pan-European region and at the global level;

(ix) Welcomes the information provided by the GREEN Action Task Force secretariat, hosted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), on the Task Force’s ongoing work, and invites the Task Force secretariat to inform the Committee regularly about the Task Force’s activities;

(j) Welcomes the document prepared by the Bureau with support from the secretariat on organizing the mid-term review of the main outcomes of the Batumi Conference (ECE/CEP/2017/16), and approves the proposed scope, format and modalities for organizing a mid-term review of the Conference’s main outcomes as presented in that document, and:

(i) Decides to organize a one-day mid-term review of the Batumi Conference main outcomes as part of the Committee’s twenty-fourth session;

(ii) Invites the ECE secretariat in cooperation with relevant partners to proceed with the organization of the mid-term review in line with the provisions in document ECE/CEP/2017/16 and in accordance with the Committee’s discussions at its twenty-third session and further recommendations by the Bureau in that regard;

(iii) Also invites countries and organizations to actively participate in the organization of the mid-term review and in the review itself;

(iv) Furthermore invites the partners and stakeholders identified in document ECE/CEP/2017/16 to proceed with the preparation of the mid-term review reports, which should be kept short and focused but without compromising their quality, in line with the template included in annex II of that document. Additional substantive information can be provided in annexes to the mid-term review report, as necessary;

(v) Notes that dialogue and cooperation with relevant organizations and other stakeholders are essential in promoting Environment for Europe initiatives, encourages efforts to involve a wide range of stakeholders, including business, civil society and others, and proposes to consider involving also youth organizations;

(vi) Decides to use a mix of different interactive formats for the mid-term review;
(k) Welcomes the work of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment, and:

(i) Requests the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment to revise and streamline the outline of its activities up to 2021, as presented in document ECE/CEP/2017/13, by including measurable outcomes and giving priority to its core activities in accordance with the financial resources available;

(ii) Takes note of the modalities for the regional environmental information and assessment network of networks, as presented in the document ECE/CEP/2017/14;

(iii) Requests the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment to encourage and facilitate broadened participation by member States, relevant organizations and existing regional environmental information and assessment networks;

(iv) Reiterates the invitation to member States and relevant organizations to participate actively in the activities and meetings of the Working Group, and invites those member States that are not represented in the Working Group to nominate their representatives by 1 December 2017 to the secretariat;

(v) Takes note of the invitation to member States to take an active part in responding to the questionnaire to be circulated to members of the Committee and national representatives designated to the Working Group, further to subparagraph (iv) above, with a view to accurately assessing the progress to date in the establishment of the Shared Environmental Information System in the pan-European region;

(vi) Agrees to the inclusion of additional substantive information in an annex to the short report on the mid-term review of progress in the establishment of the Shared Environmental Information System, as appropriate;

(vii) Welcomes the information provided by the ECE Statistical Division on the specific activities related to environmental statistics and indicators and on the United Nations Initiative on Global Geospatial Information Management;

(l) Greatly appreciates the work of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators, and:

(i) Adopts the renewed mandate and terms of reference of the Joint Task Force for 2018–2021, as presented in the annex to document ECE/CEP/2017/12, and requests the secretariat to submit the renewed mandate to the ECE Executive Committee for approval;

(ii) Takes note of the planned reduction in the frequency of meetings of the Joint Task Force;

(m) Invites member States and organizations to provide in-kind and financial support to the environmental monitoring and assessment programme and, in particular, thanks the European Union through the European Environment Agency, the Russian Federation and Switzerland for their financial support, and also UNEP and the European Environment Agency for their substantive support to the programme;

(n) Adopts the recommendations in the Environmental Performance Review of Mongolia (information paper No. 2);

(o) Also adopts the recommendations in the Third Environmental Performance Review of Albania (information paper No. 3);

(p) Furthermore adopts the recommendations in the Third Environmental Performance Review of Bosnia and Herzegovina (information paper No. 4);
(q) Welcomes the information provided by the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on the implementation of recommendations contained in its Second Environmental Performance Review, conducted in 2011;

(r) Welcomes the information provided on activities of the Environmental Performance Review Programme, and expresses its appreciation to the secretariat for the excellent work in support of the Programme, and:

(i) Greatly appreciates the work of the ECE Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews in 2017, and invites delegations to nominate their representatives to the Expert Group;

(ii) Welcomes the commencement of the third environmental performance review of Kazakhstan;

(iii) Welcomes the requests from Romania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Ukraine to undergo their third environmental performance reviews;

(s) Greatly appreciates the first experience of integrating the relevant Sustainable Development Goals and targets in the environmental performance reviews conducted in 2017;

(t) Emphasizes the importance of integrating the relevant Sustainable Development Goals and targets as much as possible in all the focal areas or chapters for each environmental performance review;

(u) Welcomes the exchange of experience and good practices on enhancing awareness-raising activities on the environment and sustainable development, and in particular the Sustainable Development Goals, to reach out to civil servants and the public at large, and:

(i) Recognizes the multiple challenges encountered by countries in raising awareness and actively engaging the public and civil servants in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals;

(ii) Acknowledges the need for the exchange of experience and good practices in this regard, including in the framework of the environmental performance reviews;

(v) Takes note of the information provided by the secretariat on resource mobilization for the Environmental Performance Review Programme in 2017 and in particular thanks:

(i) Germany, Portugal and Switzerland for their financial support;

(ii) France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, UNEP and the World Health Organization for providing expertise;

(iii) Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Montenegro, the Republic of Moldova, Romania and Switzerland for having delegated their experts to the ECE Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews;

(iv) Sweden for offering a training to the Environmental Performance Review Programme secretariat;

(v) UNDP for logistical support;

(w) Appreciates the close cooperation of the ECE Sustainable Energy, Forests, Land and Housing, Statistics and Sustainable Transport Divisions with the Environmental Performance Review Programme;

(x) Encourages delegations to provide in-kind (expert) and financial support to the Environmental Performance Review Programme;
(y) Takes note of the information provided on the work under the ECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development, while noting the difficult situation with regard to mobilizing voluntary contributions sufficient to enable the continuation of the regional intergovernmental platform and other activities to share experience and good practice with a view to advancing education for sustainable development across the region;

(z) Welcomes the information provided on and the progress of work under the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP);

(aa) Also welcomes the information provided on the outcomes of the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, held in June in Ostrava, Czechia;

(bb) Recognizes the close interlinkages existing between environment and health;

(cc) Welcomes the document prepared by the secretariat in consultation with the Bureau on possible arrangements for a joint secretariat for the European Environment and Health Process (ECE/CEP/2017/18);

(dd) Decides to maintain the status quo and remain a strong partner of the European Environment and Health Process, without ECE joining the secretariat of the Process at present, and to consider the issue again should there be extrabudgetary resources made available by interested countries for additional work by ECE on the process;

(ee) Concludes that the wider engagement of environment ministries in the European Environment and Health Process is essential to tackle the challenges of the environmental impacts on health in the region in a more effective and integrated manner;

(ff) Requests the secretariat to send letters to those ministers of environment who had expressed interest in serving on the European Environment and Health Ministerial Board in 2017–2018, informing them about the new institutional arrangements under the Process that no longer include the Board;

(gg) Takes note of the invitation to nominate national environment focal points for the European Environment and Health Task Force;

(hh) Encourages its members to liaise with their health counterparts engaged in the European Environment and Health Process to avoid potential contradictions between future decisions taken within the Process with those taken by the Committee;

(ii) Takes note of the information provided with regard to the Environment and Security Initiative;

(jj) Takes note of the activities of the ECE Committee on Housing and Land Management, in particular the progress of work on energy efficiency in buildings;

(kk) Takes note of the information provided with respect to gender mainstreaming in environmental activities carried out by the ECE Environment Division since the Committee’s last session, as part of the implementation of the ECE Policy for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women for 2016–2020; and:

(i) Welcomes the information provided on the work on equitable access to water and sanitation under the Protocol on Water and Health, in particular to address the gender dimension of access to water and sanitation;

(ii) Acknowledges the importance of gender disaggregated data to enable better understanding of the gender dimension of environmental issues;

(ll) Approves the biennial performance report of the Environment subprogramme for 2016–2017 (ECE/CEP/2017/8);

(mm) Approves the biennial performance plan of the Environment subprogramme for 2018–2019 (ECE/CEP/2017/9);
(nn) Adopts the programme of work of the Environment subprogramme for 2018–2019 (ECE/CEP/2017/7), and the list of publications contained therein, and asks the secretariat to submit it to the ECE Executive Committee for approval;

(o0) Reviews the proposed strategic framework of the Environment subprogramme for 2020–2021 (ECE/CEP/2017/10);

(pp) Takes note of the information provided about persisting problems in reporting on the status of financial resources for environmental activities, and:

(i) Expresses concern about the difficulties arising due to Umoja not being fully operational;

(ii) Requests the secretariat to provide information on the status of resources in the Environment subprogramme for the biennium 2016–2017 at the twenty-fourth session of the Committee;

(iii) Invites countries and other stakeholders to consider making voluntary contributions to the Environment for Europe trust fund to support participation of eligible participants in the meetings of the Committee and its Bureau, and in this regard expresses gratitude to Norway and Switzerland for their financial contributions to support secretariat activities under the Environment for Europe process;

(iv) Requests the secretariat to send letters to all ECE member States highlighting the progress achieved thus far in the work of the Committee and asking them to consider making contributions to support the work of the Committee;

(qq) Concerning the criteria for financial support for participation in meetings and events, agrees with the Bureau recommendation to continue with the criteria for financial support as adopted by the Committee at its twenty-second session in January 2017 (using data for 2015) and, at the same time, asks the Bureau, with support from the secretariat, to verify the availability of data for 2016 (e.g., in December 2017 and in February and May 2018) and, if available for all countries with economies in transition, to prepare revised criteria for financial support for approval by the Committee by email through a silence procedure;

(rr) Approves the draft terms of reference of the Committee on Environmental Policy, as annexed to the present document, and asks the secretariat to submit them to ECE for prospective adoption at its sixty-eighth session in 2019;

(ss) Welcomes the information provided by UNEP about developments in preparing the third session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, and invites UNEP to continue informing the Committee about relevant developments under the Assembly;

(tt) Decides to continue the current practice of conducting its meetings and organizing its business in accordance with the ECE rules of procedure;

(uu) Also decides to postpone the election of officers to the next session of the Committee, with the current Bureau continuing until then;

(vv) Approves the proposed schedule of Committee and Bureau meetings until 2020, as presented in information paper No. 8, while deciding to organize the Committee’s twenty-fourth session in Geneva in the week of 28 January to 1 February 2019 and respectively adapting the preparatory schedule;

(ww) Invites the Bureau and the secretariat to seek the views of Committee members and observers on the format of Committee meetings and, in that regard, to explore the possibility of preparing and organizing a meeting of the Extended Bureau, possibly back to back to the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development in the ECE region in 2018, with a view to discuss the format of the Committee’s meetings;
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(xx) Requests the Bureau and the secretariat to follow up on the Committee’s decisions, including by preparing the documents and reports necessary for the Committee’s work at its next session;

(yy) Expresses appreciation to ECE and UNEP for organizing a side event on “The environmental dimension of the Belt and Road Initiative: opportunities and challenges”;

(zz) Also expresses appreciation to ECE, OECD, UNEP and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization for organizing a side event on “Greening Economies in the Eastern Neighbourhood: from commitment to results”;

(aaa) Expresses strong appreciation for the work of the ECE secretariat in preparation of the present meeting.
Annex

Draft revised terms of reference

1. The Committee on Environmental Policy concentrates its efforts on preventing environmental damage, including from climate change, promoting sustainable management of environmental resources and contributing towards the development of cooperation in the field of environment among countries of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region, thereby leading to improvements in the region’s environment.

2. In particular, the Committee, as a multilateral forum for cooperation in the area of environment in the ECE region, will:

   (a) Serve as an instrument for ECE member States to provide policy direction in the region and to launch international initiatives, including the preparation of ministerial meetings in the region to review environmental priorities and adopt a strategic environmental policy;

   (b) Act as the convening body for the preparatory processes for the Environment for Europe ministerial conferences and implement relevant outcomes of the ministerial conferences;

   (c) Promote and define the modalities of environmental performance reviews in interested countries, using a country-needs based approach, adopt the conclusions and recommendations of the reviews and assist member States in their implementation;

   (d) Oversee the development and implementation of the Shared Environmental Information System in support of a regular process of environmental assessment in the region;

   (e) Promote and strengthen environmental information and observation capacity and the use of indicators to assess progress, particularly in countries of the Caucasus, Central Asia and Eastern and South-Eastern Europe and other ECE countries, as appropriate, in order to provide reliable and relevant information on the state of the environment as a basis for improved policymaking and public awareness;

   (f) Consider the need for and develop, as appropriate, legally binding instruments, recommendations, methodologies and guidelines with a view to improving environmental management in member countries;

   (g) Conduct and support international activities that:

      (i) Promote environmental protection and sustainable development in the region at the subregional and transboundary levels;

      (ii) Facilitate the contribution of the Committee’s work to the United Nations Environment Assembly at the global level;

      (iii) Promote effective and cost-efficient cooperation among all parties concerned in the areas of its mandate;

      (iv) Encourage public participation in environmental decision-making with the involvement of civil society, including the private sector, in accordance with the United Nations procedures and the national practice of ECE member States;

   (h) Promote cooperation and share experience among the ECE environmental conventions, supporting effective implementation of these instruments;

   (i) Promote implementation of policy instruments and tools and the legally binding instruments of ECE with a view to strengthening the capabilities of countries in the
Caucasus, Central Asia and Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, through technical assistance, advisory missions and capacity-building upon the request of a member state;

(j) Assist member States, as necessary, to integrate environmental considerations into other policies, to promote cross-sectoral approaches and to use indicators to assess progress, as appropriate;

(k) Contribute to the ECE region’s implementation of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and support the regional meetings, such as the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the ECE region, organized in preparation for meetings of the high-level political forum on sustainable development;

(l) Regularly review its programme of work to ensure the coherence of its activities with the overall objectives of ECE, develop synergies and propose to the ECE Commission modalities for cooperation with other sectoral committees on issues of common concern;

(m) Facilitate the achievement of synergies in the implementation of regional environmental programmes, including those developed through regional economic integration organizations, and cooperate with other United Nations regional commissions, international organizations and other relevant bodies, including financing institutions, to avoid duplication of work and enhance synergies;

(n) Promote and support member States’ efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.