

Economic Commission for Europe

Committee on Environmental Policy

Special session

Geneva, 23–25 February 2016

Summary of the outcomes of the special session and the decisions taken

(as approved by the Committee on 25 February 2016)

The Committee on Environmental Policy:

(a) Adopts the agenda of its special session (ECE/CEP/S/2016/1), taking into account the proposed timetable, as presented in information paper No. 1/Rev.2;

(b) Expresses its appreciation to the Bureau for its good work, and for efficiently fulfilling the mandates assigned to it by the Committee, and to the ECE secretariat for the efficient and high quality support provided to the Bureau;

(c) Takes note of the developments in ECE activities regarding the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the planned contribution of the ECE region to the fourth meeting of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in July 2016;

(d) Appreciates the progress made in organizing the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Batumi, Georgia, 8–10 June 2016);

(e) Welcomes the preparations undertaken by Georgia for hosting the Conference, and encourages interested countries to consider supporting financially or in kind the host country in the organization of the event;

(f) Also welcomes the revised drafts of the two thematic substantive documents (ECE/CEP/S/2016/L.2 and ECE/CEP/S/2016/L.3) and approves them, as amended during the session, for submission to the Conference;

(g) Further welcomes the revised draft report on progress in establishing SEIS in the pan-European region (ECE/CEP/S/2016/L.9) and approves it, as amended during the session, for submission to the Conference;

(h) Takes note of the information provided on, and the progress in preparing, the European regional assessment report of the Sixth Global Environment Outlook, to be launched at the Conference;

(i) Also takes note of the proposed process for preparing a summary of key findings and policy messages of the European regional assessment report, and invites its members and observers to consider the draft summary, which will be circulated on 1 March 2016 for comments by 14 March 2016. In that regard, agrees that the summary be submitted to the Conference;

(j) Welcomes the high quality of the work leading to the draft summary for policymakers of the assessment report of the ECE Air Convention, and approves the submission of the summary to the Batumi Conference to support the discussions under the air theme;

(k) Also welcomes the short summary for decision makers prepared by the Chair of the Bureau of the Air Convention, based on the above summary for policymakers, and approves it for submission to the Conference as an information document;

(l) Further welcomes the final progress report on the Astana Water Action (ECE/CEP/S/2016/L.8) and approves it, with the forthcoming minor corrections, for submission to the Conference to support the discussions under Conference agenda item 2 (a);

(m) Additionally welcomes the draft provisional agenda (ECE/CEP/S/2016/L.1) and the draft organization of work (ECE/CEP/S/2016/L.7) of the Conference and approves them, as amended during the session, for submission to the Conference to guide the preparations for and the work at the Conference;

(n) Invites the Committee's members to inform the secretariat by 1 May 2016 of interest expressed by their heads of delegation in delivering a keynote address, making a statement or intervening from the floor on one of the two themes of the session, in accordance with the organization of work of the Conference;

(o) Takes note of the information provided on the main outcomes of the eleventh meeting of the ECE Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development, advancing the preparation of the education for sustainable development segment at the Conference;

(p) Also takes note of the list of documents for the Conference, and in particular welcomes the draft information note on the mapping of the Environment subprogramme processes and activities that support countries in achieving the SDGs prepared by the ECE secretariat;

(q) Welcomes the revised draft of the Batumi Action for Cleaner Air (ECE/CEP/S/2016/L.5) and approves it, as amended during the session, for submission to the Conference as an outcome to be endorsed. In that regard, invites interested Committee members and observers to submit voluntary commitments to the initiative, preferably by Monday, 9 May 2016;

(r) Welcomes the revised draft of the Pan-European Strategic Framework for Greening the Economy (ECE/CEP/S/2016/L.4) and adopts it, as amended during the session, for submission to the Conference as an outcome to be endorsed;

(s) Also welcomes the draft Batumi Initiative on Green Economy (BIG-E) included in the annex to the Strategic Framework. In that regard, expresses its gratitude to Switzerland for its leadership, welcomes the proposed approach for the initiative, and invites interested Committee members and observers to submit voluntary commitments to the initiative, preferably by Monday, 9 May 2016. Furthermore, takes note of the draft list of possible green economy actions, to be used as a reference only, and invites its members and observers to provide additional examples to be added to the list by 21 March 2016;

(t) Further welcomes the fruitful cooperation between ECE, EEA, OECD, UNEP, WHO and other partners in developing documents for the Conference;

(u) Approves the draft Ministerial Declaration, as prepared during the session (see annex), for submission to ministers for adoption at the Conference;

(v) Welcomes the progress achieved in the implementation of communication plan for the Conference, and invites countries and other Environment for Europe stakeholders to actively promote the Conference and participate in the communication activities. Also, invites interested countries and organizations to support in kind and financially some of the communication activities;

(w) Takes note of the information provided on the resource requirements for the Conference, as well as the resources provided by the host country, and invites countries and other stakeholders to consider the need for resource mobilization to assist both the host country and the secretariat in preparing the Conference. In that regard, expresses gratitude to Norway and Switzerland for their financial contributions, and to Luxembourg for the pledge made to support the secretariat activities under the Environment for Europe process, and asks the host country and the secretariat to keep the Committee and its Bureau informed about the progress in funding the Conference preparations;

(x) Also takes note of information on the side events to be organized on the margins of the Conference, and recommends keeping the number to a maximum of 30 (with no more than 5 events for each of the six time slots available). In that regard, welcomes the joint organization of several side events, and invites other organizers of side events sharing a similar scope and substance to consider partnering with each other with a view to decreasing the number of the side events;

(y) Invites Committee members and observers to proactively identify and submit to the secretariat by 14 March 2016 concrete suggestions for private sector representatives that would be interested in participating in the Conference;

(z) Also invites Committee members and observers to register for the Conference as early as possible and by no later than the deadline of 15 March 2016, and to submit to the ECE secretariat the list of the official delegation for each member State and observer organization by e-mail, informing it also of any subsequent changes, to enable the secretariat to validate the online

registrations. Furthermore, recognizes the need for timely official registration in order to facilitate the efficient preparation of the Conference by the host country and the ECE secretariat;

(aa) Takes note of the information provided by the secretariat on access to financial data during the period of transition to the new United Nations “Umoja” enterprise resource planning system, which was rolled out for ECE in November 2015, as well as the note verbale of 18 February 2016 issued to all permanent missions of ECE member States by the Office of the Executive Secretary, 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 2014–2015 at the Committee’s regular session in December 2016, in a possibly revised format, taking into account the features and information available through Umoja;

(bb) Agrees to organize the Committee’s special session in Batumi on 7 June 2016 and its twenty-second session in Geneva from 7 to 9 December 2016, and takes note of the information provided by the secretariat that an updated schedule of meetings until 2019 will be prepared for the Committee’s consideration at its twenty-second session;

(cc) Takes note of the information provided by UNEP and welcomes the developments in preparing the second session of the United Nations Environment Assembly;

(dd) Also takes note of the information provided by Belarus regarding a workshop on land degradation neutrality to be organized by UNCCD for countries of Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, back to back to the Batumi Conference;

(ee) Expresses appreciation to the OECD EAP Task Force for organizing a side event during the session on “possible areas of work of the rebranded EAP Task Force beyond the Batumi Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference”;

(ff) 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 sessions in 2016;

(gg) Expresses its appreciation to the secretariat for an excellent organization of the meeting.

Draft Ministerial Declaration of the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference: “Greener, cleaner, smarter!”

1. We, the ministers and heads of delegation from [number] countries in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region and the representative of the European Commission meeting in Batumi, Georgia, from 8 to 10 June 2016 in the framework of the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, make the following declaration.

2. We confirm our commitment to improving environmental protection and advancing sustainable development in the ECE region, taking also into account the renewed momentum provided by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) adopted at the United Nation Summit in September 2015. We value the Environment for Europe process as a unique pan-European platform for addressing environmental challenges, improving environmental governance, promoting environmental and cross-sectoral cooperation and information sharing among countries, and as a pillar of sustainable development in the region for 25 years. Furthermore, we reiterate the importance of the active inclusion of civil society in decision-making to improve the environment.

3. We reiterate our commitment to take the lead in the transition to a green economy as a key path to sustainable development and poverty eradication and to direct investments and trade to support a green and inclusive economy. We are committed to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

4. In greening our economies, we will work towards the full internalization of externalities that cause the loss of or damage to natural capital, including through measuring costs and economic instruments, and will enhance ecosystems and ecosystem services as part of ecological infrastructure and improve the sustainable use of natural resources. We will foster a circular economy, transparent and responsible business practice and eco-innovation, and will further work towards cleaner and more resource-efficient production processes. We will develop the human capital for green and decent jobs, including by providing relevant education and training, and increase the availability of such jobs, provide access to essential services and promote effective public participation. And we reaffirm the importance of further strengthening and scaling-up education for sustainable development.

5. We therefore endorse the voluntary “Pan-European Strategic Framework for Greening the Economy” — a tool equipping countries with knowledge about actions and instruments for achieving green economy objectives and, at the same time, contributing to the implementation of the SDGs — and invite ECE member States and other stakeholders to implement it. We welcome the “Batumi Initiative on Green Economy” (BIG-E), which consists of voluntary commitments, and encourage countries and other stakeholders to implement them to facilitate the transition to a green economy, and to report on progress thereon to the Committee on Environmental Policy in accordance with the Strategic Framework. We encourage the promotion of BIG-E through existing knowledge-sharing platforms, such as the Green Growth Knowledge Platform. We commend the good cooperation between ECE and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and invite the two organizations, in cooperation with other relevant international organizations, to support countries in their efforts to green their economies and achieve sustainable development.

6. While praising the good progress achieved in the pan-European region over the past three decades in decreasing emissions of the main air-polluting substances and their impacts, we are concerned that air pollution, both outdoor and indoor, remains the largest environmental health threat and an important risk factor for major non-communicable diseases. We therefore commit to improving air quality for a better environment and human health, including by integrating air pollution reduction measures into financial and development policies, as well as other sectoral policies, as appropriate, and through cooperation to address transboundary impacts and enhanced policy coordination and coherence at the national and regional levels. We commend the good collaboration between ECE and the World Health Organization on air pollution and we invite them, in cooperation with other relevant international organizations, to support countries in their efforts to reduce air pollution.

7. We endorse the voluntary “Batumi Action for Cleaner Air” and welcome the initiatives launched by interested countries and other stakeholders aimed at improving air quality and protecting public health and ecosystems. We invite countries and other stakeholders to implement the Batumi Action for Cleaner Air in close cooperation with the ECE Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution (Air Convention), as appropriate, and to report on progress thereon to the Committee on Environmental Policy. We will also strengthen the role of civil society in addressing air pollution and its impacts, and we commit to ensuring adequate monitoring of and public access to relevant information on air pollution, in particular ground-level monitoring.
8. We appreciate progress achieved under the ECE multilateral environmental agreements and recognize the need to strengthen the participation of civil society and the private sector in their implementation. We invite countries to ratify, implement and provide adequate resources for the relevant multilateral environmental agreements, inter alia, the Air Convention and its three most recent protocols. We recognize the opportunities provided by multilateral environmental agreements to implement the 2030 Agenda.
9. We recognize the important contribution of the ECE Environmental Performance Review (EPR) Programme as an effective and practical policy tool throughout the past 20 years, and highlight the role it can play in supporting the achievement and monitoring of SDGs in the pan-European region. We express our satisfaction with the progress in the third cycle of reviews and encourage countries to benefit from the EPR Programme by undertaking further reviews.
10. While welcoming progress in developing the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) to support a regular process of environmental assessment, we invite countries to continue their efforts and to further develop their national information systems to have SEIS in place in the countries of Europe and Central Asia by 2021. We note the value of UNEP Live and the Group on Earth Observation as global knowledge-sharing platforms. [We welcome the Global Environment Outlook European component, as the pan-European regular environmental assessment product building on the recent State and Outlook Report of the European Environment Agency, as well as other regional, thematic and national assessments. [We also take note of the key messages of these reports and acknowledge the role of these assessments in identifying environmental concerns that need to be addressed in the region.]]
11. We acknowledge progress in implementing the Astana Water Action and encourage interested countries and organizations to continue using this initiative according to their needs.
12. We welcome the work of the Environmental Action Programme Task Force and we invite the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development to continue its activities under its new name, the Green Economy and Environment Action Programme Task Force (GREEN Task Force), in cooperation with relevant partners.
13. We acknowledge the role of regional initiatives in support of the 2030 Agenda and recognize the important contributions of the United Nations system, multilateral development banks and other international and inter-State organizations.
14. We value the role of Regional Environmental Centres in implementing initiatives to improve environmental governance at all levels and encourage them to strengthen their activities and to continue playing a valuable role in the pan-European region by supporting the needs of target countries.
15. We reiterate the importance of civil society participation — including business, women, non-governmental organizations, academia and other groups — in decision-making to improve the environment and promote sustainable development. We appreciate the activities of civil society organizations in the region in this regard and commit ourselves to further develop partnerships with them and create favourable conditions for their operation. We also welcome the contribution of the European ECO Forum to the Environment for Europe process.
16. We invite the Committee on Environmental Policy to convene in 2018 a mid-term review to assess progress in the implementation of the main outcomes of this Conference.

[17. We invite offers of interest from Governments to host the next Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference in 2021, celebrating 30 years of the Environment for Europe process, for consideration by the Committee.]

18. We express our gratitude to the Government of Georgia for having hosted this Conference and we wish to thank it and the people of Georgia for the warm hospitality we have received.
