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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

Ad Hoc Preparatory Working Group of Senior Officials
“Environment for Europe”
Executive Committee

Second meeting
Geneva, 24 February 2006

REPORT OF THE SECOND MEETING

Prepared by the secretariat in consultation with the Chairperson

1. The second meeting of the Executive Committee of the Ad Hoc Preparatory Working Group of Senior Officials (WGSO) for the preparation of the Sixth Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe” (the Belgrade Conference), to be held in Belgrade, Serbia and Montenegro, on 10–12 October 2007, took place on 24 February 2006 in Geneva.
2. The following members of the Executive Committee participated: Hungary (Ms. Alojzia Lakosné Horvath), Italy (Mr. Massimo Cozzone), Kyrgyzstan (Mr. Bekmurza Chybyev), the Russian Federation (Mr. Alexander Pankin), Serbia and Montenegro (Mr. Miroslav Spasojevic accompanied by Mr. Mihailo Djukic and Ms. Ivana Milovanovic), Sweden (Mr. Jon Kahn), Switzerland (Mr. Juerg Schneider) and the United States of America (Mr. Chuck Ashley).

3. Participating as observers were the Chairperson of the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy (Mr. Zaal Lomtadze), the Co-Chairperson of the OECD Task Force for the Implementation of the Environmental Action Programme (represented by Ms. Eija Kiiskinen and Ms. Aziza Nasirova), the Chairperson of the Project Preparation Committee (represented by Mr. Jean-Marie Frentz), the Chairperson of the Council for the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy (represented by Mr. John Carstensen), a representative of the Presidency of the European Union (Ms. Elisabeth Hosner), a representative of the European Commission (Ms. Annika Agerblad), a representative of the European ECO-Forum (Ms. Victoria Elias) and a representative of the Regional Environmental Centres (Mr. Bulat Yessekin). The meeting was also attended by the Chairperson of the UNECE Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) (Mr. Andreas Karamanos accompanied by Mr. Michael Scoullous). The list of participants is available at www.unece.org/env/wgso/Belgrade/execomMeetings.htm.

4. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Miroslav Spasojevic (Serbia and Montenegro).

5. The Executive Committee had before it the following working papers: the provisional agenda (WGSO/EXECOM-2/2006/1/Rev.1), an overview of activities that could provide input to the agenda of the Conference (WGSO/EXECOM-2/2006/4); an overview of high-level and other relevant events scheduled to take place before the Conference (WGSO/EXECOM-2/2006/7); possible themes for the agenda of the Conference (WGSO/EXECOM-2/2006/3); organizational issues related to the Conference (WGSO/EXECOM-2/2006/5); provisional estimates of the resources required for the preparation of the Conference (WGSO/EXECOM-2/2006/6); the draft provisional agenda for the second meeting of the WGSO (WGSO/EXECOM-2/2006/2); and a compilation of other proposals for activities submitted to the secretariat by partners (Information Paper No. 1). The Bureau of the UNECE Steering Committee on ESD made available a proposal for a segment on ESD at the Conference (SC-ESD/BUREAU-2/2006/2 and Add.1).

6. A number of other informational papers prepared by partners in the “Environment for Europe” process and by some member States were made available to participants.

7. The Chairperson opened the meeting and thanked all those who had contributed to its preparation. The Executive Committee adopted the provisional agenda as set out in the document WGSO/EXECOM-2/2006/1/Rev.1.

Overview of activities relevant to the agenda of the Belgrade Conference

8. The secretariat presented the working paper containing an overview of activities relevant to the Conference (WGSO/EXECOM-2/2006/4). This overview had been prepared¹ on

¹ The submitted activities were divided into three categories in accordance with the document on organizational issues related to the Conference (WGSO/EXECOM-2/2006/5). The working paper includes only Category I documents (for possible action by Ministers, to be submitted through and endorsed by the WGSO) and Category II background documents of direct relevance to the Belgrade Agenda (to be submitted through the WGSO). All other proposals for activities submitted to the secretariat by partners were consolidated into an informal document (Information Paper No 1).

the basis of the contributions sent to the secretariat by partners in the “Environment for Europe” process, taking into account the themes identified at the first meeting of the WGSO (12–13 October 2005).

9. The Executive Committee discussed the overview and accepted the overall activities proposed thus far for the Conference. It decided to enquire further about some of the activities, such as those relating to the energy theme, which should also include progress reports concerning, and outcomes of, energy-related activities undertaken by the UNECE Committee on Sustainable Energy. The theme of sustainable consumption and production (SCP) patterns was discussed on the basis of papers prepared by Sweden and UNEP. Sweden informed the Executive Committee that a proposal on SCP would be elaborated in cooperation with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the European Environment Agency (EEA). Some members of the Executive Committee noted that more activities and documents might be added later, when the Conference agenda was better defined.

10. The Executive Committee noted the large number of assessments and analytical papers being prepared for the Conference. Some Executive Committee members expressed the view that, while many of the reports proposed for the Conference could be useful to experts and civil servants at the international and national levels in their daily work, a summary of the key messages of the most important reports could facilitate the work of Ministers at the Conference. Some support was expressed for a synthesis report to include key messages of Category I and II documents, as appropriate. To facilitate the task of developing the synthesis report in time for the Conference, it was suggested that each of the relevant documents include an executive summary with key messages. Furthermore, the Executive Committee noted plans to issue other reports in 2007, both at the regional and global levels, such as the GEO-4 report, the reports for the Environment and Health intergovernmental mid-term review meeting, and the reports prepared for the High-level Meeting on Transport, Environment and Health. Close cooperation between the responsible bodies should be ensured so as to coordinate efficiently the compilation of all these reports in a way that avoided gaps and overlaps and did not impose an unnecessary burden on countries providing substantive input and financial contributions to the reports.

11. The Executive Committee enquired about the independent report suggested by the European Union at the first WGSO meeting. Questions were asked on issues such as the report’s scope and format, the responsible body/expert, the time frame and necessary resources. It was agreed that the European Union would clarify these issues and inform the secretariat prior to the second meeting of the WGSO.

12. The Executive Committee requested that the partners in the “Environment for Europe” process submit further proposals for activities (Category I and II documents) to the secretariat by 15 March 2006 and asked the secretariat to revise the working paper accordingly for submission to the second meeting of the WGSO.

Overview of high-level and other relevant events taking place before the Conference

13. The secretariat presented the working paper providing an overview of high-level and other relevant events scheduled to take place before the Conference (WGSO/EXECOM-2/2006/7). This overview is based on information available on the Internet and on input from

partners in the “Environment for Europe” process. The outcomes of at least some of these events could provide inputs for the preparation of the Conference.

14. The Executive Committee requested the secretariat to amend the overview taking into account a few more events that had been suggested at the meeting, and to submit it to the second meeting of the WGSO as an informal document.

Possible themes and expected outcome of the Conference

15. The secretariat presented the revised working paper on possible themes for the Belgrade agenda (WGSO/EXECOM-2/2006/3) that had been prepared taking into consideration comments provided by governments and other partners in the process.

16. Mr. Andreas Karamanos, Chairperson of the UNECE Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), presented, on behalf of the Bureau of the Steering Committee, a proposal for a possible segment on ESD at the Conference (SC-ESD/BUREAU-2/2006/2 and Add.1). Given that ESD is an effective tool for implementing sustainable development, the segment could make a substantial contribution to the overall purpose of the Conference, namely furthering the implementation of agreed goals and commitments. He stressed the high relevance of ESD to the Conference in view of the Kiev Declaration, the Kiev Statement on ESD and decisions of the Vilnius High-level Meeting. The ESD segment would provide a good example of cross-sectoral cooperation (in this case between the environment and education sectors), as well as between all relevant stakeholders. It would also demonstrate how policy integration, which is an essential prerequisite for sustainable development, can work in practice, and would set an example for other sectors. The segment would contribute to assessing the first phase of the implementation of the United Nations Decade of ESD in the UNECE region.

17. Due to time limitations at the Conference, it was proposed to divide the segment into two parts: (a) a *formal plenary session* of three hours that would focus on progress in implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD, with a joint statement by Ministers of Education and of the Environment as the major outcome; and (b) an *informal panel discussion* of two hours (during lunch time, prior to the formal plenary session). Depending on the priority themes identified by the WGSO, the panel discussion would address the role of ESD in dealing with problems related to these themes.

18. The Executive Committee discussed the proposal and expressed some concerns about it, while nevertheless affirming the importance of ESD. The major concerns were (a) the time allocation for one agenda item vis-à-vis other possible items; and (b) the need for extended cross-sectoral consultations at the national level before delegations were formed for the Conference. Some members proposed a back-to-back meeting on ESD. However, it was also stressed that Ministers would probably not stay for an event that took place before or after the Conference. In addition, there could be practical implications for the host country. It was agreed that the WGSO would discuss the issue further at its second meeting.

19. The Executive Committee discussed the subregional focus of the Conference and in particular enquired about activities of interest to the South-East European (SEE) subregion. The Chairperson informed the Executive Committee that a SEE Ministerial Conference was planned

for May 2006 at the invitation of the Government of Serbia and Montenegro. This conference would attempt to identify themes of interest and possible contributions from the SEE subregion to the Belgrade agenda. The Chairperson would inform the WGSO of the outcomes of this conference.

20. At the request of the Executive Committee, the secretariat informed participants that, following an internal meeting of secretaries of the UNECE multilateral environmental agreements, the issue of compliance and reporting mechanisms had been identified as a possible theme for the Conference. However, the nature of contributions was still being discussed, and more information would be provided to the WGSO meeting.

21. Some participants proposed such themes as *Environment and security*, *The financing and economics of ecosystems* and *Mountains*, including relevant mountain initiatives to be further discussed at the WGSO meeting.

22. The Executive Committee agreed in general with the themes proposed in the working paper and asked the secretariat to redraft the paper for submission to the second meeting of the WGSO, taking into account the discussions and recommendations from this meeting and organizing the existing themes and proposed activities in a more structured format. It was proposed that each of the possible items for the Belgrade agenda be structured to cover (a) an assessment of progress, (b) an evaluation of problems and (c) the way forward.

23. The Executive Committee asked the partners in charge of themes that had received support to develop and submit to the secretariat by 15 March 2006 proposals for possible activities and concrete input into the Conference.

24. The Executive Committee discussed the possible major outcomes of the Conference and concluded that the most appropriate would be to have both a Ministerial Declaration and a chairperson's summary. The Executive Committee stressed that the Ministerial Declaration should be a short document addressing a limited number of issues of a political and strategic nature.

Organizational issues related to the Conference

25. The secretariat presented the working paper on organizational issues for the Conference (WGSO/EXECOM-2/2006/5), which had been prepared by the secretariat in consultation with the Chairperson of the WGSO on the basis of a similar document approved by the WGSO for the Kiev Conference. The section "Documents" and its document submission deadlines reflect United Nations rules for processing documentation.

26. The Executive Committee agreed with the organizational procedures for the Conference and asked the secretariat to amend the paper's section on documents in accordance with the discussions at the meeting for submission to the WGSO.

The budget required for the Conference and the preparatory process

27. The secretariat presented the working paper on the estimated budget required for the preparation of the Conference and the Conference itself (WGSO/EXECOM-2/2006/6). The paper was prepared on the basis of input from partners and the host country and also takes into

account internal UNECE budget-related rules.

28. The Executive Committee took note of the budget estimates and stressed that only the activities that have direct input into the Belgrade agenda (i.e. the resources needed to produce category I and II documents) should be included in this paper. The Executive Committee asked the “Environment for Europe” partners to submit to the secretariat by 15 March 2006 updated budget figures for planned activities and requested the secretariat to update the paper accordingly for submission to the WGSO.

The status of host country preparations

29. Mr. Miroslav Spasojevic, Chairperson of the WGSO, updated the Executive Committee on the national preparatory process for the organization of the Conference, including political and operational aspects. The Conference was scheduled to take place from 10 to 12 October 2007. A briefing on the Conference for the embassies of UNECE member States, recently held in Belgrade, had been well attended. The participants at the briefing had welcomed the report by the host country and had expressed their willingness to cooperate and to provide necessary support for the efficient organization of the Conference.

30. The host country made available to the Executive Committee a video presentation of Conference venue. The presentation will be available at the second meeting of the WGSO and is also available at http://www.unece.org/env/wgso/Belgrade/vid_presentation.htm

The second meeting of the WGSO and the third meeting of the Executive Committee

31. The Chairperson presented the draft provisional agenda for the second meeting of the WGSO (WGSO/EXECOM-2/2006/2). The Executive Committee commented on the agenda and asked the secretariat to update it accordingly for submission to the WGSO.

32. The Executive Committee agreed with the proposed time schedule for the upcoming meetings. The second meeting of the WGSO will take place on 29–30 June 2006 in Geneva, back to back with the meeting of the Bureau of the Committee on Environmental Policy (28 June 2006), and the Executive Committee will meet on 30 June 2006, immediately after the WGSO meeting. An updated schedule of preparatory meetings for the Belgrade Conference appears in the annex to this report.

The “Environment for Europe” communication strategy

33. At the first meeting of the WGSO, the Chairperson had informed delegations that the Committee on Environmental Policy had taken note of the draft strategy (CEP/2005/2) and had passed it to the WGSO for further refinement. The Chairperson had asked delegations to submit comments on the content of the strategy and on the further process by 15 January 2006. To date, the secretariat had not received any comments.

34. The Executive Committee discussed the issue and agreed to recommend to the WGSO the development of a communication plan for the Conference once the Conference agenda was better defined. It was suggested that the plan focus on the Belgrade agenda and expected outcomes and on how to better involve civil society in the process. It was proposed that the secretariat prepare a paper outlining the communication plan for the third meeting of the

WGSO. If resources are available, the secretariat may hire a public relations expert to prepare the proposal for the WGSO.

Closing

35. The Chairperson thanked the Executive Committee for the constructive discussions and closed the meeting.

Annex

Proposed schedule of preparatory meetings for the Belgrade Conference

Committee on Environmental Policy	Ad Hoc Preparatory Working Group of Senior Officials (WGSO)	Executive Committee of the WGSO
Twelfth session, Geneva, 10–12 October 2005	First session, Geneva, 12–13 October 2005	First meeting (organizational), Geneva, 13 October 2005
---	---	Second meeting, Geneva, 24 February 2006
Bureau meeting, Geneva, 28 June 2006	Second session, Geneva, 29–30 June 2006 (a.m.)	Third meeting, Geneva, 30 June 2006 (p.m.)
Thirteenth session, Geneva, 9–11 October 2006	Third session, Geneva, 12–13 October 2006	Fourth meeting, Geneva, 13 October 2006 (p.m.)
Bureau meeting, Geneva, February 2007	---	Fifth meeting, February 2007
---	Fourth session, Geneva, 5–7 June 2007 (all documentation and organizational arrangements completed)	Sixth meeting, Geneva, 4 June 2007
Fourteenth session, 2007	Fifth session, Belgrade, 6–8 October 2007 (finalization of draft ministerial declaration, as needed)	---
<i>Translation and reproduction of documents</i>		
“Environment for Europe” Ministerial Conference, 10–12 October 2007		