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COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

Fourteenth session
Geneva, 29 May 2007
Item 4 of the provisional agenda

REVIEW OF THE PROGRAMME OF WORK FOR 2007-2008

**REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE BUREAU OF THE COMMITTEE
ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY**

Note by the secretariat

1. The Bureau of the Committee on Environmental Policy met in Geneva on 13 February 2007. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Zaal Lomtadze (Georgia) and attended by Ms. Ruzanna Davtyan (Armenia), Mr. Bert-Axel Szelinski (Germany), Ms. Eldrid Nordbo (Norway), Mr. Czeslaw Wieckowski (Poland), Mr. Jon Kahn (Sweden) and Mr. John Michael Matuszak (United States of America).

I. PREPARATIONS FOR THE SIXTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF UNECE

2. The secretariat informed the Bureau about the preparations for the Commission's sixty-second session to be held in Geneva on 25–27 April 2007. This session will celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of UNECE with a high-level segment (26–27 April) discussing *inter alia* some of the decisive factors in promoting sustainable development in the UNECE region, namely (a) sustainable energy policies; (b) secure transport development; and (c) the economics of gender in the European economy.

3. The secretariat also informed the Bureau about UNECE's contribution to the fifteenth OSCE Economic Forum through the preparation of a review of implementation of OSCE commitments on the environment.

II. THE COMMITTEE'S REVISED DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE

4. The Bureau considered the draft Terms of Reference of the Committee, which the secretariat had revised on the basis of the feedback received during and after the Committee's thirteenth session. Following further amendments to the text, the Bureau approved the draft and invited the secretariat to submit it to the Commission for adoption. The final draft of the terms of reference is annexed to this report.

III. PREPARATIONS FOR THE "ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE" CONFERENCE IN BELGRADE

5. Mr. Miroslav Spasojevic (Serbia), Chair of the Ad Hoc Preparatory Working Group of Senior Officials (WGSO) for the preparation of the sixth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" (Belgrade, 10–12 October 2007), informed the Bureau about the key issues on the agenda of the meetings of the Executive Committee (EXECOM) and the drafting group for the Ministerial Declaration to be held on 14–16 February 2007.

6. Mr. Spasojevic informed the Bureau that the draft agenda for the Belgrade Conference would be finalized by the WGSO at its meeting on 30–31 May 2007. Thereafter the secretariat together with the Chair would need to propose chairs for the different sessions as well as panellists and keynote speakers, as appropriate, on the basis of expressions of interest by countries and ensuring a balanced geographical representation of countries.

7. The Bureau was also informed of the schedule for drafting the Ministerial Declaration, which involved meetings of the drafting group on 2–3 July and 30–31 August 2007.

8. The Bureau considered the following documents under preparation for the Belgrade Conference:

A. "From intentions to actions: overcoming bottlenecks – Critical issues in implementation of environmental policies highlighted by the UNECE Environmental Performance Review Programme"

9. The Bureau welcomed the paper prepared by the secretariat as an interesting and useful illustration of the bottlenecks faced by the reviewed countries. It invited the secretariat to shorten the paper and supplement it with an executive summary indicating to the ministers the bottlenecks and possible remedies to overcome them. It suggested further substantiating the recommendations and shortening the practical examples. In order to remain operational, the recommendations should not be too general.

10. The Bureau deemed important that the paper also mention positive developments and highlight the progress made in the reviewed countries, and not focus solely on the bottlenecks they face. In this regard, it considered it worthwhile to ask reviewed countries to send case studies related to the five sections of the paper to the secretariat no later than 1 March 2007.

B. “Environmental policy and international competitiveness in a globalizing world: challenges for low-income countries in the UNECE region”

11. The Bureau held the view that the paper provided a solid overview of major issues pertaining to the relationship between environmental policy and international competitiveness. It agreed on the importance of discussing this topic at the Belgrade Conference given that competitiveness concerns are often used as an alibi for not moving to more stringent environmental standards. This is especially true for countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA), where the position of the environment ministries in government is in general weak and environmental priorities rank low among national economic development strategies.

12. The Bureau invited the secretariat to prepare a shorter version of the paper, using less technical language and with stronger emphasis on major policy implications and policy messages. The longer version of the paper should be kept for information and reference, especially as regards the relevant research literature.

13. The Bureau suggested that the item be discussed at the Belgrade Conference during the session dealing with implementation issues, but referred the final decision on this matter to the EXECOM and the WGSO. The Bureau proposed, moreover, that the CEP consider holding follow-up discussions on this topic after the Belgrade Conference, possibly at its session in 2008.

C. Documents related to monitoring and assessment

14. The Bureau discussed the following draft documents prepared with the involvement of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment:

- (a) Guidelines on the application of environmental indicators for EECCA;
- (b) Guidelines on strengthening environmental monitoring and reporting by enterprises;
- (c) Guidelines on indicator-based environment assessment reporting;
- (d) Recommendations to EECCA Governments on the application of environmental indicators and environmental assessment reporting.

15. The discussion focused in particular on the Guidelines on Strengthening Environmental Monitoring and Reporting by Enterprises. It acknowledged the importance of improving enterprise monitoring and data collection. Some Bureau members proposed making the language of the Guidelines less prescriptive and offered to send written comments to the secretariat before 1 March.

16. The Bureau considered that the documents seemed too long and/or technical for the ministers to discuss and adopt. The Bureau debated on whether the documents should be submitted to the Belgrade Conference, and decided to refer the decision to the CEP at its session on 29 May 2007. It invited the secretariat to prepare for the fourteenth session of the CEP, on the basis of these documents, a policy paper for possible submission to the Belgrade Conference as a category I document.

IV. THE ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE REVIEW PROGRAMME

17. The secretariat informed the Bureau about the preparation of the draft reviews of Montenegro and Serbia.

18. In addition, the secretariat drew the Bureau's attention to the request by the Committee at its last session to revise the conducting of peer reviews, including by allocating more time to discussing the reviews at the Committee's annual sessions. The Bureau recommended postponing this discussion until after the Belgrade Conference and devoting the next session of the CEP (29 May 2007) to the preparations for the Conference.

V. MULTILATERAL ENVIRONMENTAL AGREEMENTS

19. The Bureau followed up on the discussion on the financing of capacity-building activities held at the meeting of the Bureaux of the CEP and the UNECE environmental conventions the day before (on 12 February 2007).

20. Mr. Abdur Chowdhury, Director of the UNECE Technical Cooperation Unit, was asked to inform the Bureau about the unit's activities to coordinate the technical cooperation activities carried out by the UNECE divisions, as well as to assist them, at their request, in identifying donor funding and in preparing project proposals for donors. He highlighted the priority given by the UN development account to financing of cross-sectoral projects.

VI. PROVISIONAL AGENDA FOR THE EXTRAORDINARY SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE

21. The Bureau approved the preliminary draft of the provisional agenda for the extraordinary fourteenth session of the Committee, to be held on 29 May 2007 (ECE/CEP/139).

VII. NEXT MEETING

22. The Bureau decided to hold its next meeting on 29 May 2007 at 8 a.m., before the fourteenth session of the Committee, scheduled for 10 a.m. that same day.

Annex

TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

to be adopted by the Commission at its sixty-second session on 25–27 April 2007

The Committee on Environmental Policy concentrates its efforts on preventing environmental damage, promoting sustainable management of environmental resources and, to contribute towards the convergence of countries of the UNECE region, hence lead to improvements in the region's environment conditions primarily by implementing the goals set out in the document "Future strategic directions for the environment", adopted in 2003 (CEP/2004/2), and the workplan on UNECE reform adopted in 2005 (E/ECE/1434/Rev.1).

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

1. Serve as an instrument for UNECE member States to provide policy direction and to launch international initiatives, including the preparation of ministerial meetings in the region to review environmental priorities and adopt a strategic environmental policy;
2. Strengthen environmental information and observation capacity, particularly in countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) and South-Eastern Europe (SEE), in order to provide reliable and relevant information on the state of the environment as a basis for improved policymaking and public awareness, and use indicators to assess progress as appropriate;
3. Consider the need for and develop, as appropriate, legally binding instruments, recommendations, methodologies and guidelines for improving environmental management in member countries.
4. Conduct and support international activities which promote environmental protection and sustainable development in the region at the subregional and transboundary levels; promote cooperation among all parties concerned in order to make action effective and cost-efficient, as well as to encourage public participation in environmental decision-making with the involvement of civil society organizations, including the private sector;
5. Promote cooperation and share experience among the UNECE environmental conventions by providing support for effective implementation of these instruments and to improve compliance with their cross-cutting provisions;
6. Promote implementation of policy instruments and tools for strengthening the capabilities of countries in EECCA and SEE through technical assistance, advisory missions and capacity-building, including the legally binding instruments of the UNECE, to prevent and reverse environmental degradation;

7. Assist Member States as necessary to integrate environmental considerations into other policies and to use indicators to assess progress as appropriate;
8. Contribute to the UNECE region's implementation of the environmental pillar of sustainable development and support the regional implementation meetings organized in preparation for the sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development;
9. Regularly review its programme of work to ensure the coherence of its activities with the overall objectives of UNECE; develop synergies and propose to the UNECE Commission modalities for cooperation with other sectoral committees on issues of common concern;
10. Facilitate coordination between environment-related programmes initiated by Governments and the European Union; cooperate with other United Nations Regional Commissions, with international organizations and with other relevant bodies, including financing institutions, to avoid duplication of work and enhance synergies;
11. Promote and support Member States' efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.
