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**EXECUTIVE BODY FOR THE CONVENTION ON LONG-RANGE
TRANSBOUNDARY AIR POLLUTION**

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Item 13 of the provisional agenda

A LONG-TERM STRATEGY FOR THE CONVENTION

**ORIENTATION PAPER FOR THE STRATEGIC VISION OF THE CONVENTION
FOR 2010–2020**

Note by the Chairperson

I. INTRODUCTION

1. At its twenty sixth session, the Executive Body decided that a long-term strategy for the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution (CLRTP) would provide a useful basis for future work. It invited its Bureau, together with the Bureau of the Working Group on Strategies and Review and the secretariat, to draw up a draft strategy based on the outline submitted at the twenty-sixth session and comments received thereon. A draft strategy was elaborated in the Bureau, but in view of the few comments received on the draft outline, the Chair deemed it necessary that, before finalizing the draft strategy, a discussion should take place during the twenty-seventh session. The goal would be to raise questions and challenges and establish a clear rationale for all aspects of the work programme of the Convention for the

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10 years to come. This note, submitted by the Chair as an official document, is intended to provide further guidance from the Parties to the Bureau for elaborating and finalizing the draft long-term strategy for the Convention (ECE/WEB.AIR/96, para. 86 (d)).

II. MOVING FORWARD: CHALLENGES AND QUESTIONS

2. The Convention stands at a crucial period in its history. It has been one of the most successful regional air pollution agreements ever established and has delivered demonstrable improvements in reducing acidification of the environment as well as the highest peak levels of ozone and photochemical smog. It has begun to make improvements in atmospheric levels and deposition of nitrogen, arguably the most important global environmental problem after climate change. It has also shown itself to be flexible and dynamic in responding to new challenges and problems in the area of transboundary air pollution.

3. However, there have been important developments at regional and global scales that require the Convention to assess how it positions itself in relation to these developments. This entails critically examining the needs for the Convention's work, assessing priorities and making hard decisions about its future work programme and organizational structure.

4. Moreover, the Convention has accumulated a large body of legislation, all of which needs servicing by the subsidiary bodies and the secretariat. This puts pressure on the resources in the Parties and in the secretariat and affects the delivery of the business of CLRTAP. It is an opportune time to examine the legislation and assess the extent to which it can be rationalized. If inefficiencies can be removed, then resources could be freed up to devote to more pressing priorities and to new areas of activity.

5. One of the great strengths of the Convention is its science base and the unique way in which the science informs policy development. In any future strategic assessment of the work of CLRTAP, this aspect will be crucial and will need to be maintained. However, the science is carried out to inform policy; consequently, as policy priorities change, so too will the scientific activities of the Convention.

6. The strategy currently being prepared and discussed will need to produce a vision for CLRTAP that reflects the changing scientific and policy environment regarding atmospheric pollution, and which provides answers, implicitly or explicitly, to the questions and challenges raised below. This note sets out those challenges and questions and provides a background context against which the strategy should be developed. Its intention is to raise questions and challenges for discussion and debate within the Convention. As these questions will also be raised in other organizations, it is therefore essential that they are debated within CLRTAP.

There are many difficult questions raised here. The intention is to provoke a thorough debate of the issues so that the conclusions in the strategy will be as robust as possible, and that we have a clear rationale for all aspects of the CLRTAP work programme.

III. THE CHANGING EXTERNAL WORLD

7. Since the last Protocol to the Convention was agreed in 1999 in Gothenburg, many significant developments have occurred at the regional and global levels which the Convention needs to take account of. CLRTAP needs to reassess the reasons for its work and to plan strategically to adapt to these changed circumstances. There are also issues arising within the internal processes and organization of CLRTAP that need to be reassessed and critically examined. The more important developments and issues include:

(a) The European Union (EU) has expanded to cover 27 Member States and this bloc now dominates the European part of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region. This has several implications for the work of the Convention and its future, due to the fact that the EU has brought forward, and is continuing to bring forward, legislation on much the same subjects as CLRTAP. So what is the argument for the Convention continuing to promote and develop environmental instruments against this background? What advantage is there vis-à-vis environmental legislation moving forward through a series of bilateral/multilateral discussions between the EU, the United States of America and countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA)? A viable future for the Convention therefore depends upon positive and vigorous participation by the Parties in all the major blocs – the EU, North America, and the EECCA and South-East European (SEE) countries. This in turn requires that the subject matter of the Convention is relevant and meaningful. A detailed evaluation of existing work and future priorities for the Convention is therefore essential;

(b) A further issue arising from this development is that in the day-to-day discussions in the Executive Body sessions and meetings of the Working Group on Strategies and Review, the EU coordination discussions represent a very large part of the dialogue in the negotiations. Yet these are opaque to the non-EU Parties, who feel excluded from most of the evolving arguments. Moreover, the need for the EU Parties to formulate a coordinated position at every development in the negotiations makes the operation of the business of the Convention very slow and discontinuous. While this might appear to be an internal issue, involving the day-to-day operations of the Convention's business, there are wider strategic issues to be resolved here, which are connected with the effective delivery of Convention's work;

(c) Climate change is now seen politically as the most important environmental problem. This in some ways could be viewed as a threat in the sense that in most countries

climate change commands the greatest share of scarce resources and the important links with air pollution policies are often ignored – this has been the case up until now. However, as the climate change agenda develops post-Copenhagen, it is likely that more attention will be devoted to short-lived greenhouse pollutants such as black carbon (BC) and tropospheric ozone. There is a strong argument that optimal control policies for these pollutants should be regional in nature, partly because they are short-lived but also because of their impact on health and the environment, which will largely be regional. There is therefore a golden opportunity for CLRTAP to play a leading role in promoting and developing strategies for the mitigation of pollutants such as BC and ozone. One way of doing this could be to incorporate BC into the revised Gothenburg Protocol¹ and to incorporate obligations on ozone precursors that reflect the co-benefits with climate change from North America and Europe in a comprehensive way. Appropriate links and cooperation at both the scientific and policy levels would need to be made with the relevant areas of the climate change community;

(d) Since the signing of the Gothenburg Protocol, CLRTAP has built up its outreach activities across the world, building on and cooperating in the work of the Global Atmospheric Pollution Forum amongst other activities. This aspect of the Convention's work is likely to assume even greater importance in the coming 10 years or so. The question for the strategy of the Convention is how best to build on this work and to develop it;

(e) Global action has begun on persistent organic pollutants (POPs) and heavy metals. The Stockholm Convention on POPs has now established itself as a global instrument dealing with POPs and has already moved ahead of the CLRTAP POPs Protocol in some senses. Equally, within the United Nations Environment Programme, negotiations have begun to deal with mercury. There are therefore some fundamental questions for CLRTAP to address: after the current amendments to the two Protocols, is there any need for further work on POPs and heavy metals in CLRTAP? If so, what is it and what is the justification for it?;

(f) Participation from EECCA and SEE countries is not yet satisfactory. The arguments above suggest that this is essential in order to ensure a healthy future for the Convention. However, there is a genuine question to address that concerns how much effort other Parties in the EU and North America are prepared to devote to fostering this, given the lack of success to date. If the Eastern countries are content to participate in the global forums on POPs and heavy metals, is there any point in devoting resources in Europe to fostering their participation? What about the links with climate change? If the work of CLRTAP were to be shifted away from POPs and heavy metals towards an axis around a revised "climate-change

¹ The 1999 Gothenburg Protocol to Abate Acidification, Eutrophication and Ground-level Ozone.

consistent” Gothenburg Protocol and stronger links with the climate change agenda, would this lead to wider participation or not?.

IV. ORGANIZATIONAL AND OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES FOR THE CONVENTION

8. The Convention has successfully reduced acidification of the environment in the UNECE region. Emissions of sulphur have reduced by almost an order of magnitude over the lifetime of the Convention. Reductions in nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) have successfully reduced peak ozone (“summer smog”) levels. With the Gothenburg Protocol, CLRTAP has led the way in delivering an international agreement dealing with multiple pollutants with multiple effects. The Convention has been one of the most successful environmental instruments in terms of bringing scientists and policymakers together, creating a powerful collective driving force to improve the environment and human health.

9. It will be through building on these strengths and critically evaluating its future role in addressing environmental problems that the Convention will ensure its long-term future. This section will address the implications of these wider strategic goals on the internal operations and structure of the Convention and its subsidiary bodies.

10. As noted in the introduction, there have been significant developments in the UNECE region and globally since 1999, when the latest CLTRP protocol was agreed. These have taken place against a background where the Convention has continued to accumulate an increasing number of protocols and activities, as well as increasing the number of subsidiary bodies to address emerging priority issues such as human health, hemispheric transport of air pollutants and reactive nitrogen.

11. These are welcome developments and demonstrate the flexibility and responsiveness of the Convention. However, these new developments have been taken on board without any other activities being reassessed, slowed down or stopped. What is more, responding to the challenges set out in the previous section, particularly those of climate change, will place additional pressures on resources both in the Parties and in the secretariat. It is therefore an appropriate time to examine the internal structure and operation of the Convention, and to align these activities with the overall strategic direction of CLRTAP for the future.

12. The priorities for the Convention will, amongst other things, be determined by the responses to the challenges set out in the previous section and how CLRTAP positions itself with respect to the wider international developments. Questions which relate more to the internal

operation of the Convention, and which will need to reflect the overall strategic priorities, include:

(a) Can resources be more efficiently used if the Convention decides to do no more development work on the Protocols on POPs and Heavy Metals, but simply operates the existing Protocols on a “care and maintenance” basis?;

(b) If work on POPs and heavy metals is reduced significantly, can we do without the Task Forces on POPs and Heavy Metals?;

(c) How can we increase ratification of the existing Protocols? Do we need a group working on this?;

(d) Do we still need a group working on technologies if the key information is incorporated into the integrated assessment models?;

(e) Can we clear away the redundant protocols in a legally permissible way, to avoid the confusion of several obligations for the same pollutant?;

(f) How do we reorganize the structure of the subsidiary bodies to deliver the outcomes more efficiently? Do we need all of the existing task forces? Even if we do, can we limit their lifetimes so they are not “solutions looking for problems”, and thus make more use of ad-hoc groups with limited lifetimes?;

(g) How do we free up resources in the secretariat to develop closer links with the secretariats of other bodies, notably with those involved in climate change and those organizations addressing reactive nitrogen?.

V. CHALLENGES AND QUESTIONS FOR SCIENCE WITHIN THE CONVENTION

13. As noted in the introduction, the scientific component of CLRTAP and the way in which it is integrated with policy development is one of the Convention’s unique strengths. The Convention’s future work should retain and build on this strength. However, it must be recognized that it is not the business of CLRTAP to fund and support science for its own sake. The function of the Convention’s scientific activity is to inform policy development and to assess the effectiveness of policy delivery. Therefore, as policy needs and priorities change, so must the scientific programme.

14. This requires taking difficult decisions. Historically, the Convention, along with many other organizations, has not been good at this. However, as pressures mount and as important new priorities emerge, it is essential that low-priority activities are re-examined and, if necessary, scaled down or discarded.

15. Some notable strengths lie in the areas of emission inventories, in monitoring networks and, in particular, the outreach and transfer of expertise to Parties where these activities are less developed. A major strength too is integrated assessment modelling, an activity right at the heart of the policy/science interface and a key element of the Convention's work.

16. As an illustration of the scrutiny process that should be undertaken to assess the whole programme, we can consider an example. The Convention was originally established to address acidification, and as already noted it has been very successful in driving down sulphur emissions and to a lesser extent those of nitrogen oxides since its inception in 1979. In many parts of the UNECE region, acidification is now seen as a solved problem. Solved not in the sense that critical loads have been met – they clearly have not – but in the sense that policies and reduction strategies have been agreed, implemented and are successful, so that the question must be raised as to what the Convention needs to do other than to report emission reductions and to assess periodically the concentration and deposition of acidic species.

17. Similarly, if CLRTAP were to decide to scale down activities on POPs and heavy metals, then there would need to be scrutiny of the scientific efforts in that area. More resources could potentially be liberated for other priorities.

18. There are therefore some fundamental questions pertaining to the science that need to be addressed together with the wider strategic agenda discussed above:

(a) What are the implications of the future strategic policy direction of CLRTAP for the science programme?;

(b) If we have task forces, should they have limited lifetimes so that they do not persist beyond their period of usefulness?;

(c) What science can we reduce? What science can we stop doing?;

(d) If we feel that less emphasis needs to be put on acidification, how do we realign the work on effects in the future? Do we still need the International Cooperative Programmes in their current form, or should we shift resources to other effects, e.g. health and eutrophication?;

(e) Recognizing the limited resources in the Parties, can we use other scientific activities and networks, e.g on monitoring and modelling, to supplement those of CLRTAP and hence get better assessments of the effectiveness of policies and more generally improve the science base of the Convention? (For example, the work of the Convention now embraces urban and local air quality issues, but the monitoring network of Cooperative Programme for Monitoring and Evaluation of the Long-range Transmission of Air Pollutants in Europe (EMEP) is composed of rural/remote sites. We should use other networks and models where they are useful.);

(f) What are the new scientific challenges that the Convention faces with regard to climate change, hemispheric transport and reactive nitrogen? Are there any other high-priority scientific challenges?;

(g) How can we best accommodate them in the work of the Convention?.
