

**Economic and Social Council**Distr.: General
9 August 2013

Original: English

Economic Commission for Europe**Committee on Environmental Policy****Nineteenth session**

Geneva, 22–25 October 2013

Item 3 of the provisional agenda

**Outcomes of the work of the Bureau of the
Committee on Environmental Policy****Outcomes of the work of the Bureau of the Committee on
Environmental Policy for the period April 2012–June 2013****Report by the Bureau of the Committee on Environmental Policy***Summary*

At its eighteenth session, the Committee on Environmental Policy of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) elected its Bureau and mandated it to carry out a number of activities, and to provide related recommendations to the Committee at its nineteenth session, with regard to: (a) the preparation of the “Environment for Europe” mid-term review of the Astana Conference outcomes; (b) the ECE contribution to the Environment and Health process; (c) the elaboration of criteria for providing financial support to participate in Committee meetings and events; and (d) the development of rules of procedure for the Committee (ECE/CEP/2012/2, paras. 25, 72, 73, 86 and 87).

To fulfil the above mandates, the Bureau worked via electronic consultations and also held a meeting in Geneva on 29 April 2013. The present document outlines the outcomes of the Bureau’s work, including its April meeting, with a view to supporting the work of the Committee on Environmental Policy at its nineteenth session.

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I. European Environment and Health Ministerial Board

1. At its eighteenth session (Geneva, 17–20 April 2012), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) mandated its Bureau, with support from the secretariat, to appoint the four members from the environment sector to the European Environment and Health Ministerial Board (EHMB) for the second term, 2013–2014, taking into account the agreement reached at its seventeenth session with regard to Belgium and the Republic of Moldova (ECE/CEP/2012/2, paras. 72 and 92 (t)).

2. Following up on that decision, on 7 June 2012 the secretariat sent out official letters to the 53 ECE member States that are also members of the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe (WHO/Europe), inviting ministers of environment to inform the secretariat by 28 September 2012 of their interest in serving on EHMB.

3. Four ministers of environment expressed interest in serving on the second term of EHMB. The CEP Bureau held a consultation by e-mail in November 2012 and decided to appoint the four members, as stated in the decision which will be included in the report of the nineteenth session of CEP:

“In accordance with the mandate given to it by CEP at its eighteenth session, the CEP Bureau decided to appoint the four members from the environment sector to EHMB for the second term, 2013–2014, as follows:

- (a) Mr. Philippe Henry, Minister of Environment, Land-use Planning and Mobility for the Walloon Region, Belgium;
- (b) Mr. Gilad Erdan, Minister of Environmental Protection, Israel;
- (c) Mr. Gheorghe Şalaru, Minister of Environment, Republic of Moldova;
- (d) Mr. Eduard Stavitsky, Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources, Ukraine.”

4. CEP was informed about the fulfilment of the above mandate by e-mail on 6 December 2012. The ECE Executive Secretary sent official letters congratulating the four new Ministers on their appointment, as well as thank you letters to the Ministers of Environment of Azerbaijan, Belarus, Romania and Turkey, expressing gratitude for their effective membership on EHMB during the first term (2011–2012).

5. In accordance with the rules of procedure of EHMB, Ukraine and Israel informed WHO/Europe — the lead secretariat for the Environment and Health process, including EHMB — about the change in their Governments and confirmed the interest of the newly appointed Ministers of Environment (Mr. Amir Peretz, Minister of Environmental Protection of Israel and Mr. Oleg Proskuryakov, Minister for Ecology and Natural Resources of Ukraine) to serve on EHMB for the second term.

II. Outcome of the review of the 2005 reform

6. At its meeting on 29 April 2013, the CEP Bureau was informed that the sixty-fifth session of ECE (Geneva, 9–11 April 2013) had adopted the “Outcome of the review of the 2005 ECE reform”.¹ The Director of the Environment Division briefed the meeting about the main outcomes related to the Environment subprogramme. As a consequence of the

¹ Available from http://www.unece.org/commission/2013/65th_index.html (decision A(65)).

overall budget cuts requested by the Secretary-General in follow up to General Assembly resolution 67/248 of 24 December 2012, ECE as a whole would cut seven posts — four General Service posts and three Professional posts. The Environment subprogramme, however, would not have to make any cuts in staff. At the same time, it was not immediately foreseen that the subprogramme would receive any additional staff, despite growing demands for services from the member States.

7. The outcome document stated that the Environment subprogramme, CEP and its related subsidiary bodies were to work efficiently within the current mandate, producing concrete results in a regular and ongoing way that had a clear value added for the region and beyond and that attracted extrabudgetary funding. The subprogramme and its subsidiary bodies should continue implementing existing mandates under the overall guidance of CEP and the ECE Executive Committee and should, subject to the approval of the Executive Committee, implement the relevant outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20 Conference). The subprogramme should also continue its capacity-building activities, from extrabudgetary resources, of particular benefit to the countries in the ECE region.

8. Turning to resources for the Environment subprogramme, the Director of the Environment Division highlighted that the outcome document stipulated that, in allocating regular budget resources, full account should be taken of the increasing number of instruments administered by the subprogramme and the Environment Division so that they could continue, without a reduction in their resources and capacities, to do their work and service all the subsidiary bodies in an efficient way in the future, while fully recognizing the obligation of ECE to service the five multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs).

9. In that regard, the Chair of the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (Protocol on PRTRs) informed the Bureau that he had written a letter to the ECE Executive Secretary on behalf of all the chairs of the governing bodies of the ECE MEAs, addressing the issue of additional regular budget resources for the three Protocols that had entered into force since 2003 — i.e., the Protocol on Water and Health (in 2005); the Protocol on PRTRs (in 2009); and the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment (in 2010). The unsustainability of work and the concrete risk of not being able to implement the decisions taken by the Parties to those Protocols had been brought to the attention of the Executive Secretary. The MEA chairs had invited the Executive Secretary to consider allocating one additional post for each of the three Protocols from the regular budget.

10. The Working Group Chair reported that, in response to the letter, the ECE Executive Secretary had expressed his understanding of and support for the position of the MEA chairs. At the same time, he had emphasized that the outcome of the review of the 2005 reform had not contained a request for additional resources for the Environment subprogramme. Furthermore, the Environment subprogramme had not been affected by the budget cuts requested by the General Assembly. Nevertheless, the Executive Secretary had assured the MEA chairs that due consideration would be given to the resource needs of MEAs if additional regular budget resources became available in the future.

11. The CEP Bureau took note of the information provided.

III. Provisional agenda for the nineteenth session of the Committee on Environmental Policy

12. At the CEP Bureau meeting in April 2013, the CEP Chair informed the Bureau of the relevant outcomes of the third informal meeting of representatives of the governing bodies of ECE MEAs and CEP (Geneva, 27 February 2013).² The meeting worked on drafting the informal guidance, “Towards enhanced cooperation of ECE MEAs”, and considered the issue of sustainable extrabudgetary financial arrangements for the ECE MEAs.

13. CEP Bureau meeting participants agreed with the MEA Chairs that such issues as developing a comprehensive calendar of all meetings planned under the MEAs, consulting on the draft programmes of work prior to their submission for adoption by the respective governing bodies and sharing and comparing the financial mechanisms under the MEAs could be among the issues for further exchange within the informal process among the MEA Chairs.

14. The third informal meeting had also considered the proposed focus for discussion on MEAs at the nineteenth session of CEP, namely, “MEAs: strengthening national implementation and compliance”, and agreed that it could be an interesting issue for discussion. The CEP Chair informed the Bureau that she had invited the MEA chairs to participate in the nineteenth session of CEP. The Bureau noted that the next informal meeting was tentatively scheduled back to back to the CEP meeting, i.e., on Monday, 21 October 2013.

15. The CEP Bureau considered the drafts of the annotated agenda and of the organization of work of the nineteenth session of CEP. With regard to the organization of work, participants recommended merging and shortening some of the agenda items so as to finish the CEP session earlier on the last day (i.e., Friday, 25 October 2013).

16. In that regard, it was suggested that the agenda item on MEAs be addressed together with the sub-item on MEAs under the agenda item on the EfE mid-term review. For instance, the MEAs-related discussions could commence with a brief report by the Chair of the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents, who had initiated the informal MEAs meetings, on the main outcomes of the most recent informal meeting.

17. Subsequently, the secretariat could present the main findings, conclusions and questions identified for discussion in a summary report being prepared by the secretariat for the nineteenth session of CEP on the work undertaken to assist countries in ratifying and implementing ECE MEAs, as well as to assess the obstacles to their ratification.

18. Thereafter, a panel discussion could be organized, including presentations by the MEA chairs on the work carried out to strengthen national implementation and compliance, followed by questions and answers from the floor. It was suggested that the agenda be organized in such a way as to conclude the discussion before lunchtime on Tuesday, 22 October 2013.

19. Furthermore, in order to avoid potential divergences from the rules of procedure once adopted, the Bureau recommended that CEP consider undertaking the election of officers at the beginning of the nineteenth session (i.e., before the consideration of the draft rules of procedure).

² See <http://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/treaties/environment-conventions/all/joint-work.html>.

20. The Bureau requested the secretariat to revise the organization of work accordingly to reflect the above discussions and recommendations.

IV. Preparation of the “Environment for Europe” mid-term review

21. At its April meeting, the CEP Bureau also considered the organization of the “Environment for Europe” (EfE) mid-term review of the main outcomes of the Seventh EfE Ministerial Conference (Astana, 21–23 September 2011) (Astana Conference), as presented in the draft provisional agenda for the nineteenth session of CEP. The Bureau discussed the idea of identifying a good moderator for the entire mid-term review segment, or, at a minimum, for the two panel discussions, i.e., on the Astana Water Action (AWA) and on greening the economy, if feasible given the financial constraints.

22. Concerning the EfE mid-term review session on the implementation of the AWA, the Bureau recommended choosing panellists from the 21 countries and 4 organizations that were included in the AWA survey. In addition to country representatives, it would be useful to have representatives of non-governmental organizations and business on the panel. Furthermore, the Bureau suggested that the Chair of the Bureau of the governing body of the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, who was also a member of the CEP Bureau, be consulted on the selection of panellists for the AWA session.

23. Regarding the the EfE mid-term review panel discussion on greening the economy, the Bureau recommended that a representative of business be included on the panel, e.g., from the United Nations Industrial Development Organization or the World Business Council. The Chair invited Bureau members to consider who might be interested in participating from business and to provide the secretariat with a list of names of potential panellists. Some Bureau members also referred to the ECE toolbox on greening the economy, which was under development and which had been preliminarily presented at the sixty-fifth session of ECE. It was suggested to present the finalized ECE toolbox at the nineteenth session of CEP, either during the mid-term review session on greening the economy, if time permitted, or at a side event on the margins of the session.

24. The Bureau also suggested inviting the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to present its green economy activities, with a focus on those activities that could be complemented by the ECE work, such as the Green Growth Knowledge Platform,³ founded by the Global Green Growth Institute, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), UNEP and the World Bank. ECE might wish to consider joining that platform.

25. The work related to greening the economy carried out by the OECD Environmental Action Programme Task Force should also be presented to CEP, with a view to identifying synergies between the work of UNEP, ECE and OECD.

26. Concerning the session on environmental assessment and reporting, including the development of a Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS), the Chair recalled that, following a request by ministers in Astana, the European Environment Agency (EEA) had prepared an outline on the establishment of a regular assessment and reporting process underpinned by the gradual development of SEIS. A first version of the document had been presented to the eighteenth session of CEP, followed by a revised version, reflecting comments received, which had been circulated by e-mail to CEP in December 2012. A

³ See <http://www.greengrowthknowledge.org>.

separate document presenting ECE inputs into the development of SEIS, which was complementary to the EEA document, had been prepared by the ECE secretariat and circulated to CEP in February 2013.

27. At the same time, EEA had encountered difficulties in collecting contributions from countries and EfE partners in the development of SEIS. The Bureau member from Switzerland informed the meeting that her country was engaged in SEIS development and had also been supporting the countries of Central Asia, via the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia, in complying with SEIS principles.

28. In that connection, the secretariat reported that the thirteenth session of the ECE Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment in October/November 2012 had focused on SEIS development in non-EEA countries, and the Working Group would continue to consider that issue, in accordance with its renewed mandate. The main bottleneck to overcome for non-EEA countries was the continuing lack of regular reporting on the state of their environment and production of indicator-based state-of-the-environment reports in many of those countries. The participation of non-EEA countries in SEIS development would require a stepwise approach. The establishment of national legal obligations for regular reporting on the state of the environment could also, consequently, better support the development of SEIS across the entire ECE region.

29. The CEP Bureau considered the challenges related to SEIS development. With regard to the participation of MEAs in the process, the need to highlight the value added was stressed, i.e., how SEIS could help to countries in implementing and joining the MEAs. A step-by-step approach should be used, with the identification of concrete actions and synergies so that MEAs could gradually adjust their procedures to comply with SEIS principles.

30. The CEP Bureau deliberated on various solutions to facilitate the development of SEIS across the region and to ensure the active involvement of all concerned partners. Following up on the commitment to SEIS declared by ministers at the Astana Conference, at the political level CEP was overseeing the establishment of a regular process of environmental assessment, including development of SEIS. At the technical/expert level, in accordance with its renewed mandate for 2012–2014, the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment would contribute to establishing a regular process of environmental assessment and in developing SEIS across the region, in close cooperation with EEA and other relevant partners.

31. The Bureau also considered the relevance of article 5 — on collection and dissemination of environmental information — of the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) in supporting the process of SEIS development in those non-EEA countries that were Parties to the Aarhus Convention. In that regard, it was suggested that the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment and the Task Force on Access to Information under the Aarhus Convention should enhance their cooperation in supporting SEIS establishment.

32. The CEP Bureau agreed that SEIS was one of the most important outcomes of the Astana Ministerial Conference and that progress in its development should be reported at the next EfE conference. To strengthen the work of CEP at the political level and the work of the Working Group at the technical level, the Bureau recommended that CEP consider establishing a SEIS coordination mechanism in the form of an ad hoc group of “Friends of SEIS” in which the main SEIS stakeholders would be expected to participate, including: representatives of the CEP Bureau; high-level representative(s) of EEA; the Chair of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment; representatives of the MEA governing bodies; and high-level representatives of other relevant stakeholders (e.g., ECE, UNEP, OECD). The CEP Bureau requested the secretariat in consultation with the Bureau

to prepare draft terms of reference, including the establishment and work modalities, for such a group for further consideration by CEP at its nineteenth session.

33. With regard to a closer involvement of MEAs in the establishment of SEIS, the Bureau recommended that the expected concrete contributions from the MEAs should be highlighted in the mid-term review discussion. The informal meeting of the MEA and CEP chairs on 21 October 2013 could discuss the link between the implementation of the MEAs and SEIS development, and prepare the message to be delivered to CEP from the MEAs.

34. The CEP Bureau was pleased to learn that EEA was planning to organize a side event on SEIS on the margins of the nineteenth session of CEP.

35. The CEP Bureau requested the secretariat to continue with the organization of the mid-term EfE review, taking into account the Bureau's discussion and recommendations. Concerning the proposed evaluation of the mid-term review's organization and content, the Bureau recommended carrying out an evaluation a few months after the nineteenth session of CEP so as to allow delegates enough time to reflect on the issue.

V. The Eighth "Environment for Europe" Ministerial Conference

36. According to the EfE reform plan, not later than 18 months before the next EfE conference CEP at its regular session should decide on not more than two themes for the conference and discuss the outline of its agenda. A decision on the agenda of the conference was to be taken at the regular meeting of CEP approximately 12 months prior to the Conference and then further preparatory work should commence.

37. In that context, taking into account that the next Environment and Health ministerial conference was expected to be organized in 2016, the next EfE ministerial conference could be held in 2015. If so, then the two themes for the conference should be identified by CEP at its nineteenth session in October 2013. Alternatively, as the mid-term review of the Astana outcomes was being held in 2013, the next EfE ministerial conference could be scheduled in 2016, i.e., with an interval of five years. At the same time, the organization of the Environment and Health conference in the same year should be taken into account when fixing the date.

38. The CEP Bureau considered the envisaged preparatory time frame for the next conference. Given that the mid-term review was being held in 2013, and that its results should be taken into account in preparing the next conference, the Bureau recommended that CEP consider holding the next ministerial conference in 2016. At the same time, it was acknowledged that the host country for the next conference had yet to be identified and that the exact date would need to be agreed with the host country. Also, the participation of the future host country was crucial in the discussions on the substance of the next conference.

39. The CEP Bureau asked the secretariat to prepare a document for the nineteenth session of CEP containing the host country requirements, on the basis of the experience of previous conferences. Furthermore, the Bureau suggested circulating that document to CEP in advance of the session, after the summer break, inviting countries to consider it and express their interest in hosting the conference by the end of September 2013 to the CEP Bureau via the secretariat.

40. Concerning the substance of the next conference, the Bureau asked the secretariat to prepare a short document, not limited in scope, to facilitate the discussion by CEP. An overview of progress in SEIS development should be included.

VI. Rules of procedure of the Committee on Environmental Policy

41. CEP had mandated its Bureau to provide it with recommendations at its nineteenth session on the possible elaboration and adoption of rules of procedure of CEP, in accordance with rule 20 of the Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure of ECE (E/ECE/778/Rev.4).

42. The secretariat had prepared a first draft of CEP rules of procedure. The draft was based on the ECE Rules of Procedure, and took into account the new Guidelines on procedures and practices for ECE bodies that had recently been adopted by the sixty-fifth session of ECE (E/ECE/1464, annex III, appendix III).

43. The CEP Bureau agreed that CEP should have rules of procedure. Furthermore, the Bureau discussed the draft and worked on revising the text projected on the screen. Regarding the formula for the composition of the CEP Bureau, the participants recommended putting forward four options for the consideration of CEP, as follows:

(a) **9+1 geographic formula**, to include one chair and nine members serving as vice-chairs for a biennium, with the possibility of being re-elected, with details of the geographical/ subregional composition included;

(b) **9+1 non-geographic formula**, to include one chair and nine members serving as vice-chairs for a biennium, with the possibility of being re-elected, with details of the geographical/subregional composition not included;

(c) **9 geographic formula**, to include one chair and eight members serving as vice-chairs for a biennium, with the possibility of being re-elected, with details of the geographical/subregional composition included;

(d) **9 non- geographic formula**, to include one chair and eight members serving as vice-chairs for a biennium, with the possibility of being re-elected, with details of the geographical/subregional composition not included.

44. The CEP Bureau requested the secretariat to revise the draft CEP rules of procedure in the light of the comments made, and to submit it to the nineteenth session of CEP for further consideration with a view to adopting it.

VII. Criteria for financial support

45. At its eighteenth session, CEP had mandated its Bureau to consider criteria for providing financial support for participation in meetings and events, with a view to assessing whether the current criteria were the most appropriate, and to provide recommendations to CEP at its nineteenth session. Accordingly, the secretariat had prepared a draft assessment of criteria for providing financial support for participation in meetings and events for the Bureau's consideration.

46. The Bureau welcomed the draft assessment document and made some comments. It agreed with the conclusions of the assessment, that the criteria currently used to determine financial support (i.e., setting up two thresholds based on national gross domestic product) were the most appropriate for the present. The Bureau recommended including an agenda item on the criteria for providing financial support for participation in meetings and events at every regular session of CEP, with a view to either adopting revised criteria or extending the existing criteria until the next regular session.

47. It was also suggested that the two thresholds established — for countries eligible for the subsistence allowance only and those eligible for subsistence allowance and travel — be

reviewed regularly. It was understood that, while doing so, changes in the cost of living might be taken into consideration, as appropriate, along with any other factors.

48. At the same time, the Bureau expressed concern that the current modalities for providing financial support⁴ from donor contributions to eligible CEP delegates to enable their participation in meetings in Geneva was inflexible and rather expensive.

49. Particular concern was expressed about the rigidity of the present approach in cases where eligible delegates had to cancel their participation in a meeting on very short notice, of one or two days (e.g., as a result of new internal dispositions and changes, or due to health or personal reasons), or in cases where delegates did not show up at the meeting without prior notice. In such cases, under the current system, the funds spent for the ticket were lost (only occasionally had it been possible to recover a small portion of the cost).

50. In that regard, the Bureau recommended exploring the option of providing lump sums to eligible delegates. Delegates would be informed well in advance of the meeting of the amount to which they are entitled. The lump sum would be expected to support their expenses related to travel, accommodation, meals, visa and other items related to their participation in the meeting. Eligible delegates would have to purchase their own ticket and would receive the lump sum during the meeting.

51. The Bureau requested the secretariat to revise the document in the light of the comments made and to submit it to CEP at its nineteenth session for consideration and adoption of the recommendations contained therein.

52. The Bureau also noted that it had fulfilled its mandate from CEP to take a decision by 15 June 2012 on the request by Belarus to be included in the list of countries eligible for support to participate in meetings. The results were reflected accordingly in the report of the eighteenth session of CEP (ECE/CEP/2012/2,⁵ para. 85 and 92 (bb), and annexes I and II).

VIII. Calendar of meetings

53. A schedule of meetings agreed well in advance would provide useful guidance for countries in planning for those meetings, and would greatly facilitate the internal planning of meetings at the facilities of the United Nations Office in Geneva.

54. The Bureau considered a draft schedule for meetings of CEP and its Bureau for the period 2014–2016. The two options presented had been developed taking into account the preparations for the Eighth EfE Ministerial Conference in either 2015 or 2016.

55. The CEP Bureau recommended that only the schedule of meetings that envisaged the next EfE conference would be held in 2016 should be retained. It also suggested

⁴ Typically, the financial support includes: (a) a ticket which is provided by the travel unit through the American Express (Amex) office located in the Palais des Nations and its partner companies located in the respective countries; and (b) a subsistence allowance for Geneva, which is given to delegates during the meeting in Geneva. The ECE travel policy foresees purchasing the least expensive ticket not later than 18 days before the meeting. Practice shows, however, that the tickets purchased from Amex are often more expensive than tickets available for purchasing in the eligible countries or online. Also, Amex does not provide tickets for companies that are not one of its partners, including budget airline companies and a number of other international and local companies not partners with Amex. Also, in addition to the ticket price, Amex levies a service charge of CHF 118 for each transaction (i.e., after the ticket is issued, if there is need to make changes in the travel itinerary, an additional CHF 118 is charged for any new bookings).

⁵ See <http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2012/ece/cep/ece.cep.2012.2.e.pdf>.

holding its own meetings, which were held back to back with the CEP sessions, in the afternoon/early evening of the day before — rather than in the morning immediately before — the CEP sessions. The morning schedule clashed with the coordination meetings organized by the European Union (EU), and hence Bureau members from EU countries had difficulties in participating in the Bureau's morning meetings.

56. The CEP Bureau asked the secretariat to revise the draft schedule accordingly and to submit it to CEP for consideration and approval. In that context, it was noted that the meetings for 2014 had been already forecasted.
