

**Economic Commission for Europe****Committee on Environmental Policy****Twenty-third session**

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Item 5 of the provisional agenda

**Follow-up to the Eighth Environment for Europe****Ministerial Conference and preparation of the****mid-term review of the Conference's main outcomes****Lessons learned from the preparation, organization and running of the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference****Note by the secretariat\****Summary*

At its twenty-second session (Geneva, 25-27 January 2017), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Committee on Environmental Policy agreed to carry out the survey contained in document ECE/CEP/2017/L.3 to assess lessons learned from the preparation, organization and running of the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Batumi, Georgia, 8-10 June 2017), with a view to improving the preparation of the next Conference. In that regard, the Committee requested the secretariat to launch the survey in February 2017, with a one-month deadline for responses, and to prepare an analysis of the responses received for consideration by the Committee at its next session (ECE/CEP/2017/2, para. 28 (e)).

Following up to the request, the current document presents an analysis prepared based on the responses received. In particular, the information collected through the survey will support the preparation of the next Conference commencing after the mid-term review of the Batumi Conference main outcomes.

The Committee is invited to consider the outcomes of the survey on the Batumi Conference.

\* The current document was not formally edited.



## I. Introduction

1. At its twenty-second session (Geneva, 25-27 January 2017), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Committee on Environmental Policy agreed to carry out the survey contained in document ECE/CEP/2017/L.3 to assess lessons learned from the preparation, organization and running of the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Batumi, Georgia, 8-10 June 2017), with a view to improving the preparation of the next Conference. In that regard, the Committee requested the secretariat to launch the survey in February 2017, with a one-month deadline for responses, and to prepare an analysis of the responses received for consideration by the Committee at its next session (ECE/CEP/2017/2, para. 28 (e)).
2. Following up to the request, the current document presents an analysis prepared based on the responses received. In particular, the information collected through the survey will support the preparation of the next Conference commencing after the mid-term review of the Batumi Conference main outcomes.
3. The survey received a limited number of responses, as follows: 17 responses in total have been received from 16 member States, representing 29 per cent of all ECE member States and 36 per cent of the member States that sent Government delegations to the Batumi Ministerial Conference. Notwithstanding the lower-than-optimal response, the data is still sufficient to draw some conclusions with an acceptable degree of confidence.
4. The Committee is invited to consider the outcomes of the survey on the Batumi Conference.

## II. Overview of the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference

5. The Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference took place in Batumi, Georgia, in June 2016. The Batumi Conference gathered over 630 official delegates from Governments from 44 ECE countries, the international community, civil society, business and the media throughout the ECE region. There were over 700 participants in total, including those participating only in side events and exhibitions.
6. The Conference addressed two main themes: greening the economy in the pan-European region; and improving air quality for a better environment and human health. In addition, during a segment on education for sustainable development, participants assessed progress made during 10 years of implementation of the ECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development and decided on the next priorities and the Strategy's future implementation framework.
7. On the first day of the Conference, delegates worked on moving forward the environment dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, both by considering how the ECE multilateral environmental agreements, policies and institutions support the 2030 Agenda and by assessing progress in the development of the Shared Environmental Information Systems to keep the pan-European environment under review.
8. The key outcomes of the Conference include: the Batumi Ministerial Declaration; the Pan-European Strategic Framework on Greening the Economy (Strategic Framework) and its Batumi Initiative on Green Economy (BIG-E); the Batumi Action for Cleaner Air (BACA); and the Batumi Ministerial Statement on Education for Sustainable Development.
9. The Conference was organized in an interactive format, including interactive discussions organized in a "talk show" format, four high-level multi-stakeholder round tables and panel discussions. To support multi-stakeholder discussions during the Conference and to facilitate decision-making, substantive documents on each of the two

main themes were prepared by ECE jointly with the United Nations Environment Programme and other Environment for Europe partners. In addition, a number of valuable information documents and a set of 11 fact sheets, linking the ECE environment activities to the relevant Sustainable Development Goals and their targets, were prepared by ECE and the Environment for Europe partners. The Batumi Conference was a paperless event.

10. On the margins of the Conference, ECE and the Environment for Europe partners organized 7 exhibitions and 33 side events on issues related to the themes of the Conference.

11. The ECE Committee on Environmental Policy prepared the Conference. The ECE secretariat, in cooperation with the Environment for Europe partners, supported the work of the Committee. The Georgian Government supported the preparation, organization and hosting of the Conference in accordance with decisions taken by the Committee. The preparatory process and the Conference were organized based on the provisions of the Environment for Europe Reform Plan adopted in 2009 (ECE/CEP/S/152 and Corr.1, annex I), and in accordance with the procedures for the Batumi Ministerial Conference adopted by the Committee in 2014 (ECE/CEP/2014/15).<sup>1</sup>

12. The preparatory process for the Batumi Conference commenced in 2014 and included: two regular sessions of the Committee (in 2014 and 2015) and two special sessions (in 2016); two separate meetings of the Bureau (in 2014 and 2015) and four meetings back to back to Committee sessions (2014–2016); and work of the group of experts on green economy by virtual means and at one meeting of the group in Glion, Switzerland (in 2016).

### **III. Conducting a survey to assess the preparation, organization and running of the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference**

13. After the Conference, the secretariat received oral and written feedback from several delegations praising the successful organization of the Conference. In that regard, the proposal to conduct a survey was put forward to the Committee with a view to enable all countries and organizations that participated in the preparation of and in the Conference itself to express their views on the organization and running of the event. In addition, the survey included questions soliciting other ideas and suggestions on how to improve the organization of future conferences. Furthermore, the survey was used to gather preliminary proposals for themes to be addressed by the next Conference. While the survey was detailed, it was a forward-looking survey aimed at assessing the organization of the Batumi Conference with a view to improve the preparation of the next Conference.

14. The survey's target audience comprised the representatives of national Governments of the ECE region. In addition, the survey aimed to collect views from observers to the Committee that participated in the preparatory process and in the Conference. Those members of and observers to the Committee that participated in the preparatory process but could not attend the Conference were invited to answer the survey questions, as appropriate.

15. The survey contained sections covering: the content of the Conference; the organization, format and running of the Conference; the preparatory process; the side events on the margins of the Conference; and possible themes for the next Conference.

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<sup>1</sup> Available from <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=35032>.

16. The survey was approved by the Committee at its twenty-second session. It was circulated to the Committee members and observers by email on 1 March 2017 with a deadline to respond of one month. The survey was made available in Microsoft Word format<sup>2</sup> in English, French and Russian and as an on-line version in English. The on-line version was adapted so that the survey questions would fit on nine web pages.

17. At the time of the Committee Bureau meeting (Lisbon, 28-29 June 2017), responses had been received from the following countries: Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Italy, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey. In order to have a more representative analysis, the Bureau recommended repeating the invitation to the countries and organizations to fill in the survey by the end of July 2017.

18. By the latter deadline, 17 responses in total were received, all from Governments, namely Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, France, Germany, Georgia, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey (two responses) and Ukraine. This represents 29 per cent of all ECE member States and 36 per cent of the member States that sent Government delegations to the Batumi Ministerial Conference.

19. Of the responses received, four (Bulgaria, Czechia, Georgia, Italy) were submitted on behalf of the delegations present at the Conference (implying some internal coordination among the members of the delegation), while the other 13 were sent by individual members of delegations. There was no significant difference between those two categories of responses. Of the 17 responses received, 12 were filled in on-line.

20. The above rate of response is lower than expected. Based on feedback received from some respondents, it could be assumed that the following factors contributed to the low response rate:

(a) Technical limitations of the on-line version (that prevented some respondents from completing the survey online);

(i) Software-related limitations (too slow interface of the third-party online software);

(ii) Design-related limitations (first version of the online survey was not sufficiently well-adapted to the interface limitations, and also contained some unnecessary technical restrictions);

(b) Timing limitations, as the survey was released almost one year after the Conference, which was too long a delay;

(c) Concept limitations, as the survey actually was to consist of several independent parts, assessing too broad a spectrum of issues—from conceptual to logistical and from past performance to ideas for the future—resulting in a comprehensive but long document, containing 68 questions. That complexity proved counterproductive.

21. Notwithstanding the lower-than-optimal response, the data is still sufficient to draw some conclusions with an acceptable degree of confidence. The two chapters below present an outline of the analysis of the responses received. The statistical summary of responses is issued in a separate document (information paper No. 9).

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<sup>2</sup> The mention of a commercial company or product in this document does not imply endorsement by the United Nations.

## **IV. Lessons learned from the preparation, organization and running of the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference**

22. As a general conclusion, the results obtained through the survey support the immediate reaction by many delegates who, after its closure, assessed the Conference as successful. The responses are positive on every aspect of the Conference, including its preparation, organization, running and content, while also providing some helpful insights into the future of the Environment for Europe process. Along with the overall positive reaction, there were also critical remarks to be taken into account in the future.

### **A. Organization**

23. The respondents to the survey generally evaluated the organizational side of the Batumi Conference very positively. The secretariat will use the positive assessments, as well as the remarks made, to guide similar preparation processes in the future, as needed.

24. The following assessment was made of particular aspects (with percentages being calculated based on the number of replies to individual questions and excluding “no opinion” replies):

(a) Despite the relative remoteness of the Conference site, the efforts of the host Government and the ECE secretariat to ease access—by diversifying access routes, issuing detailed guidance for using various means of transport and establishing trilateral channels of communication for responding to individual requests from participants—generally worked well. More than 80 per cent of the respondents were either very satisfied or satisfied with the organization of arrival and departure (across all means of transport (air, train and bus) and all locations (Tbilisi, Kutaisi and Batumi) and including the welcome at transport hubs and hotels);

(b) The guidance on accommodation provided by the host Government proved to be useful. More than 80 per cent of the respondents were either very satisfied or satisfied with the guidance, across both Government-recommended and other hotels. Unfavourable comments were mostly related to technical problems with Wi-Fi in the Sheraton Batumi Hotel, the main site of the Conference (where the bulk of the hotel’s broadband traffic capacity was used to service the needs of the Conference rooms, leading to limitations in guest rooms);

(c) Other logistical aspects of the stay in Batumi (commuting, dining facilities, lunches, welcome reception provided by the Georgian Government and the family photograph) were rated overwhelmingly positively. The host-country reception was universally acclaimed;

(d) A few novelties were tested for the first time by the secretariat for the registration process for the Batumi Conference, such as on-line registration only and use of “smart” badges. The result was good: across all aspects of registration and access to the site, 90 per cent of respondents were either very satisfied or satisfied. The result was similar also when assessing the arrangements in the main meeting rooms where some innovations were also introduced, such as the unusual seating arrangements, and the provision of information technology equipment on-site;

(e) The work done by both the host-country and ECE secretariats was assessed very positively, with more than 90 per cent of respondents being either very satisfied or satisfied with the services provided;

(f) Though the overall rating of the documents of the Conference (both formal and informal, including pre-, in- and post-session documents) was highly satisfactory, a sizeable minority (35 per cent) found the formal documents either somewhat long, or too long. To the extent possible, this observation will be taken into account by the secretariat in future;

(g) The visual identity of the Conference received unanimous praise, with 82 per cent of respondents being very satisfied.

## **B. Content and conduct**

25. The respondents to the survey generally evaluated the content and running of the Batumi Conference very positively. The secretariat takes note of the positive assessments as well as some remarks to guide similar preparation processes in future, as needed. For example, it may be recommended to discuss possible adjustments to the (otherwise well-received) format of the Conference sessions during the preparations for the next Environment for Europe Conference.

26. The following assessment was made of particular aspects:

(a) The two themes of the Conference were found to be very relevant;

(b) All eight agenda items were considered to have been well-prepared and the proceedings in each segment conducted adequately;

(c) The format of the sessions was also well-received in each case and the interactive setup was praised (rated as “excellent” in one comment). The consensus was to repeat the same format at the next Conference. In some cases there were sizable opinions in favour of keeping the format while making some adjustments. Specifically, 50 per cent favoured adjusting the discussion on the ECE multilateral environmental agreements, policies and institutions supporting the 2030 Agenda; 40 per cent for the discussion on keeping the pan-European environment under review; 40 per cent for the segment on education for sustainable development; 33 per cent for the discussion on greening the economy; and 38 per cent for the discussion on improving air quality. The respondents did not provide concrete proposals, but the subject may require further discussion by the Committee on Environmental Policy in future;

(d) The time-frame of the Conference (overall duration and time allocation per agenda item) was found to be good and might therefore be used as a possible blueprint for future conferences.

## **C. Preparatory process**

27. The respondents to the survey generally evaluated the preparatory process of the Batumi Conference very positively. The five-year period between the Environment for Europe conferences was found to be adequate. 46 per cent of the respondents thought that the length of the preparation period for the Batumi Conference (May 2014-June 2016) was either somewhat long, or too long. Further discussions on the Environment for Europe process might address this issue.

## **D. Side-events**

28. The respondents to the survey generally evaluated the side-events of the Batumi Conference positively, including their number, timing and quality. They also rated some side-events that were attended by either themselves or colleagues from the same delegation;

all ratings were very satisfactory or satisfactory. The assistance provided by the host country secretariat in organizing and attending the side-events was also generally praised.

29. The experience of the side-events at Batumi Conference was generally positive and might be used by the secretariat to guide the organization of future such events.

## V. Possible themes for the next Conference

30. The respondents to the survey reacted to the two closed questions on the issues to be addressed by the next Ministerial Conference, as follows:

(a) “It would be useful if the next ministerial conference continues to address issues related to greening the economy”: 81 per cent strongly agreed or somewhat agreed, while 19 per cent somewhat disagreed or strongly disagreed. The reasons behind the negative responses were explained in comments (for details see the information paper No. 9), referring to, for example, the limited added value with respect to existing processes, different approaches to this sector, the existence of other forums and the topic being too broad and abstract;

(b) “It would be useful if the next ministerial conference addresses issues related to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”: 87 per cent strongly agreed or somewhat agreed, while 13 per cent somewhat disagreed. The reasons given by one of those agreeing was provided in a comment (for details see the information paper No. 9), referring to the 2030 Agenda being at the top of the international agenda and considering that the next ministerial conference should make use of this momentum.

31. In response to two other questions that asked respondents to identify one established thematic priority of the next Conference and one emerging one, several proposals were submitted as follows:

(a) Proposals received for the first thematic priority (an established theme of importance to the entire region, e.g., the Seventh Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference in Astana addressed the “Sustainable management of water and water-related ecosystems” and the Batumi Conference addressed “Improving air quality for a better environment and human health”):

- (i) Assessing progress in greening the economy and cleaning the air (as a follow up to the Batumi Conference);
- (ii) Air quality;
- (iii) Water quality;
- (iv) Waste management;
- (v) Nature conservation;
- (vi) Sustainable Development Goals and their regional implementation;
- (vii) Sustainable development in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;
- (viii) Greening the economy and moving forward to sustainable development in the ECE region;
- (ix) Education and environmental awareness-raising – successful ways of communication;
- (x) Urban issues, including the urban agenda and smart cities – hubs for green progress;
- (xi) Sustainable consumption and production – transition to sustainability;

(b) Proposals received for the second thematic priority (an emerging theme of importance to the entire region, e.g., the Astana Conference addressed “Greening the economy: mainstreaming the environment into economic development” and the Batumi Conference addressed “Greening the economy in the pan-European region”):

- (i) Environmental impact assessment or strategic environmental assessment;
- (ii) A theme in line with an ECE Convention or environmental pollution;
- (iii) Financing of green economy;
- (iv) Greening the economy in a sustainable environmental manner;
- (v) Sustainable consumption and production.

32. One respondent suggested that thematic priorities for the next conference will mostly depend on the emerging regional priority directions and the implementation of the global agenda at the regional level. Thus, ideas for thematic sessions should be provided at a later stage. It was also suggested that education for sustainable development should be included as a cross-cutting issue, along with the main thematic priorities.

## **VI. Conclusion**

33. Despite of the limitations mentioned above, the survey exercise was useful for drawing some lessons and conclusions on several issues of both the Batumi Conference and the future Environment for Europe Conference. Some technical aspects identified will be taken into account by the secretariat in its future work. On some other aspects, further discussion by the Committee on Environmental Policy would be needed.

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