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Twenty-fourth session

Geneva, 29–31 January 2019

Item 2 of the provisional agenda

Outcomes of the work of the Bureau

Outcomes of the work of the Bureau for the period January-October 2018

Report by the Bureau of the Committee on Environmental Policy

Summary

At its twenty-third session (14–17 November 2017), the Committee on Environmental Policy requested its Bureau and the secretariat to follow up on the Committee's decisions, including by preparing the documents and reports necessary for the Committee's work at its next session in January 2019. The present document outlines the outcomes of the Bureau's work during the period January–October 2018 with a view to supporting the Committee's work at its twenty-fourth session.

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Introduction

1. At its twenty-third session (14–17 November 2017), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Committee on Environmental Policy requested its Bureau to follow up on the Committee's decisions and mandated it to carry out a number of activities, including: (a) to seek the views of Committee members and observers on the format of Committee meetings and to explore the possibility of preparing and organizing a meeting of the Bureau in an extended format to discuss the format of the Committee's meetings; (b) to prepare the Committee's twenty-fourth session; (c) to organize a one-day mid-term review of the main outcomes of the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Batumi, Georgia, 8–10 June 2016) as part of the twenty-fourth session; and (d) to verify the availability of data for 2016 and, if available for all countries with economies in transition, to prepare revised criteria for financial support.

2. In the intersessional period, the Bureau worked by means of electronic consultations and met in Geneva on 28 February and 26 September 2018. In particular, further to the Committee's request at its twenty-third session, the Bureau sought the views of Committee members and observers on the format of Committee meetings and prepared the Committee's twenty-fourth session, including the mid-term review. It furthermore looked into updating the criteria for eligibility for financial support for participation in meetings and events.

3. The Bureau of the Committee on Environmental Policy comprises the Chair from Portugal and Vice-Chairs from Belarus, Belgium, Czechia, France, Georgia, Kazakhstan, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Switzerland and the United States of America.

I. Format of sessions of the Committee on Environmental Policy

4. The secretariat in consultation with the Bureau sought the views of the Committee members and observers on the format of the Committee's meetings by inviting them to complete a short survey. Both the Word version and the online version of the survey were made available to the Committee members and observers by the secretariat on 22 December 2017. In total, 17 complete responses were received from the Committee members and observers, representing 16 member States and 1 United Nations organization.

5. The Bureau met in an extended format in Geneva on 28 February 2018, back to back to the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development in the ECE region (1–2 March 2018). The Bureau considered the results of the survey and focused its discussion on the optimization and streamlining of the Committee's sessions, including the twenty-fourth session of the Committee, which would have a slightly different format as it would also incorporate the mid-term review.

6. Starting from the Committee's twenty-fourth session, the Bureau recommended:

- (a) That the total duration of Committee sessions should be limited to two and a half days;
- (b) To reintroduce coffee breaks;
- (c) To dedicate 15 minutes every morning to the list of decisions;
- (d) To skip presentations of official documents, as they are made available on the website well before the session;

(e) To have one 30-minute long discussion on all cross-sectoral activities under the auspices of the ECE Environment subprogramme, including mainstreaming a gender perspective in environmental activities, and to ask the secretariat to prepare an overview of these activities as an official document to facilitate the Committee's discussion, including on the recent developments under each activity, goals and challenges, planned activities and decisions expected from the Committee on Environmental Policy regarding each activity;

(f) To have a maximum of one one-hour-long side event per session;

(g) To establish maximum times to be allocated for particular agenda items, with 90 minutes for discussion on sustainable development in the region; 30 minutes for environmental monitoring, assessment and reporting; 45 minutes for peer reviews of a country under the Environmental Performance Review Programme plus 30 minutes to discuss the recent and planned activities under the Programme; and 90 minutes for consideration of the work under the multilateral environmental agreements (except for the twenty-fourth session, when the agreements would be discussed as part of the mid-term review).

II. Provisional agenda for the Committee's twenty-fourth session

7. During its meeting in September 2018, the Bureau approved the draft provisional annotated agenda for the Committee's twenty-fourth session and the provisional time frame for the meeting. In particular, the Bureau recommended:

(a) To continue its practice of inviting interested countries and organizations to share their experience in identifying practical ways and means of approaching national implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and relevant Sustainable Development Goals from an environmental perspective, in particular steps taken to foster the integration foreseen in the 2030 Agenda, and to invite countries to inform the secretariat in advance of the Committee's session of their interest in sharing their practical experience in the implementation of Goals 4 (quality education), 8 (decent work and economic growth), 10 (reduced inequalities), 13 (climate action), 16 (peace and justice, strong institutions) and 17 (partnerships for the Goals);

(b) To ask the secretariat to send a circular regarding the candidates for the Committee's Bureau to be elected at the twenty-fourth session.

III. Follow-up to the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference and preparation of the mid-term review of the Conference's main outcomes

8. During its February meeting the Bureau recommended to create an online reporting tool on the implementation of voluntary commitments under each of the two Batumi initiatives – the Batumi Initiative on Green Economy (BIG-E) and the Batumi Action for Cleaner Air (BACA) – to make it easier for countries and organizations to report.

9. At its meeting in September 2018, the Bureau considered the information provided by the secretariat on the preparation of the reports for the mid-term review of the Batumi Conference main outcomes and guided the secretariat in finalizing the documents for submission to the Committee.

10. With regard to the responses received through the online reporting tool on the two Batumi initiatives, the Committee recommended that the secretariat seek more responses

from the countries and international organizations that had made commitments under the initiatives.

11. In addition, the Bureau took note of the information provided by the secretariat on sustainable fashion and decided to discuss the topic during the Committee's twenty-fourth session in the context of the discussion on greening the economy. The Bureau also invited the secretariat to prepare an information paper on the topic.

IV. Overview of resources for environmental activities and criteria for financial support for participation in meetings and events

12. At its September 2018 meeting, the Bureau requested the secretariat to prepare a first draft of a note on countries' eligibility for financial support to participate in meetings and events. The draft was sent to the Bureau members for consultation on 28 September 2018 and received positive feedback. On 30 October a revised draft was circulated among the Committee members and observers for approval by a silence procedure with a deadline of 14 November. As no objections were received by the deadline, the new eligibility criteria enter into force as of 15 November 2018.

13. The Bureau considered information provided by the secretariat and agreed on the format of the information paper on the regular and extrabudgetary resources for activities relating to the Environment subprogramme.

V. Other business

14. At its September 2018 meeting the Bureau also exchanged views on other environment-related topics, including the Environment for Central Asia process; the Belt and Road Initiative; and the "connectivity strategy" of the European Union for its foreign and security policy.

15. The secretariat also briefed the Bureau on changes within ECE in order to mainstream the Sustainable Development Goals into its work. To broaden its integrated approach to supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and to effectively respond to the multisectoral nature of the Goals, ECE would strengthen cross-sectoral collaboration between its eight subprogrammes in four nexus areas, namely: (a) sustainable use of natural resources; (b) sustainable and smart cities; (c) sustainable mobility and smart connectivity; and (d) measuring and monitoring the achievement of the Goals.
