

Environment

Committee on Environmental Policy concludes eighteenth session



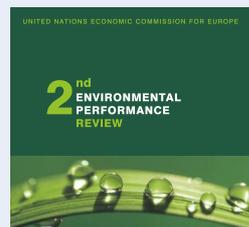
At its eighteenth session, held last week in Geneva from 17 to 20 April 2012, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Committee on Environmental Policy provisionally extended the mandates of bodies on environmental performance reviews and environmental monitoring and assessment, and adopted recommendations to improve environmental performance in Albania, Romania and Turkmenistan among others.

Bringing together representatives of Governments, the United Nations system, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and the regional environmental centres, the session was chaired by the new Committee Chair, Ms. Elisabete Quintas da Silva (Portugal). The meeting was also attended by the Chairs and/or Vice-Chairs of the governing bodies of the UNECE multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), who briefed the Committee on activities related to strengthening capacity for implementation of the MEAs, as well as their application to support a green economy. The session was preceded by an informal gathering of representatives of the governing bodies of the ECE MEAs with the Committee, on 16 April, with a view to continuing to strengthen the coordination of activities, as well as building synergies.

Noting the importance of the the upcoming United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20 Conference) for setting priorities and targets in the area of the environment, the Committee welcomed the informal input to Rio+20 prepared by the representatives of the governing bodies of UNECE MEAs and the Committee Chair. It was vital to keep regional initiatives and perspectives in the Rio+20 outcome document.

Advancing environmental governance

Delegations also expressed their great appreciation for the outcomes of the Sixth "Environment for Europe" (EfE) Ministerial Conference (Astana, September 2011), which had been arranged in a new interactive format according to the EfE Reform Plan. The Committee agreed to organize a mid-term review in autumn 2013 to assess the implementation of the Astana commitments and provide renewed impetus to the process, as well as to support the preparations for the next ministerial conference. Countries and EfE partners were invited to actively contribute to the mid-term review.



The Committee adopted by acclamation the recommendations in the First Environmental Performance Review (EPR) of Turkmenistan, as well as in the Second EPRs of Albania and Romania. A first EPR of Morocco was under preparation for autumn 2012, provided the necessary resources were made available. The Committee highly appreciated the work of the Expert Group on EPRs, and extended its mandate until the end of 2014, pending the formal approval of the UNECE Executive Committee.

The Committee also considered progress in the area of environmental monitoring, assessment and reporting, and noted the great value of the work of both the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment and of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Indicators. The Committee extended the mandate of these two groups until the end of 2014, pending the formal approval of the UNECE Executive Committee.

Delegations further welcomed the progress achieved in a number of cross-sectoral activities, in particular the implementation of the UNECE Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development and the Pan-European Programme on Transport, Health and Environment. Participants also welcomed the information provided regarding the Environment and Security Initiative, the Environment and Health Process and the green building initiative. The Committee mandated its Bureau to appoint the four members from the environment sector to the second term (2013-2014) of the European Environment and Health Ministerial Board, taking into account the agreement reached at its seventeenth session with regard to Belgium and the Republic of Moldova.

Finally, the Committee adopted the programme of work of the Environment subprogramme for the biennium 2012–2013 and the strategic framework for 2014–2015, as well as approved the biennial performance of the Environment subprogramme in 2010–2011 and the plan for 2012–2013. The Committee also approved the list of countries eligible for financial support and considered the status of resources in the Environment subprogramme in 2010–2011 and expected expenditures in 2012–2013. □

The nineteenth session of the Committee will be held from 22 to 25 October 2013. The eighteenth session was organized as a paperless event to the extent possible – meeting documents were made available on the UNECE website at: <http://www.unece.org/env/cep/2012sessionapril.html>.

Agricultural Standards

UNECE experts will promote seed-potato standard at World Potato Congress



The World Potato Congress, 27-30 May 2012, is an important agenda date for the potato industry's leading international researchers. UNECE's Specialized Section on Seed Potatoes will take full advantage of this year's event in Edinburgh, Scotland, to promote the UNECE standard for seed-potato production and marketing.

A UNECE meeting will take place immediately after the Congress. "Running the UNECE meeting in conjunction with the Congress provides the opportunity for certification officials and industry bodies from four continents to join together in harmonizing trading standards", says John Kerr, Vice-Chair of the Specialized Section and Head of the Potato Branch at Science and Advice for Scottish Agriculture (SASA). "The meeting will also help each participating country hone its own domestic controls of seed potato quality through the experience of others".

Through discussions and poster sessions, Pier Giacomo Bianchi, the Specialized Section's Chair, and John Kerr will also be actively promoting the UNECE standard.

This year, the World Congress will focus on trade in potatoes. Bianchi and Kerr will emphasize that the UNECE international standard provides harmonized criteria for measuring and offering assurance on the quality of the seed potatoes that are traded using the standard. The standard is available free of charge and is open for use globally by any interested countries and/or traders.

During a workshop on seed health, Kerr will outline, in some detail, the importance of seed-production standards. He will explain how the UNECE scheme provides a framework to ensure healthy seed production and how the scheme is applied in Scotland.

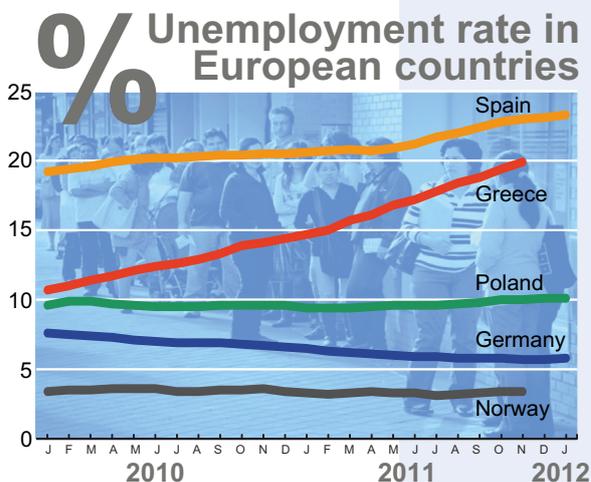
The UNECE meeting, hosted by SASA, will discuss further developing the standard. They will be focusing, in particular, on virus control. At least 13 countries will be represented, including: Australia, New Zealand and South Africa; as well as countries from Europe and North America. □

For more information, please visit: <http://www.wpc2012.net/> and

http://www.unece.org/trade/agr/standard/potatoes/pot_e.html.

Facts and Figures

Large variations in unemployment rates across European countries



Over the last two years, unemployment rates have continued to diverge across European countries reflecting the level of economic activity and the different impact of the economic crisis.

By early 2012, the unemployment rate in Spain reached 23 per cent - the highest in Europe. Although Greece has experienced a sharper increase in unemployment due to the economic and financial constraints in the country, the unemployment rate was smaller than in Spain - about 20 per cent by the end of 2011.

Germany and Poland - two large European economies - have experienced stable unemployment rates: 10 per cent in Poland and a gradual fall from 8 to 6 per cent in Germany. Norway is an example of an economy that has not been influenced much by the crisis. Unemployment there has stayed at 3 per cent over the last two years. □

Source: UNECE Statistical database www.unece.org/stats/data.