



**Economic and Social
Council**

Distr.
GENERAL

CES/2000/1
1 June 2001

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

STATISTICAL COMMISSION and ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Forty-ninth plenary session
(Geneva, 11-13 June 2001)

**Matters arising from the May 2000
session of the Economic Commission for Europe**

Note by the secretariat

SUMMARY

The 2001 annual session of the Economic Commission for Europe was held in Geneva from 7-11 May 2001. This note provides an overview of the main outcomes of the session, highlighting the implications and the follow-up, which are relevant to the Conference of European Statisticians, and its program of work. Mr. Longva attended the session on behalf of the Conference.

Several issues of interest to the Conference were discussed at the session. The following were the main substantive agenda items of the session: the situation in the Central Asian and the Caucasian countries; reactions to the Spring Seminar on "Governance and Corruption"; preparations for the 2002 ECE ministerial conference on ageing; strengthening inter-sectoral policy links within the ECE region, particularly in relation to environment energy and transport; the UN Millennium Declaration and its implications for Europe; the ECE overall strategic directions; and other matters arising from the work of the subsidiary bodies requiring decision by, or meriting the attention of, the Commission.

The strategic orientation and the priorities of work of the Conference are largely consistent with the decisions and recommendations of the annual session of the ECE. However, the outcome of the session does require some significant follow-up by the Conference. A draft decision of the Conference concerning the outcome of the Commission session with reference to the Conference is given in para. 25.

Introduction

The annual session is the most important meeting for the ECE. Annually the representatives of the ECE member countries, often with high-level delegations coming from capitals, meet to define priorities, strategic orientation and the utilisation of ECE resources, and orient the activities of the Principle Subsidiary Bodies of the ECE, of which the Conference of European Statisticians is one. The 2001 meeting was particularly significant, as it was the first organised by the new Executive Secretary, Ms. Danuta Huebner, and was expected to carry forward the in-depth discussion of the new strategic directions of the ECE initiated in 2000.

As the Chairperson of the ECE, the Austrian Ambassador Mr. Harald Kreid said in its introduction and concluding comments, there were three main issues underlying the discussion and the outcome of the annual session: a) how to strengthen the overall consistency of strategic direction and activities of the ECE, bringing together the work of the different technical forums and promoting cross-sectoral activities; b) how to focus the program of work, and the use of the limited resources of the ECE, on the “developmental dimension” of the policy agenda drawing on the priorities of the United Nations; c) how to attract more policy attention, and correspondingly more resources, in order to give value and effectiveness to the excellent technical work carried out at the ECE.

These three issues were reflected in the agenda of the meeting, and in its outcome. Indications were provided in the conclusions of the meeting on a) how to link more closely the program of work of the PSBs, including the CES, to the core policy preoccupations of member countries, and promote more interaction and collaboration among the different sectors, and PSBs; b) how to align priorities on the main thrust of the UNECE policy agenda, as required in particular by the 2000 Millennium Declaration, and its follow-up, and extend the policy analysis to cover new areas of priority concern for member countries, such as poverty, governance, and conflict resolution; c) how to increase the resources made available by member countries to enable ECE to perform its tasks, either through in-kind contributions of expertise or through extra-budgetary resources.

I. ISSUES DISCUSSED AT THE COMMISSION SESSION OF RELEVANCE TO THE CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

(a) Business enterprise and economic growth in the Central Asian and the Caucasian countries

1. The Commission expressed satisfaction with the debate on Central Asia and the South Caucasus, where countries are experiencing serious difficulties in the transition process. It underlined the priority needs of these regions and encouraged the Executive Secretary to strengthen assistance to these countries through regional and subregional cooperation, and in cooperation with other international institutions and organizations, in particular through the work of special programmes and projects for the South Caucasus and Central Asia, it being understood that appropriate resources should be made available. Support was expressed for the continuation of activities in relation to the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA).

(b) Spring Seminar on “Institutional Reform and Governance”

2. The Spring Seminar and the debate of the first day of the Annual Session addressed broad issues of governance and institutional reform, including corruption, and their relationship with economic and social development, with particular emphasis on the relevance of institutional reform for economies in transition. This discussion has implications for ECE policy analysis, including statistics, and for operational activities.

3. There was considerable interest shown in discussion of ECE's operational activities, with particular attention devoted to assistance to the CIS countries. How to translate this discussion in practical terms will be dealt with at a forthcoming ad hoc informal meeting of the Commission, and at the relevant PSB's meetings.

(c) ECE ministerial conference on ageing

4. Mr. Peter Haupt, the German State Secretary for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, gave a briefing on preparations and expectations for the ECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing, scheduled to be held in Berlin in September 2002. He stressed that the Conference offered unique opportunities for member States and civil society to work together to develop those socio-political measures that are necessary to meet the challenges of demographic change. A national and international discussion on ageing was needed and the UNECE had made the relevant decision to organize a conference to that end. The Berlin Conference would try to provide a regional implementation scheme for the plan developed by the UN Second World Assembly on Ageing to be held in Madrid in 2002. He conveyed an invitation from the German Minister for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth to Ministers of ECE member States to attend the Conference in Berlin and encouraged them to actively participate in the preparatory process.

(d) Strengthening intersectoral links within the ECE region¹

5. The discussion was led by members of a Round Table comprising the Executive Secretary, ECE Directors, the Chairpersons of ECE Principal Subsidiary Bodies (Committee for Trade, Industry and Enterprise Development, Committee on Environmental Policy, Committee on Human Settlements, Committee on Sustainable Energy, Conference of European Statisticians; Inland Transport Committee, Timber Committee) and the Vice-President, Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

6. The importance of the role of ECE in promoting regional cooperation on intersectoral issues, given its areas of competence, which are at the heart of key intersectoral issues, as well as its specialized intergovernmental bodies involved in these issues, was underlined.

¹ The Commission considered this item on the basis of document E/ECE/1385 “Intersectoral Cooperation in the ECE”.

7. Particular attention was devoted to discuss inter-sectoral linkages among environment, energy and transport, also in preparation of the Johannesburg Summit on Sustainable Development of 2002. The quality of work carried out by all the Principal Subsidiary Bodies (PSBs) within their sectoral areas of expertise was commended and full support was expressed for the work already developed on intersectoral issues. PSBs were also invited to develop intersectoral linkages further in various areas, many of which involve data and policy analysis.
8. The ECE mandated the consolidation of existing ECE databases in a multisectoral framework. This long-term strategy will have considerable implication for the Conference program of work, and the activities of the ECE Statistical Division, which so far has essentially supported only the macroeconomic database for the Economic Survey of Europe.
9. PSBs were requested to examine the most efficient, flexible and cost-effective modalities to address intersectoral issues. These may include: joint meetings of the PSBs or their bureaux; creation of a joint group of experts or task force under their auspices; delegation of one member of a PSB to a meeting of another PSB; specific projects jointly implemented and monitored; and the establishment of a web page to facilitate the sharing of information on developments in intersectoral cooperation.
10. PSBs were further requested to review annually the intersectoral cooperation already ongoing and to consider potential new issues for such cooperation to be subsequently brought to the attention of other concerned PSBs, with decision thereon to be taken by the Commission. It was stressed that regular programme review and evaluation, and the timely dissemination of the evaluation results to member States, were critical to maintain ECE's effectiveness.
11. PSBs were also encouraged to find new ways to secure the means for implementing intersectoral activities, including setting aside regular resources and seeking extrabudgetary funding for these activities.
12. Where value added was clearly seen, the willingness of organizational units participating in intersectoral cooperation could be counted upon. However, intersectoral activities should be carefully planned so as to avoid overburdening the PSBs and affecting their core activities.

(e) The Millennium Declaration: Challenges for Europe²

13. The Commission held a Round Table discussion on the key policy concerns of the Millennium Declaration relevant to the ECE region: Peace, Security and Disarmament, Development and Poverty Eradication, Protecting our Common Environment, Human Rights, Democracy and Good Governance

2 The commission considered this on the basis of document E/ECE/1386 "The Millennium Declaration: The Challenges for Europe". In addition, the ECE Statistical Division also prepared a Conference Room Paper "Monitoring social and development policies in the ECE region (The policy challenges)" that was distributed to the delegates. Copies of this paper will also be available as a room document at the 49th plenary session of the CES.

and Protecting the Vulnerable. It also discussed strengthening the United Nations and the UN-ECE. The Commission had heard from a mix of speakers from within and outside the United Nations. The discussion was based on a background paper whose preparation was co-ordinated by the Statistical Division and to which all other ECE Divisions contributed.

14. The Commission welcomed the opportunity to discuss the objectives of the Millennium Declaration with a focus on the ECE region, as it states clearly in a long term perspectives what are the priorities for the UN agenda set by member countries, and what commitments member countries themselves undertook in relation to this agenda. The discussion focussed on identifying the most relevant economic and social objectives for ECE member States, on the progress already made and further efforts to achieve these objectives. Follow-up mechanisms to monitor this progress were also considered.

15. The Chairman proposed means to assist ECE member countries in the implementation of the Millennium Declaration objectives and in monitoring progress made. The following are related to the Conference:

- The ECE Principal Subsidiary Bodies will be invited to consider what contribution they can make to the implementation process, and how to integrate the Millennium Declaration concerns and objectives into their programmes of work;
- A dialogue with the relevant stakeholders, i.e. non-governmental organizations, representatives of academia, business community, will be held to raise awareness and promote public-private partnership in support for the follow-up to the Millennium Declaration;
- Through inter-agency cooperation at the regional level the ECE will promote coordinated initiatives for joint follow-up to the Millennium Declaration;
- By comparing national experiences and disseminating best practices in monitoring of the implementation of the Millennium Declaration, implementation of these commitments will be facilitated, including through development of establishing guidelines on the economic dimension of some of the areas of the Declaration, such as governance;
- Information sharing and better communication on the policies undertaken at the national and regional levels for implementing the Millennium Declaration will be promoted, using available tools and technologies with a view to stimulating the effectiveness of the peer dialogue and public awareness. This in particular could be used to encourage implementation of ECE's legal instruments.

(f) ECE strategic directions

16. The Executive Secretary reported on an informal brainstorming open to all member States that had taken place on Wednesday, 9 May 2001, with the participation of the ECE Bureau, chairpersons of PSBs, the Executive Secretary and ECE Directors. All who took part felt it was very useful.

17. The first topic discussed at that meeting was how to meet the growing demands on ECE in an environment of zero growth budget. Various points were made about how to attract funding, including: that long-term projects were more attractive than requests for funding ad hoc activities; that the private sector was a possible source of financing to be tapped; and that it would be useful to circulate to member States and other potential donor agencies a list of projects for which funding was needed. A suggestion was made that the Commission adopts a decision calling on donor countries to include ECE on their lists of eligible institutions for development assistance funding and that the decision could be further submitted to ECOSOC for endorsement. Some delegations supported the draft of the decision presented by the secretariat and noted that this proposal was timely and appropriate. Given the need for some other delegations to consult with capitals, it was decided to postpone a decision by the Commission on this matter and to discuss it at a future ad hoc informal meeting.

18. The second topic considered was the need to strengthen overall policy coherence and communication in the ECE. It was suggested to establish a Steering Group made up of the ECE Bureau members, the PSB chairpersons, and the Executive Secretary, at which interested members could participate, which would meet in the context of the Annual Session and discuss and articulate the overall policy priorities and direction of activities. The Commission also decided to request the ECE Group of Experts on the Programme of Work to continue its discussions on the strategic directions of the ECE.

19. A number of economies in transition of the ECE eastern region, namely Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation and Ukraine, jointly emphasized the importance of active involvement of ECE in supporting the transition process to a market economy. To this end, they urged the Commission to strengthen its operational activities addressing the issues of economies in transition. These countries considered it to be necessary to strengthen fundraising activities in order to provide new extrabudgetary resources for operational activities and to improve the strategy planning and implementation of such activities accordingly.

(g) matters arising from the work of the subsidiary bodies requiring decision by, or meriting the attention of, the Commission

20. The Commission did not have any draft decision presented to it that had been proposed by the Conference of European Statisticians.

21. The Commission's attention was drawn to four Conference Room papers that had been prepared for the session. They included papers on:

- Sustainable energy production and use;
- Monitoring social and development policies in the ECE region (this paper was prepared by the Statistical Division);
- Activities of ECE in support of the UN Initiative for Information and Communication Technology for Development; and
- HIV/AIDS epidemic in the ECE region.

22. The Executive Secretary recalled that the General Assembly had invited all UN entities, including the regional commissions, to be involved in the preparatory activities leading up to the Special Session on HIV/AIDS to be held in June 2002. She pointed out that although UNECE had not been involved in the process, it had prepared the latter Conference Room paper on HIV/AIDS Epidemic in the ECE Region in order to draw member States' attention to the European dimension of the problem. A representative of UN/AIDS addressed the Commission in this regard. He invited ECE member States to provide assistance and support for the Special Session.

(h) other business

23. The secretariat was requested to ensure that, for all ECE meetings, invitations to capital-based experts are copied to the missions in Geneva. It was also suggested that member States be provided regularly with information on extrabudgetary resources and their origin and use. In addition, the secretariat was invited to report on ECE activities in the Mediterranean region at the next annual session.

24. An issue raised requiring further consideration by the Commission was the involvement of member States in the drafting of decisions taken at the annual session.

II. DRAFT DECISION BY THE CONFERENCE

25. The Conference may consider that its method of work and its operating procedures are already largely aligned with the ones, which were called for in the discussion that took place at the Commission session. The Conference therefore may wish to:

- a) thank Eurostat for facilitating the participation of representatives of central and east European countries and of CIS countries in the annual plenary sessions of the Conference of European Statisticians and in selected other high priority meetings in the Conference's work programme, by permitting representatives of the statistical offices of these countries to use the European Commission's PHARE and TACIS funds to finance their participation in these meetings (see para. 17);
- b) agree that the ECE Statistical Division is closely involved in operational activities addressing the issue of economies in transition through the Regional Adviser Programme and the involvement in the UNDP financed project aiming at statistical capacity building for social reporting (see paras. 3, 17 and 19);
- c) agree that the ECE Statistical Division is already involved in consolidation of existing ECE databases in a multisectoral framework, and ask the Bureau to consider in which ways the Conference can support such consolidation, drawing on close coordination and co-operation with other international agencies. The ECE Statistical Division is asked to prepare a progress report for the next plenary session of the Conference (see para. 8);

- d) ask the Bureau of the Conference, on the basis of proposals by the Secretariat, to examine in which area the Conference can further contribute to cross-sectoral activities, and what are the most efficient, flexible and cost effective modalities to address intersectoral issues such as those mentioned in para 9 above (see paras. 9 – 12);
- e) ask the Bureau to review annually the intersectoral cooperation already ongoing and report on the outcome of the review to the annual plenary sessions of the Conference (see paras. 10 and 12);
- f) ask the Bureau to consider what contributions the CES can make to the implementation process of the Millennium Declaration, including through the Integrated Presentation, and how aspects of it can be integrated into CES programme of work (see para. 15), particularly by comparing national experiences in monitoring of its implementation for which work is currently underway in the framework of a UNDP financed project executed by the ECE Statistical Division.
