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Economic Commission for Europe**Conference of European Statisticians****Fifty-ninth plenary session**

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Item 11 of the provisional agenda

Organization of the meetings of the Conference of European Statisticians and its Bureau**Organization of the meetings of the Conference of European Statisticians and its Bureau****Note by the secretariat***Summary*

The note presents two issues for discussion on the organization of the Conference of European Statisticians' plenary sessions and the Bureau meetings.

The first issue concerns the frequency of the meetings of the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians. The Conference decided in 2009 to test a different timing of the Bureau meetings compared to those stipulated in the Rules governing the work of the Conference and its Bureau (ECE/CES/2007/8). The Bureau discussed the results of the testing in February 2011 and proposes to go back to the frequency of its meetings as per the Rules.

The second issue concerns the duration and timing of the plenary sessions of the Conference. The plenary session has been held back-to-back with the meeting of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Statistics Committee and its predecessor, the High-Level Group. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development secretariat and the Chair of the Statistics Committee plan to increase the duration of the Statistics Committee meeting, and to hold the meeting in April in even years. This will have implications on the organization of the Conference of European Statisticians plenary session if these two meetings continue to be held back-to-back. Any changes to the format and duration of the Conference's plenary session have to be decided by the Conference of European Statisticians.

I. Frequency of the Bureau meetings of the Conference of European Statisticians

1. The *Rules governing the work of the Conference and its Bureau* (ECE/CES/2007/8) stipulate the following concerning the organization of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) Bureau meetings:

“12. Functioning of the Bureau

a) Meetings of the Bureau will normally be held in February and October of each year. The subjects of discussion, as well as the need for the availability of all secretariat experts for the February meeting, suggest that the meeting should be held in Geneva.

b) Additional Bureau meetings may be convened in conjunction with the annual plenary session.

c) Further meetings of the Bureau could be determined by the Bureau members or the Chairman of the Conference as the need arises.”

2. In June 2009, the Conference decided to test a different timing of CES Bureau meetings compared to those stipulated above. The points 12 (a), (b) and (c) from the Rules were suspended for two years to experiment with a changed frequency and duration of the CES Bureau meetings (see paras 77-78 of the Report, document ECE/CES/76). This consisted of a short (1-1.5 hour) meeting back-to-back with the United Nations (UN) Statistical Commission in February, a one-day meeting back-to-back with the CES plenary session in June, and a two-day meeting in October/November.

3. The two years testing period expires in 2011. The Bureau discussed the results of the testing at its February 2011 meeting and concluded the following (para 26 from the Report of the CES Bureau meeting on 23 February 2011, document ECE/CES/2011/14):

“26. The Bureau decided to go back to the frequency of meetings as per *Rules governing the work of the Conference and the Bureau* (ECE/CES/2007/8), that is, a meeting in spring (February) and a meeting in the autumn (October). The spring meeting could be held back-to-back with another high-level meeting where most of the CES Bureau members participate.”

4. The decision about the venue of the CES Bureau meetings was left to the new Bureau to be elected in June 2011. It was considered desirable to alternate the venue regularly between Europe and North America as was done in the past.

A. Points for discussion

5. To be in line with the Bureau decision, it is proposed that point 12 (a) from the *Rules governing the work of the Conference and its Bureau* be formulated as follows:

“(a) Meetings of the Bureau will normally be held in February and October of each year. It is desirable to alternate the venue between Europe and North America, and to hold the spring meeting back-to-back with another high-level meeting where most of the CES Bureau members participate.”

II. Duration and timing of the Conference of European Statisticians plenary sessions

6. The CES plenary sessions are organised according to the format introduced by the 50th CES plenary session over two and a half days (ECE/CES/62). The format includes two full day seminars and a so-called “formal session” of half a day. One of the seminars is organised on a topic related to foundational issues of statistical systems. The other seminar deals with new, emerging issues. The “formal” part of the CES plenary session takes decisions, such as final approval of guidelines, recommendations, follow-up actions of in depth reviews, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Statistical Programme, etc.

7. The Conference is a forum for all countries and international organizations active in statistics in the UNECE region and beyond. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member countries have been participating in the Conference work since the mid-1990s. In recent years, countries outside UNECE and OECD also participate. The CES has proven its usefulness by efficiently coordinating the international statistical work in the region, launching joint activities by international organizations and adopting guidelines and recommendations that have a global impact.

8. The format introduced by the 50th CES plenary session has been successfully used since 2003. It permits discussion of topics that are of interest to both developed and developing statistical systems. More importantly, this arrangement has allowed for bridging the two groups of countries and preparing the transition economies for their future challenges. Over the years this approach has contributed to the development of the statistical systems of many of the transition economies to become European Union (EU) members and OECD members.

A. Reasons for considering the duration and timing of the Conference of European Statisticians plenary sessions

9. Since the creation of the OECD High-Level meeting of Chief Statisticians (subsequently the OECD Committee on Statistics (CSTAT)), the annual meetings of the CES and CSTAT have been held back-to-back. This arrangement was put in place to ensure efficient use of time and to facilitate travel for attendees of both meetings.

10. Recently, the OECD secretariat and the Chair of CSTAT have put forward the view that more time is required for the CSTAT’s annual meeting due to the need to add to its agenda issues such as accession, enhanced engagement, or a joint session with one of the OECD policy committees. Therefore, the OECD secretariat would like to extend the duration of the CSTAT meeting from the current one and a half day to two days.

11. The consequence of this will be a total duration of the two meetings of four and a half days if the two bodies continue to hold the meetings back-to-back, that is half a day longer than at present. However, some concerns have been expressed that this duration is too long and the CES plenary session should be reduced to compensate for the extended duration of the CSTAT meeting.

12. Furthermore, it was also proposed that the OECD Statistics Committee meeting in even years (2012, 2014 etc.) be held in April in order to discuss and finalise their biennial budget and work programme plans.

13. As the CES and CSTAT meetings have been held back-to-back, these plans have implications also to the CES plenary sessions. In this relation, the CES Bureau discussed

the timing and duration of the CES plenary session at its November 2010 and February 2011 meetings.

B. Timing of the Conference of European Statisticians plenary sessions

14. The CES plenary sessions have been held during the second week of June since 1952. Throughout the years the other international meetings of the Heads of national statistical offices (NSOs) have adjusted to this schedule to avoid conflicting timing. Since the mid-1990s, the UNECE organises a meeting for the Heads of offices of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the UN Special Programme for Economies of Central Asia (SPECA)¹ countries back-to-back with CES in coordination with the CIS Statistical Committee. Furthermore, the ECE secretariat has long established intergovernmental expert meetings that are traditionally held between mid-April and mid-May. These meetings require a lot of preparation by key senior staff and therefore the secretariat is not in a position to hold a CES plenary session in April/May in parallel to the major expert meetings.

C. Duration of the Conference of European Statisticians plenary session

15. Different views have been expressed by the CES Bureau members concerning the duration of the CES plenary session. Some Bureau members supported holding the CES plenary session over two days, while other members have been firmly against shortening the duration of the CES plenary session. Support was expressed for having a 2-day CES plenary session in one year and possibly a longer meeting (up to 3 days, including 2 seminars) every second year, if the CES plenary sessions and OECD Statistics Committee meetings are held separately in even years.

16. At its February 2011 meeting, the Bureau concluded the following (paras 24 and 25 of the report of the 23 February 2011 CES Bureau meeting, document ECE/CES/2011/14):

“24. The Bureau will prepare a proposal to the CES 2011 plenary session concerning the organization of future CES plenary sessions. The CES plenary sessions will continue to be held during the 2nd week of June as has been the case since its creation in 1952.

25. In odd years, when the CES plenary session is held back-to-back with the OECD CSTAT meeting, it will be held for two days: one day devoted to substantive discussion and decision making, and one day to a seminar. In even years, if the OECD CSTAT is held in April, the duration of the CES plenary session could be longer than two days.”

D. Points for discussion

17. Any changes to the format and duration of the CES plenary session have to be decided by the CES. The Conference is invited to consider the following proposals agreed by the CES Bureau at its 23 February meeting:

- a) The CES plenary sessions will continue to be held in June;

¹ Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan.

b) In odd years, when the CES plenary session is held back-to-back with the OECD CSTAT meeting, it will be held for two days: one day devoted to substantive discussion and decision making, and one day to a seminar;

c) In even years, the duration of the CES plenary session could be longer than two days.
