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Item 2 of the provisional agenda

Matters arising for the Conference of European Statisticians from the 2013 session of Economic Commission for Europe**Matters arising from the 2013 session of the Economic Commission for Europe****Note by the secretariat***Summary*

This note presents the outcome of the sixty-fifth session of the Economic Commission for Europe, held from 9 to 11 April 2013. It focuses on the discussions and decisions of the Commission session that have a bearing on the work of the Conference of European Statisticians.

The note reflects the discussions during a panel session on sustainable development governance: regional implications and perspectives for the post-Rio+20 institutional set-up. The Conference is also informed of the outcome of the review of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, which aims to provide concrete recommendations and proposals for future work priorities for each subprogramme of the Economic Commission for Europe, including the Statistics subprogramme.

I. Introduction

1. The document presents the outcome of the sixty-fifth session of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), held from 9 to 11 April 2013. The Economic Commission for Europe convenes every second year at a Commission session. The Commission is a parent body of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES).
2. The sixty-fifth session was attended by representatives from Albania, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, San Marino, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America and Uzbekistan. The session was attended by representatives of the European Union and several United Nations organizations and other international organizations.
3. The agenda of the Commission session discussed the following main topics:
 - (a) Follow-up to Rio+20 and post-2015 development agenda;
 - (b) Economic developments and challenges in the ECE region: the role of innovation in creating a dynamic and competitive economy;
 - (c) Outcome of the review of the 2005 reform of ECE.
4. The agenda items (a) and (c) have a particular relevance for the work of the CES. The CES Chair participated in a panel discussion of the Commission session on sustainable development governance. Furthermore, the Commission session agreed on the outcome of the review of the ECE subprogrammes.
5. The full report of the Commission session (E/2013/37) is available at: www.unece.org/commission/2013/65th_index.html

II. Follow-up to Rio+20 and post-2015 development agenda

6. The ECE session included a panel discussion called “Sustainable development governance: regional implications and perspectives for the post-Rio+20 institutional set-up”. Mr. E. Giovannini, President of the Italian National Institute of Statistics and Chair of the Conference of European Statisticians at that time, participated in the discussion as a panellist. The following text is taken from the Chair’s summary of the session.
7. In his introduction, Mr. Giovannini noted that substantial improvement in statistical and monitoring systems is required. In order to establish an adequate monitoring and assessment system of measuring the progress towards sustainable development, it is necessary, as a first step, to put in place adequate methodology and expertise, as well as financial and human resources. There are still many countries and statistical areas where even the basic data are either lacking or are of low quality. It is crucial that statisticians be involved in the development of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at an early stage. The experience with Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) has demonstrated how the lack of investment in statistics may result in a lack of comparability of data. Since 1992, many countries and international organizations have developed sets of indicators to measure sustainable development using different approaches, which makes the results harder to compare and difficult to conclude whether a country is on a sustainable path or not. To address this challenge, ECE jointly with the European Commission (Eurostat) and

the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have developed a conceptual framework to harmonize the existing approaches. In June 2013, the Heads of Statistical Offices of countries in the region discuss adoption of the framework along with suggested indicators for sustainable development.

8. Mr. Giovannini emphasized that the work carried out under the auspices of the CES serves as a valuable contribution to the ongoing process of developing SDGs and the respective targets and indicators. It is of crucial importance that the SDGs and the related targets be measurable. It will be more complicated to measure sustainable development than it is to measure MDGs. Therefore, it is important that the conceptual work undertaken by CES member countries, together with ECE, Eurostat, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and other international organizations, is taken into account. Once the SDGs are established, the CES should continue its work to align the framework and the indicators with the actual SDG targets. It is also vital to find simple ways to explain complex issues – e.g. inter-generational equity – to broader audiences, and link the concept of long-term “sustainability” to the issues of current policy interest, such as “vulnerability” and “sustainable and equitable welfare”.

9. During the discussion from the floor, delegations raised the following points related to statistics and measurement of sustainable development:

(a) Regarding SDGs, the Open Working Group (OWG) on SDGs and the post-2015 development agenda process should ultimately converge into one single framework. Concerning the substance, any proposal for SDGs should reflect the three overarching objectives and essential requirements for sustainable development, i.e. poverty eradication, changing unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, and protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development;

(b) SDGs should be global in nature and universally applicable to all countries, limited in number, action-oriented and easy to communicate. A reservation was made against broadening the concept of sustainable development by including issues like peace and security in the post-2015 development agenda;

(c) The importance of taking into account the measurement aspects when setting up the SDGs and targets was highlighted. A regular mechanism needed to be established for monitoring the achievement of the goals, and regional commissions could have an important role to play in this;

(d) Measuring the regional and global dimensions with the same indicators might not be possible. Some flexibility will be required to take into account regional and national circumstances when developing targets and indicators for the post-2015 development agenda;

(e) The regional commissions should assume a strong and active role in both the high-level political forum (HLFP) working in the area and SDGs processes, also acting as a “conductor” between global and national levels. ECE could continue to facilitate the discussions on issues that are specific to the region with a view to contributing to the work of the HLFP.

III. Outcome of the review of the 2005 reform of the Economic Commission for Europe

A. The review process

10. An ECE reform was adopted in December 2005 (document E/ECE/1434/Rev.1). Subsequently, at the March 2011 Commission session, member States decided to carry out a review of the reform in each of the eight ECE sub-programmes. The purpose was to review how the recommendations of the 2005 reform were implemented and to provide further concrete recommendations and proposals for future work priorities for each sub-programme in the ECE, including statistics.

11. The review was carried out over the period of July 2011 – December 2012. A series of consultations with all member States were held during the review process. The Bureau of the CES discussed the documents prepared by the secretariat for the review process at its meeting in November 2011. These documents were submitted to the ECE Executive Committee (EXCOM) for the review of the Statistics subprogramme in December 2011.

12. During the December 2011 review, several members of the UNECE Executive Committee (EXCOM) expressed strong support for the work undertaken by the CES and the Statistical Division as reflected in the Minutes. The European Union (EU) delegation gave the Statistics sub-programme as a good example, in particular with respect to its work with other international organizations, the flexibility of the Teams of Specialists guided by concrete Terms of Reference, deliverables and sunset clauses, and the work through electronic means.

13. The Russian Federation considered the CES to be an important intergovernmental mechanism in developing and implementing regional and world-wide standards in statistical work. The Russian delegation also expressed its support for the future programme of work proposed by the CES Bureau, and noted that serious work was being done in supporting the development of statistics in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries.

14. The United Kingdom, France and others noted that there is a need to further promote and communicate the notable results of the work of the Statistics subprogramme in a clear and efficient manner. Some direct quotes mentioned include: “the CES has a unique and complementary role”; “the CES is the most important mechanism in statistics regionally and with a global impact”; and “it is not only attended by very high-quality and experienced people but is one of the most active and proactive international statistical forums in the world”.

15. The process continued throughout 2012 with a series of more in-depth reviews of each ECE subprogramme.

B. Excerpts from the document on the outcome of the review

16. At its April 2013 session, the Commission adopted the outcome of the review of the 2005 reform of ECE, as contained in document E/ECE/1468 and as described in Annex III of the report of the sixty-fifth Commission session (E/2013/37). The following is a direct quote from the outcome document:

“In view of the importance of relevant global conferences and initiatives, such as the Rio+20 Summit and the Sustainable Energy for All initiative of the Secretary-General, and their potential implications for ECE, the Commission expresses its

commitment to play, within its current mandate and existing resources, an active part in the appropriate regional and global implementation of their outcomes, and invites its subsidiary bodies and the secretariat to suggest to EXCOM possible ways to enhance their contribution to implementing these outcomes.”

17. The review acknowledged that “the UNECE Statistics subprogramme, the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) and its related subsidiary bodies work within current mandates in an efficient way, producing concrete results (methodological principles, recommendations, guidelines and databases) in a regular and ongoing way that have clear value added for the region and beyond, and that attract extra-budgetary funding from outside the region as well.”

18. The following priorities were identified for the Statistics subprogramme to be implemented within the existing budgetary resources under the overall guidance and decisions of the CES and EXCOM:

(a) “The subprogramme and its subsidiary bodies should continue implementing existing mandates under the overall guidance of CES and EXCOM, and should continue the good cooperation with partner organizations such as Eurostat, the CIS Statistical Committee, OECD, World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF);

(b) Particular attention should be given to the work on measuring sustainable development;

(c) The subprogramme should continue its capacity-building activities from extra-budgetary resources of particular benefit to the countries in the ECE region;

(d) In allocating regular budgetary resources, due regard should be given to the needs of the subprogramme and the ECE Statistical Division so that they can continue, without reduction in their resources and capacities, to do their work and service all the subsidiary bodies in an efficient way in the future.”

C. Other decisions

19. The EXCOM decided to make some organizational changes and resource adjustments in some of the ECE sub-programmes. These did not concern the Statistics subprogramme. Member States emphasized the importance of continued effective and efficient use of limited ECE budgetary and human resources as well as of further efforts to ensure an adequate level of regular budget resources for ECE to fulfil its mandate.

20. Member States, other partners and organizations are encouraged to support mandated ECE activities and work programmes with additional resources in accordance with the existing rules, regulations and practices.

21. The ECE Commission also adopted Guidelines on Procedures and Practices for ECE bodies. All sectoral committees and other subsidiary bodies may adopt their own Rules of Procedure on the basis of ECE Rules of Procedure and, where applicable, Rules of Procedure of ECOSOC, taking into account these guidelines. Otherwise it will be presumed that they are governed by the Rules of Procedure of the Commission and, where applicable, Rules of Procedure of ECOSOC and taking into account these guidelines.
