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STATISTICAL COMMISSION and ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Forty-fourth plenary session  
(Paris, 11-13 June 1996)

**MATTERS ARISING FROM THE APRIL 1996 SESSION  
OF THE ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE**

Note by the secretariat

**SUMMARY**

At its annual session in April 1996, the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) discussed the activities and work programmes of its Principal Subsidiary Bodies (PSBs), including those of the Conference of European Statisticians. The Commission also made a number of decisions concerning these bodies and their work.

A summary of the outcome of the Commission's review of the work of the Conference is presented in paragraph 1, and an overview of the work which has been done to date as part of a Governmental in-depth review of the Commission and its PSBs and its possible implications for the work of the Conference of European Statisticians is given in paragraph 2.

The first part of this document notes the Decisions of the April 1996 session of the Commission. One of these decisions is concerned with the work of the Commission and its future activities, and it contains an operative paragraph in which the Commission asks the Executive Secretary to transmit that decision as well as other decisions of the 1996 Commission session to the Principal Subsidiary Bodies concerned. Some of the other decisions also contain elements which are of potential interest to the work of the Conference. The relevant parts of those decisions are reproduced in paras. 3-5 of this note.

The Conference may consider that its policies and activities are entirely consistent with those of the Commission and may therefore wish to note this in its own report. A draft conclusion is offered at paragraph 6 below.

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. The work of the Conference of European Statisticians was discussed on the basis of the report of the 1995 plenary session (ECE/CES/48) and of the associated integrated presentation of international statistical work in the ECE region (CES/1995/R.25 and adda 1-6). Delegations appreciated the work conducted by the Conference, and they welcomed the impressive effort the Conference has made during the last three years to improve its efficiency. They cited in particular the Integrated Presentation of Statistical Work Programmes, in which information on the statistically-related work being undertaken by all major international and supranational organizations that affects ECE and OECD countries is presented. The close cooperation which exists between the Conference, Eurostat and OECD was cited as an example of the coordination and complementarity which should be emulated, where possible, by other Principal Subsidiary Bodies and by other international organizations working in the region.

2. The Commission also reviewed the work that has been done to date by its Ad Hoc Working Group on Strategic Directions and Efficiency, which is conducting an in-depth review of the work being carried out by the Commission and its Subsidiary Bodies. Delegations welcomed in particular the questionnaire for priority-setting that had been sent to Governments, and stressed that the Commission should focus on those activities which reflected ECE's comparative advantages, thus adding real value and yielding efficiency. (The Governmental questionnaire which the Working Group prepared is distinct from the questionnaire which the Bureau of the Economic Commission for Europe sent to the Bureau of the PSBs [the response which Mr. Fellegi submitted to the ECE Bureau in response to the questionnaire was sent to all NSOs at the end of 1995], but both questionnaires are part of the same review process). The delegations considered the review process to be a valuable tool for matching resources to activities and for adapting the ECE so that it would be a more streamlined and cost-effective instrument which would be better equipped to meet the challenges of the coming century. They also stressed the importance of the review process completing its work in the next few months (i.e. by the autumn of 1996) so that it could effectively feed into and contribute to the related review and reform exercise of the Organization which is being undertaken in New York. Although the review being undertaken by the ECE's Ad Hoc Working Group and the related review being undertaken in New York will likely only be completed several months after the 1996 plenary session, it is quite possible that they will result in some conclusions which could have some impact on the Conference and its work programme in 1996/97 and later years (e.g. in areas such as the number, type and frequency of meetings, meeting documentation, publications, and possibly work areas and resource allocations).

## **II. DECISIONS OF THE COMMISSION**

3. The complete text of the decisions taken at its April 1996 session can be found in the relevant part of the Report of the Annual Session, (document No. E/1996/34; E/ECE/1344). The full list of decisions taken by the Commission at its fifty-first (1996) session is as follows:

Decisions:

- A (51) The work of the Commission and its future activities
- B (51) Participation of the business community in the activities of the Economic Commission for Europe
- C (51) Diversification of forms and methods of the Commission's activities designed to assist countries of the region in transition to a market economy and their integration with the European and global economy
- D (51) Strengthening of cooperation between the Economic Commission for Europe and the Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe
- E (51) Economic cooperation in the Mediterranean
- F (51) Cooperation in the field of environment and sustainable development
- G (51) Cooperation in the field of transport
- H (51) Cooperation in the field of energy

**III. PROVISIONS AND ISSUES OF SPECIFIC INTEREST TO THE CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS**

4. Commission decision A (51) on the work of the Commission and its future activities contains in operative paragraph 13 elements which are of direct concern to the Conference of European Statisticians. In that paragraph the Commission decided to suspend the activities of the Committee on Agriculture, and to retain only ECE work on agricultural statistics, to be transferred for the time being to the Conference of European Statisticians - which is in any case already currently being carried out in the Conference's work programme in Programme Element 3.10 in conjunction with FAO - (and work on standardization of perishable produce, to be transferred for the time being to the Committee on the Development of Trade), pending the decisions of the Commission's fifty-second session (April 1997) on the future of the Committee on Agriculture.

**IV. DECISIONS ADDRESSED TO THE COMMISSION'S PRINCIPAL SUBSIDIARY BODIES**

5. The following provisions of decisions are applicable to the Commission's Principal Subsidiary Bodies and therefore are also brought to the attention of the Conference:

- a) Decision A (51), on the Work of the Commission and its future activities

In operative paragraph 14 of this decision the Commission requested the Executive Secretary to transmit the present decision as well as other decisions of this session, together with the views expressed or agreed in

relation thereto by member Governments, to the Principal Subsidiary Bodies concerned. It also requested the Principal Subsidiary Bodies to take those decisions into account in their work and when reviewing their respective work programmes. The parts of this decision which are likely to be of greatest potential interest to the Conference are listed below:

Decisions O (45) and P (45)

In operative paragraph 1 of this decision the Commission reaffirmed its determination, pending the outcome of the work of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Strategic Directions and Efficiency, to continue to implement decisions O (45) and P (45). It also requested its subsidiary bodies to continue to carry out the provisions of decision O (45) when reviewing and carrying out their programmes of work. (The relevant extracts from Decision O (45) are reproduced as Annex II of this document).

Commission's contributions to forthcoming or recent global conferences

In operative paragraph 3 of this decision the Commission noted the Executive Secretary's note on ECE's contribution and follow up to UN global conferences and programmes (E/ECE/1343), and requested the Executive Secretary to continue the ongoing work of the ECE in these fields and to consult member States before taking any new initiatives on the Commission's contribution to forthcoming or recent global conferences or international years pending the decisions of its fifty-second session (April 1997) on the outcome of the work of the Ad hoc Working Group on Strategic Directions and Efficiency.

Gender perspective

In operative paragraph 4 of this decision the Commission called on its Principal Subsidiary Bodies to take into account the mainstreaming of a gender perspective, where appropriate, while defining and implementing their work programmes.

Governmental review of the ECE and its PSBs

In operative paragraph 10 of this decision the Commission noted the interim report of the Ad hoc Working Group on Strategic Directions and Efficiency set up by decision 1 (1995-S) adopted by its Special Session of 20 September 1995, urged a prompt response to the questionnaire prepared by the Ad hoc Working Group that had been addressed to ECE Governments to seek their views on the review process, and requested the Ad hoc Working Group to finalize its deliberations as soon as possible in order to prepare a Declaration on Strengthening of economic cooperation in Europe to be adopted by its fifty-second Jubilee session in April 1997.

Information on deployment of resources

In operative paragraph 11 of this decision the Commission requested the Executive Secretary to provide regular information on the deployment of resources both under the regular budget and from extra-budgetary contributions to Permanent Missions in Geneva and to the Principal Subsidiary

Bodies, and invited the Executive Secretary to consult member States on any changes in its programme activities for the biennium 1996-1997 in the light of the proposals of the Secretary-General (document A/C.5/50/57) subject to their approval by the General Assembly.

Rationalization of PSB proceedings

In operative paragraph 12 of this decision the Commission requested its Principal Subsidiary Bodies to consider further measures aimed at rationalization of their proceedings, with the view to making optimal use of available resources.

b) Decision B (51), on the Participation of the business community in the activities of the Economic Commission for Europe

In operative paragraph 1 of this decision the Commission invited member States and requested the Executive Secretary to encourage, to the greatest extent practicable, business community participation in the execution of the ECE mandate through developing its closer cooperation with relevant PSBs and trust funds. In operative paragraph 6 of this decision the Commission requested the Executive Secretary to study possible mechanisms for enhancing Non-Governmental Organization and business community involvement in the ECE activities, with due regard to similar arrangements already in place with the ECOSOC, UNCTAD and other relevant UN bodies and to make proposals for its further development, to be presented to the fifty-second (April 1997) session of the Commission.

c) Decision D (51), on Strengthening of cooperation between the Economic Commission for Europe and the Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe

In operative paragraph 2 of this decision, the Commission considered that cooperation between ECE and the OSCE could be strengthened within existing resources along various lines, including the elaboration by ECE of early warning indicators of the economic situation through the provision of timely and topical statistics and economic analysis, while taking into account the work being done by other international organizations in this field, thus enabling OSCE to detect risks of tension which could endanger stability and security in the region. In operative paragraph 4 of this decision, the Commission called upon its Subsidiary Bodies to contribute in an appropriate manner to the practical follow-up of the Fourth Meeting of the OSCE Economic Forum in line with the role recognized to UN/ECE by para. 15 of the Budapest Summit Declaration.

d) Decision F (51), on Cooperation in the field of environment and sustainable development

In operative paragraph 4 of this decision the Commission called upon all its Subsidiary Bodies, as appropriate, to contribute to the implementation of the Environmental Programme for Europe.

**V. POSSIBLE ACTION BY THE CONFERENCE**

6. The Conference may consider that its activities are already consistent with the thrust of these Decisions. The Conference may therefore wish to take note of the Decisions and to continue to take them into account in considering priorities within its own work programme.

**Annex**

**Excerpts from Decision 0 (45) of the Economic Commission for Europe  
which the Commission adopted at its 1990 (45th) resumed session**

Decision 0 (45), The activities of the Economic Commission for Europe  
(excerpt)

"The Economic Commission for Europe,

In fulfilment of its decision A (45), and in the light of the  
conclusions of the CSCE Summit Meeting in Paris,

1. Decides on the following priority areas of activity: environment,  
transport, statistics, trade facilitation, and economic analysis. In doing  
so, the Commission recognizes the need to re-evaluate its priorities from  
time to time in accordance with changed circumstances;

2. Decides to take the following practical measures in the priority  
areas of activity:

I. ENVIRONMENT

...

(e) In order to ensure co-ordination on a continuing basis of the ECE's  
activities in the area of environment, the Commission invites the Executive  
Secretary:

- (i) to ensure harmonization of approach among secretariat Divisions,  
and to encourage adequate exchanges of information among  
Principal Subsidiary Bodies regarding proposed initiatives and  
work programme elements having environment aspects;
- (ii) to prepare annually a report on this matter for consideration by  
the Commission.

...

II. TRANSPORT

...

III. STATISTICS

(a) The Commission regards statistical activities as a priority area of its  
work, and attaches particular importance to the central role of the  
Conference of European Statisticians as an institution which includes the  
National Statistical Offices of all countries in the region, in the framework  
of the mechanisms of co-operation among international and supranational  
organizations active in the field of statistics.

(b) Taking into account the changing international context in the region,  
and the particular needs of countries that are developing from the economic

point of view, the Commission urges the Conference of European Statisticians to pursue the initiatives that it has already taken to develop new methods of work, and requests the Conference to continue to review periodically its priorities and to eliminate non-priority elements in its work programme.

(c) The Commission underlines the need for strong statistical support for its priority areas of environment, transport, trade facilitation, and economic analysis.

(d) The Commission requests the Executive Secretary, taking into account the advice of the Conference of European Statisticians and its Bureau, to implement practical measures to ensure the reinforcement of the role of the Statistical Division in the effective co-ordination of all statistical activities of the ECE.

(e) The Commission urges the Conference of European Statisticians to pursue the initiatives it has already undertaken to adapt its work programme to the present needs of economies in transition, and particularly to those that can most suitably be addressed within the framework of multilateral co-operation.

(f) In this context, the Commission invites the Conference and the Executive Secretary to utilize fully the intersecretariat mechanism established under the auspices of Eurostat in the field of statistical co-operation with central and eastern Europe, with a view to achieving a more efficient co-ordination among international organizations, and to avoiding duplication of work.

(g) The Commission considers that there is an increasing need for transparency, efficient work, and clear distribution of tasks among the international and supranational organizations involved in multilateral co-operation on statistics in the region. In addition, there is a need for shared data collection by international and supranational organizations in the region in order not to add unnecessarily to the burden that the provision of information places on the member States. Therefore, the Commission requests the Executive Secretary, taking into account the advice of the Conference of European Statisticians and its Bureau, to implement practical measures to ensure efficient co-ordination between the ECE secretariat and the secretariats of other international and supranational organizations, notably the OECD and Eurostat, and to report to the Commission periodically on the steps taken to carry out this request.

(h) The Commission requests the Conference of European Statisticians to evaluate periodically the utility and impact of the ECE's various statistical publications for policy makers and enterprises in the region, and to formulate recommendations concerning:

- (i) the discontinuation of publications of low interest;
- (ii) improvements to the format, substance and arrangements for distribution of publications actually or potentially of high interest.

(i) The Commission considers that for several years inadequate human and financial resources have adversely affected secretariat support for statistical programmes of the ECE. The Commission therefore urges the Executive Secretary to take all possible steps to provide the Statistical Division with adequate human and financial resources to support ongoing work in priority areas and implementation of new activities initiated by the Conference of European Statisticians on the basis of present and developing requirements for statistical co-operation.

(j) The Commission requests the Executive Secretary to draw the necessary resources, first, from activities that the Conference of European Statisticians identifies as not being priorities in its own work programme, and second, from the lowest priority activities of the Principal Subsidiary Bodies which are not among the priority sectors, and from savings achieved by improving administrative activities and the organization of work of the ECE.

(k) The Commission urges the Conference of European Statisticians to consider strengthening the role envisaged for the Bureau in supervising, under the guidance of the Conference, the implementation of the statistical programme and activities of the ECE, and in making suggestions to the Executive Secretary regarding related secretariat support. The Commission welcomes the initiative already taken by the Conference to consider the future of the Bureau and its composition, and to elaborate its mandate and rules of procedure.

#### IV. TRADE FACILITATION

...

#### V. ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

...

(1) The Commission invites the Executive Secretary to provide the Division for Economic Analysis and Projections with the human and financial resources necessary for the ECE to maintain its important role in economic analysis in Europe, and in particular with a stronger computing and statistical support allowing the development of adequate specialized data bases, appropriate research on such data, and proper analysis of medium and long term economic perspectives in the region.

\* \* \*

3. Decides, in order to promote the process of economic reform and integrating the economies in transition with the global economy, on the following broad outlines of work in sectors not identified as priorities:

...

\* \* \*

4. Decides, taking into account the provisions of paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 above, on the following measures on the methods of works, the structure, and the resources of the Commission:

I. METHODS OF WORK

(a) The Commission decides, taking into account its decision on sub-paragraphs 1(a), (b) and (c) of decision A (45), that the Executive Secretary and the Principal Subsidiary Bodies should identify general principles in order to streamline and save resources. The Commission attaches particular importance to the following list, which is not exhaustive:

- (i) The Principal Subsidiary Bodies will mainly address policy matters and supervise the technical work done by their subsidiary bodies;
- (ii) Better co-ordination among different Divisions and among Principal Subsidiary Bodies;
- (iii) Effective co-ordination with the international economic organizations and non-duplication of work with these bodies;
- (iv) The presentation of the work programme of each Principal Subsidiary Body shall in future include a full priority ranking of all programme elements and, to the extent it is feasible, an estimate of the secretariat's resources needed for each activity, the timescale for its completion, and details of the objectives, means and expected output for each activity;
- (v) Promotion of informal meetings and workshops.

(b) The Commission recalls the guidelines of the "Supplementary Report containing views and proposals of the ECE to the Special Commission of ECOSOC on the In-depth Study of the Intergovernmental Structure of the UN Economic and Social Sectors" (E/ECE/1150/Rev.1) and expresses its regret that many of the recommendations contained therein have not been applied. The Commission reaffirms those recommendations, insofar as they do not conflict with the present decision. The Commission decides, however, to delete from those recommendations all reference to two economic systems, as contained for example in paragraph 127 of document E/ECE/1150/Rev.1.

(c) The Commission emphasizes the importance of the procedures for approval of new programme elements set forth in paragraphs 127-129 of the Supplementary Report and calls on all its subsidiary bodies strictly to adhere to these procedures.

(d) The Commission underlines in particular the importance of paragraph 143 of the guidelines and therefore invites the member Governments to distribute their national statements prior to a meeting, so that during the meeting a thorough discussion and exchange of information can take place. To facilitate this distribution, the secretariat is asked to circulate, at each meeting, a more detailed list of participants, with their complete addresses, fax numbers, etc.

(e) The Commission also underlines the importance of paragraph 151 of the guidelines, and requests the secretariat, responsible for the drafting of the reports of the subsidiary bodies, to limit them to the strictly necessary,

confining the text mainly to decisions taken and a minimum explanatory text including any reservations, interpretations or conditions considered essential by one or more delegations. The adoption of such reports should be completed in the minimum possible time,

(f) The Executive Secretary is requested to prepare a tabular presentation, reflecting the volume of the reports of all Bodies in the last four years, for consideration by the Sessional Committee of the annual sessions,

(g) The secretariat is invited to assure the adequate distribution of the above guidelines to all Bodies.

## II. STRUCTURE

(a) The Commission invites all its Principal Subsidiary Bodies to re-examine their structure, their mandates, and the work of their subsidiary bodies, and to redefine them to take account of the priorities identified by the Commission, and to assist the process of reform in economies in transition.

(b) For sectors not identified as priorities, the Commission decides the following:

...

## III. RESOURCES

(a) The Commission underlines the importance it attaches to the provision of additional human and financial resources, within the current budget of the ECE, to strengthen the priority sectors of environment, transport, statistics and trade facilitation, and reiterates its recommendations on the provision of computing and statistical support for the sector of economic analysis. It is understood that all activities not identified as priorities, including the work of the Central Office of the secretariat, may have to work in some cases within the context of diminished resources.

\* \* \*

5. Requests its Principal Subsidiary Bodies to implement this decision without delay, and to report on action taken to the session of the Commission following their next meeting;

6. Requests the Executive Secretary to implement this decision, where the work of the secretariat is concerned, and to report on action taken to the next session of the Commission."