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CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

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Item 5 of the provisional agenda

STATISTICS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

PROPOSAL BY THE BUREAU OF THE CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS
FOR FURTHER WORK

Note by the secretariat

I. BACKGROUND

1. At its meeting in February 2008, the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES Bureau) discussed the Draft Report of the Joint UNECE/Eurostat/OECD Working Group on Statistics for Sustainable Development (WGSSD), its presentation to the Conference in June and possible follow-up steps. The report (document ECE/CES/2008/29) is the result of two years' work and explores the capital approach to measuring sustainable development. It also reveals commonalities with the existing sustainable development indicators developed by some countries and provides some recommendations for further work.

2. The CES Bureau found the document to be useful as a research report. However, it was recognized that, with this report, the conceptual work on developing statistics for sustainable development is not closed: many issues remain unresolved and can be further developed. The CES Bureau also recognized that a lack of concrete follow-up steps would lead to loss of the momentum that has been built up during the last few years since the Joint UNECE/Eurostat/OECD Working Group was created. Converging views and accumulation of

expertise achieved by the Joint Working Group should be used for continuation of the work in some form, e.g. to develop practical guidelines.

3. Following the meeting in February 2008, the CES Bureau continued the discussion electronically on the possible way forward. The CES Bureau believes that the conceptual work on measuring sustainable development on the basis of the capital approach should continue further with the aim of developing a list of indicators that meet the quality standards of official statistics. Consensus has emerged that a new Task Force should be created to further pursue the conceptual development of the capital approach. It is important that additional work on capital approach is undertaken bearing in mind the standards of official statistics.

II. PROPOSAL

4. The CES Bureau proposes the following way forward:

(a) Creation of a new Task Force, combining official statisticians and academic researchers, to further pursue the conceptual development of the capital approach in identifying indicators to present the long-term dimension of sustainability;

(b) The Task Force should test a set of indicators in a restricted domain of statistics and ensure that the long-term indicators can be compiled using statistically rigorous methods and that they are, or can be, compiled by national statistical systems at different stages of development;

(c) The Task Force will report to the CES Bureau which will play the role of a high level group to guide the work of the Task Force. Existing groups will be invited to participate or contribute to specific domains (e.g. the London group, others);

(d) Work should also be carried out to compare the existing national indicator sets with the long-term indicators developed by the Task Force;

(e) The mandate of the Task Force will extend from October 2008 to June 2010. The Task Force will present its final report at the CES plenary meeting in June 2010;

(f) The terms of reference of the new Task Force will be discussed by the CES Bureau at its next meeting in October 2008. The terms of reference will take into account the results of the broad consultation of the report and the discussion and views expressed at the plenary session of the Conference in June 2008.

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