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COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

UNECE Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development

First meeting

Geneva, 13–14 December 2005

Report of the Meeting

1. The first meeting of the UNECE Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) took place in Geneva from 13 (afternoon) to 14 December 2005.
2. The meeting was attended by delegates from Albania, Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, the Russian Federation, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and the United Kingdom. Representatives of the Commission of the European Communities also attended.
3. Representatives from the following organizations of the United Nations system participated: the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO).
4. The following intergovernmental organizations were represented: the Council of Europe, the European Environmental Agency and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

5. The Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC-CEE), the Regional Environmental Center for Central Asia (CAREC), the Regional Environmental Center for the Caucasus and the Regional Environmental Center for the Republic of Moldova were represented.

6. The following academic and research institutions attended: the Global/General Education – University Association (GEduc), Copernicus Campus and Environmental and School Initiatives (ENSI). Also represented was the European ECO-Forum, a coalition of environmental citizens' organizations.

I. OPENING, ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

7. The meeting was opened by Mr. Paolo Garonna, Acting UNECE Executive Secretary, who underlined the important role of education in achieving sustainable development through building cultural understanding, knowledge and skills. He also highlighted the role of science in implementing ESD. He stressed that, owing to the inclusive and complex nature of ESD, the key prerequisite for successful implementation was effective cooperation between authorities at different levels and stakeholders. He expressed appreciation of the fact that governments as well as a wide range of stakeholders were represented at the meeting, and he extended a particular welcome to UNESCO as a key partner.

8. The Steering Committee elected Mr. Andreas Karamanos, Secretary General of Education, Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs of Greece, as its Chair and Ms. Violeta Ivanov, Chief of the Environmental Policy and European Integration Division, Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Moldova, as its Vice-Chair.

9. Mr. Karamanos in his introductory message expressed appreciation for his election as Chair of this challenging and innovative body and voiced his belief that the work of the Steering Committee would be successful. He introduced his assistant Mr. Michael Scoullas, member of the National Committee for ESD of Greece and chairman of the Mediterranean Office for Environment, Culture and Sustainable Development (MIO-ECSDE).

10. In order to represent in a balanced way the different sub-regions of the UNECE, the Steering Committee elected to its Bureau representatives of the following: Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and the Republic of Moldova (Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia); Serbia and Montenegro (South-Eastern Europe); Canada (North America); and France, Greece, Italy and Norway (other UNECE member States). The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee will serve in their respective capacities in the Bureau. One representative from each of the following stakeholders was invited to participate in the Bureau as an observer: UNESCO, regional environmental centres, European ECO-Forum and ENSI.

11. The Steering Committee adopted its agenda as amended at the meeting

II. DRAFT WORK PLAN 2005–2007: FOLLOW-UP TO THE VILNIUS FRAMEWORK FOR IMPLEMENTATION

12. The Committee discussed a draft Work Plan for 2005–2007 (CEP/AC.13/2005/8) prepared by the secretariat on the basis of the decisions of the High-Level Meeting of Environment and Education Ministries (Vilnius, Lithuania, 2005).

A. Coordination at the national/state and international levels

13. Prior to the meeting, the secretariat had sent a questionnaire to the countries regarding some initial measures for the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development and had prepared an information note based on the responses received. The document was praised as an important tool for the exchange of information on implementation in different countries.

14. Representatives of member States briefed the Committee on the progress made so far in their respective countries in implementing of the Strategy. Reports by the countries showed that there was a clear tendency in government policies for ESD to receive prominent recognition. Regarding the translation of the UNECE Strategy into the official languages and the establishment of focal points and the consultative mechanism for the implementation of the Strategy, the majority of the countries confirmed that these two initial processes were under way. Most countries had also taken steps to introduce ESD into their policy and legislative documents. In many countries ESD is addressed in the national strategies for SD, while in some countries it is included in other policy documents (e.g. strategies for environmental protection). Some countries have started drafting their national implementation plans and introducing ESD into the curriculum and learning programmes at all levels of education. Lack of resources was identified as the main implementation challenge faced by some countries with economies in transition. Many countries have established websites offering information relevant to ESD. Most countries support the organization of various conferences, seminars and other relevant events. There are several good examples of sub-regional cooperation, including the Baltic 21 process and ESD-related processes in the sub-regions of Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Mediterranean. The Chair concluded the discussion by saying that its results showed that there was both a good basis and a constructive spirit for the successful implementation of the Strategy. (The texts of interventions can be found at www.unece.org/env/esd/SC.Meet.htm.) To ensure transparency and effective communication at the national and international levels, the Committee requested the secretariat to post the list of the focal points dedicated to ESD on the official UNECE site.

B. Capacity building and sharing of experience

15. The Steering Committee discussed activities aimed at strengthening capacity and sharing experiences. These included sub-regional/thematic workshops, the compilation of national good practices, case studies and the use of electronic tools.

16. *Sub-regional/thematic workshops.* The Chair informed delegates that the workshop for the SEE sub-region originally planned for May 2007 had taken place on 28 November 2005 in

Athens, upon the invitation of the Government of Greece. The workshop was organized back to back with the Conference on the Launching of the UN Decade of ESD in the Mediterranean region. Mr. Scoullou, who was the rapporteur of the Conference and the chairperson of the workshop, briefed the Committee on the key outcomes of both events. (More information can be found at www.unece.org/env/esd/WorkshSEE.htm.) Regarding the proposed sub-regional workshops for North America and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA), the Committee requested the secretariat to follow up with the countries concerned and keep the Bureau and the Committee updated.

17. The Committee was also informed about other sub-regional ESD-related events, including various conferences taking place in Central Asia and the Caucasus and an upcoming conference on ESD which will be organized under the European Union (EU) presidency of Austria. (For more information on sub-regional events, see www.unece.org/env/esd/events.htm.) To ensure better exchange of information at the sub-regional and regional levels, delegates were requested to provide the secretariat with relevant information on future events so that the secretariat could post this information in the “Events” section of the UNECE website. The same request was made with regard to ESD-related websites.

18. *Compilation of national good practices, case studies and use of electronic tools.*

The preparation of a compilation of good practices was supported by a majority of delegates as an important input into the sixth Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe” (Belgrade, October 2007). It was agreed that the secretariat, in consultation with the Bureau, would prepare a template for good practices that would be sent to the member States.

19. Case studies were considered a valuable tool for illustrating in a practical way achievements and challenges in the implementation of the Strategy. Several member States, including Norway, Finland and Slovenia, volunteered to carry out the first reporting for the Belgrade Conference using indicators developed by the UNECE Expert Group on Indicators. It was agreed that the Expert Group would prepare a list of selected indicators for this purpose. The secretariat was requested to follow up on this matter.

20. Delegates welcomed UNESCO’s offer to use jointly with UNECE a section of its web portal on DESD (www.unesco.org/education/desd). This portal area will facilitate the sharing of experience, projects and other information. Currently there are several links from this section of UNESCO’s portal to the UNECE site. UNECE will regularly update its website on ESD. Focal points were requested to keep the secretariat informed about initiatives relevant to ESD +in their countries and sub-regions.

C. Review of implementation: indicators and reporting

21. Mr. Roel van Raaij, the Chair of the Expert Group, reported on the progress made in developing indicators (see CEP/AC.13/2005/9 and his PowerPoint presentation). The key challenge for the Expert Group was to ensure that the indicators reflected both aspects of the mandate: “the implementation” as a process, and “the effectiveness of the implementation” as a qualitative feature of the process and of the outcome, including the long-term effects of ESD. Delegates welcomed the results of the Group’s work, calling it both substantive and innovative.

They provided a number of comments on the indicators. Delegates agreed that the overall number of indicators should be reduced in order to permit a realistic and effective reporting process. It was also recommended to investigate the feasibility of redesigning some qualitative indicators into quantitative ones. At the same time, some countries questioned the usefulness of a few input and output indicators (e.g. “number of books”), stressing the importance of the outcome indicators (e.g. whether books are used and how useful they are). A proposal was made to introduce an indicator that would address synergies between the measures taken to implement the UN Decade of ESD and the UNECE Strategy for ESD. Some countries remarked on the small number of indicators on non-formal and informal learning, at the same time recognizing the difficulty of measuring these issues. Some countries with federal government structures expressed concern about the difficulty of gathering some of the data owing to these countries’ decentralized education systems. It was explained that the clauses “as appropriate” and “as understood by your education system” would meet this concern. Thus, for countries with a federal structure, final data would be a compilation of data provided by various sub-statal entities.

22. It was agreed that delegates would send their comments on the draft indicators in writing to the secretariat by 20 January 2006. After comments from the Steering Committee were taken into account, the final outcome of the group’s work would be presented for endorsement to the second meeting of the Steering Committee.

23. With regard to the reporting mechanism, the Committee agreed on the proposal presented in the draft work plan of implementation (CEP/AC.13/2005/8, chapter 1.3)- With regard to the format for reporting, it agreed on the proposal amended by the Expert Group (CEP/AC.13/2005/9, annex I).

24. In addition, the Expert Group was requested to suggest a list of key indicators that would be used by governments that volunteered to prepare their first implementation reports for the Belgrade Conference.

D. Financial arrangements

25. The Chair brought to the Committee’s attention the report on the use of funds prepared by the secretariat and stressed the importance of ensuring stable and predictable funding for effective implementation of the Strategy. The secretariat expressed its appreciation for all contributions received and stressed that they had helped to make the regional implementation process possible. Delegates were also informed about pledges and contributions made since August 2005. Contributions to the UNECE trust fund were made by the following countries: Italy (20,000 euros), Sweden (27,000 euros), France (5,000 euros). Contributions in kind were provided by the Netherlands and OSCE to support the Expert Group on Indicators and by Greece for the organization of the sub-regional workshop for South-East Europe. The following countries have made pledges: Croatia (2,000 euros), Belgium (2,000 euros) and Norway (100,000 Norwegian kroner). Germany, Greece and Romania indicated their wish to provide financial support. To facilitate the fundraising, the Committee decided to organize a “donors’ meeting” in conjunction with its second meeting.

26. Taking into consideration the key outcomes of the discussion, the Steering Committee adopted, as amended, its Work Plan for Implementation.

III. INPUT FOR THE SIXTH “ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE” CONFERENCE

27. The secretariat informed delegates about key relevant outcomes of the first meeting of the Working Group of Senior Officials (12–13 October 2005), the intergovernmental preparatory body for the Conference. The Working Group decided that the Belgrade Conference would take place in the beginning of October 2007 and be focused on the effectiveness of implementation of commitments. ESD received strong support as a potential agenda item, but it was stressed that any proposal should be prepared in such a way that it attracted the attention of Ministers. To ensure equal participation by the education and environment sectors, the ESD segment would be a bipartite separate session.

28. The Chair highlighted the timing for the preparatory process: an intermediate draft proposal for the Belgrade Conference could be discussed by the Working Group of Senior Officials as early as June 2006. An elaborated draft paper should be available in the three official UNECE languages to the meeting of the Working Group of Senior Officials in October 2006. The final input to the Belgrade Conference should be ready by the beginning of April 2007. .

29. The Committee discussed the main focus of a proposal on ESD for the Belgrade Conference. It suggested a general plenary session that would address cooperation on ESD between the environment and education sectors and regional cooperation for the Strategy’s implementation. The session could be combined with a thematic panel discussion followed by interactive debates on ESD’s role in solving emerging SD-related problems. As background materials for the session, the following could be prepared: a compilation of good practices; pilot reporting by volunteering countries using the selected set of indicators; and a first report with an overview of implementation progress based on responses from countries. One of the issues for decision by Ministers could be the continuation of the process. The Committee mandated the Bureau (a) to follow up on these proposals keeping in mind the time frame for preparations for the Belgrade Conference and the financial resources available to carry out these activities; (b) to present these proposals to the Working Group of Senior Officials; and (c) to report to the next meeting of the Steering Committee on the results.

IV. INTERLINKAGES AND POSSIBLE MUTUAL BENEFITS OF THE UNECE PROCESS AND OTHER ESD PROCESSES

30. Delegates strongly supported strengthening synergies between ESD-related activities taking place within the frameworks of the UN Decade of ESD, the UNECE Strategy for ESD and the UN Commission on SD. Germany presented to the Committee its plans for organizing a conference on the UN Decade of ESD in 2009. Copernicus -Campus reported on the development of guidelines on incorporating SD into the European Higher Education Area within the Bologna process. The Regional Environmental Centers for the Caucasus and Central Asia gave briefings on the recently organized conferences on ESD in their respective sub-regions; ENSI provided information about its ESD-related activities; and REC-CEE updated the Committee on its

projects in EECCA countries. OSCE presented a number of examples of its work on ESD – for example, the activities of the Aarhus Centres, the organization of seminars and summer camps and the publication of a Green Pack.

V. CALENDAR OF MEETINGS

31. The Expert Group on Indicators plans to meet in March and May 2006. The Steering Committee agreed to hold its next meeting on 4–5 December 2006 in Geneva. The Bureau's first meeting took place on 14 December 2005 (following the meeting of the Steering Committee), and the second meeting is scheduled for the end of February 2006, back to back with the meeting of the Executive Committee of the Working Group of Senior Officials for the Belgrade Conference.

VI. OTHER BUSINESS

32. Kyrgyzstan stressed the importance of financial support for the sub-region of Central Asia, in particular during the first phase of the implementation of the Strategy, and asked for this sub-region to be considered as a pilot region.

VII. CONCLUDING REMARKS BY THE CHAIR AND CLOSING

33. The Chair summarized the decisions made and the key issues raised during the discussions. The Bureau and the secretariat were requested to follow up on the decisions of the Steering Committee in order to prepare for the Committee's second meeting. The secretariat was asked to finalize the report and the list of participants for circulation to delegates after the meeting. The Chair thanked all participants for their constructive contributions and closed the meeting.