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Economic Commission for Europe

Committee on Environmental Policy

Twenty-third session
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Item 11 of the provisional agenda
Terms of reference

Draft terms of reference of the Committee on Environmental Policy

Note by the Chair in consultation with the Bureau of the Committee on Environmental Policy

Summary

At its twenty-second session (Geneva, 25-27 January 2017), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Committee on Environmental Policy mandated the Bureau, with support from the secretariat, to prepare a first draft of revised terms of reference for the Committee's consideration at its present session. In that regard, the Committee asked the secretariat to circulate the Committee's current terms of reference to Committee members and observers for comments by 28 February 2017, and to compile the comments received for consideration by the Bureau (ECE/CEP/2017/2, para. 83).

Following up on that request, the current document presents in an annex a first draft of the updated terms of reference, which have been revised in the light of comments received and taking into account relevant developments since 2007. The document was prepared by the Chair, in consultation with the Bureau, for the Committee's consideration.

The Committee is invited to consider the draft contained herein to facilitate its discussion on revising its terms of reference with a view to submitting them to ECE for prospective adoption at its sixty-eighth session in 2019.

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Introduction

1. At its twenty-second session (Geneva, 25-27 January 2017), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Committee on Environmental Policy mandated the Bureau, with support from the secretariat, to prepare a first draft of the Committee's revised terms of reference for the Committee's consideration at its present session. In that regard, the Committee asked the secretariat to circulate the current terms of reference to Committee members and observers for comments by 28 February 2017, and to compile the comments received for consideration by the Bureau (ECE/CEP/2017/2, para 83).

2. On 8 February 2017 the secretariat circulated to the Committee members and observers the terms of reference that were adopted by ECE in March 2007 (E/ECE/1447/Add.1). The following members and observers submitted their comments to the secretariat: Georgia; Malta, on behalf of the European Union and its member States; Romania; the Russian Federation; Switzerland; and the United Nations Environment Programme.

3. In a comment, the secretariat was asked to confirm whether the Commission decision on reform adopted in 2013 legally states that the Committee on Environmental Policy is required to amend its current terms of reference. By its decision A(65) (E/2013/37-E/ECE/1464, para. 34) the Commission adopted the outcome of the review of the 2005 reform of ECE (ibid., annex III). That decision contains no specific provisions regarding amending the terms of reference of the sectoral committees.

4. At the same time, paragraph 5 of the outcome of the 2005 review, adopted through decision A(65) states that:

> In view of the importance of relevant global conferences and initiatives, such as the [United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development] 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 [the Executive Committee] possible ways to enhance their contribution to implementing these outcomes.

5. Taking into account the above invitation by the ECE Executive Committee to the ECE subsidiary bodies and the secretariat to suggest to the Executive Committee possible ways to enhance their contribution to implementing the outcomes of relevant global conferences and initiatives, and given that the terms of reference of the Committee on Environmental Policy adopted by ECE in 2007 contain references to bodies and processes that have accomplished their mandates, such as the Commission on Sustainable Development and the Millennium Development Goals, and that in 2009 the Committee was entrusted to be the convening body for preparing the Environment for Europe ministerial conferences, minor changes to the Committee on Environmental Policy might be needed.

6. Following up to the Committee's request, the present document is a first draft of updated terms of reference, which have been revised in the light of comments received and taking into account relevant developments since 2007, such as the Reform Plan of the Environment for Europe process endorsed by ECE in 2009. The document was prepared by the Chair of the Committee on Environmental Policy, in consultation with the Bureau.

7. The Committee is invited to consider the document to facilitate its discussion on revising its terms of reference with a view to submitting them to ECE for prospective adoption at its sixty-eighth session in 2019.

Annex

Draft revised terms of reference

1. The Committee on Environmental Policy concentrates its efforts on preventing environmental damage, promoting sustainable management of environmental resources and contributing towards the development of cooperation in the field of environment among countries of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region, thereby leading to improvements in the region's environment.

2. In particular, the Committee, as a multilateral forum for cooperation in the area of environment in the ECE region, will:

(a) Serve as an instrument for ECE member States to provide policy direction in the region and to launch international initiatives, including the preparation of ministerial meetings in the region to review environmental priorities and adopt a strategic environmental policy;

(b) Act as the convening body for the preparatory processes for the Environment for Europe ministerial conferences and implement relevant outcomes of the ministerial conferences;

(c) Conduct environmental performance reviews in interested countries, using a country-needs based approach, and assist member States in the implementation of the recommendations from those reviews;

(d) Oversee the development and implementation of the Shared Environmental Information System in support of a regular process of environmental assessment in the region;

(e) Strengthen environmental information and observation capacity and the use of indicators to assess progress, as appropriate, particularly in countries of the Caucasus, Central Asia and Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, in order to provide reliable and relevant information on the state of the environment as a basis for improved policymaking and public awareness;

(f) Consider the need for and develop, as appropriate, legally binding instruments, recommendations, methodologies and guidelines with a view to improving environmental management in member countries;

(g) Conduct and support international activities that:

(i) Promote environmental protection and sustainable development in the region at the subregional and transboundary levels;

(ii) Facilitate the contribution of the Committee's work to the United Nations Environment Assembly at the global level;

(iii) Promote cooperation among all parties concerned in order to make action effective and cost-efficient;

(iv) Encourage public participation in environmental decision-making with the involvement of civil society, including the private sector, in accordance with the United Nations procedures and the ECE member States national practice;

(h) Promote cooperation and share experience among the ECE environmental conventions, supporting effective implementation of these instruments;

(i) Promote implementation of policy instruments and tools and the legally binding instruments of ECE with a view to strengthening the capabilities of countries in the Caucasus, Central Asia and Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, through technical

assistance, advisory missions and capacity-building, so as to prevent and reverse environmental degradation;

(j) Assist member States as necessary to integrate environmental considerations into other policies and to use indicators to assess progress, as appropriate;

(k) Contribute to the ECE region's implementation of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and support the regional meetings, such as the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the ECE region, organized in preparation for meetings of the high-level political forum on sustainable development;

(l) Regularly review its programme of work to ensure the coherence of its activities with the overall objectives of ECE, develop synergies and propose to the ECE Commission modalities for cooperation with other sectoral committees on issues of common concern;

(m) Facilitate the achievement of synergies in the implementation of regional environmental programmes, including those developed through regional economic integration organizations, and cooperate with other United Nations regional commissions, international organizations and other relevant bodies, including financing institutions, to avoid duplication of work and enhance synergies;

(n) Promote and support member States' efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.