



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
31 October 2018

Original: English

Economic Commission for Europe

Committee on Environmental Policy

Twenty-third session

Geneva, 14–17 November 2017

Report of the Committee on Environmental Policy on its twenty-third session

Contents

	<i>Page</i>
I. Introduction	3
A. Attendance	3
B. Opening of the session and organizational matters	4
II. Outcomes of the work of the Bureau	4
III. Sustainable development in the region	4
IV. Multilateral environmental agreements	8
V. Follow-up to the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference and preparation of the mid-term review of the Conference's main outcomes	11
VI. Environmental monitoring, assessment and reporting	13
VII. Environmental performance reviews	15
VIII. Cross-sectoral activities	17
A. Education for sustainable development	17
B. Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme	17
C. Environment and security	18
D. European Environment and Health Process	18
E. Green building	18
IX. Programme of work of the Environment subprogramme	19
A. Mainstreaming a gender perspective into environmental activities	19

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B.	Performance assessment of the Environment subprogramme in 2016–2017 and performance plan for 2018–2019.....	19
C.	Programme of work and list of publications of the Environment subprogramme for 2018–2019.....	19
D.	Proposed strategic framework for the Environment subprogramme for 2020–2021	19
E.	Overview of resources for environmental activities and criteria for financial support for participation in meetings and events.....	20
X.	Presentation and exchange of views on the third session of the United Nations Environment Assembly	20
XI.	Terms of reference	20
XII.	Rules of procedure	21
XIII.	Election of officers	21
XIV.	Calendar of meetings.....	21
XV.	Closure of the meeting	21
Annex		
	Draft revised terms of reference.....	23

I. Introduction

1. The Committee on Environmental Policy held its twenty-third session from 14 to 17 November 2017 in Geneva. The present report is based on a summary of the session's outcomes and the decisions taken, which the Committee approved on 17 November 2017.¹

A. Attendance

2. Delegations from the following 43 member States of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) attended the meeting: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Ukraine and United States of America. Representatives of Mongolia also participated.

3. The chairs or other representatives of the following ECE multilateral environmental agreements participated in the session: the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) and its Protocol on on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers; the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention) and its Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment; the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution (Air Convention); the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention) and its Protocol on Water and Health; and the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents (Industrial Accidents Convention).

4. The chairs or other representatives of the following ECE sectoral committees participated in the discussion on sustainable development in the region: the Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry; the Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships; and the Committee on Sustainable Energy.

5. From the United Nations system, representatives of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Regional Office for Europe, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the United Nations Resident Coordinator Office in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Europe were present.

6. Other national, regional and international organizations and bodies were represented at the meeting, including: the European Union, represented by the Council of the European Union, the European Commission, the European Environment Agency and the European Investment Bank; the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); the Regional Environmental Centre for the Caucasus; and the Regional Environmental Centre Moldova.

7. From civil society, representatives of the following organizations participated in the session: Eco-Accord; European ECO Forum; Green Liberty; Journalists for Human Rights; the Sustainable Infrastructure Foundation; and Zoï Environment Network.

¹ Meeting documents and other information, including the summary of decisions, are available on the session web page (www.unece.org/index.php?id=45618).

B. Opening of the session and organizational matters

8. In an opening address, the Deputy Executive Secretary of ECE informed the Committee about the management reform of the United Nations Secretariat initiated by the Secretary-General to better respond to the request of Member States to meet new emerging issues and challenges. Furthermore, he highlighted the value of the outcomes of the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Batumi, Georgia, 8–10 June 2016) in supporting countries' efforts to enhance environmental governance and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, including the Batumi initiatives on clean air and green economy and decisions on the future direction of the Environmental Performance Review Programme and the Shared Environmental Information System.

9. The Chair of the Committee on Environmental Policy welcomed participants and recalled the main objectives of the session.

10. A side event, "Environmental Dimension of the Belt and Road Initiative: opportunities and challenges", was organized jointly by ECE and UNEP on 14 November. Another side event, "Outcomes of the Greening Economies in the Eastern Neighbourhood (EaP GREEN) project funded by the European Union", was organized jointly by ECE, OECD, UNEP and UNIDO on 15 November.

11. The Committee adopted the agenda of its twenty-third session (ECE/CEP/2017/4), along with the proposed timetable (information paper No. 1/Rev.1).

II. Outcomes of the work of the Bureau

12. The Chair reported that the Bureau had worked by means of electronic consultations and had held a meeting in Lisbon on 28 and 29 June 2017 to prepare the current session of the Committee. The outcomes of Bureau's work were presented in document ECE/CEP/2017/6. In addition, the Bureau held a half-day meeting on 13 November 2017 to address pending issues. The Chair invited the Committee to consider the outcomes of the Bureau's work under the respective agenda items.

13. The Committee expressed appreciation to the Bureau for its good work and to the ECE secretariat for the support provided to the Bureau.

III. Sustainable development in the region

14. The Principal Adviser to the ECE Executive Secretary, in her capacity as ECE focal point for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, presented developments related to the ECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development. At the 2017 session of the Regional Forum (25 April) the participants had presented national efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda, including by using existing policy frameworks; reviewing policies and strategies in the light of the Goals; defining new policies adapting the Goals to national and local realities; establishing institutional structures between ministries and using a whole-of-government approach to coordinate action for delivering on the 2030 Agenda; and various strategies to ensure that stakeholders were involved at all levels. The United Nations system helped countries' efforts by providing norms, standards, legal instruments, policy recommendations and expert advice as well as direct support to countries. The Secretary-General had initiated the ongoing reform of the United Nations development system precisely to maximize the country impact in implementing such a transformative agenda. A Chair's summary of the results of the 2017 session of the Regional Forum had been submitted to the high-level political forum on sustainable development for consideration at its 2017 meeting (10–19 July).

15. Preparations for the 2018 session of the ECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (1–2 March) were ongoing. As for the 2017 session, the 2018 session would be organized as a peer-learning platform with a focus on the Goals under global review in 2018, namely Goals 6 (clean water and sanitation), 7 (affordable and clean energy), 11 (sustainable cities and communities), 12 (responsible consumption and production), 15 (life on land), and 17 (partnerships for the Goals). Participants would work both in plenary and in small groups to enable an efficient exchange of good practice and case studies; identify shared goals, challenges and regional trends; and address transboundary issues. On the margins of the session, both a civil society pre-meeting and a regional preparatory meeting for countries undertaking a Voluntary National Review in 2018 would be held, on 28 February 2018. The outcomes of the 2018 session of the Regional Forum would constitute the contribution of the ECE region to the 2018 meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development (9–18 July).

16. The delegates of Belgium, Czechia, Finland, Kazakhstan, Romania and Sweden shared their experience and practical ways for delivering on the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals with a particular focus on Goals under review in 2018.

17. Belgium had in place a legislative, policy and institutional set-up for implementing the 2030 Agenda. The principle of sustainable development was part of the Belgian Constitution and was recognized as a general policy objective to which the federal State, the communities and the regions were required to contribute. Belgium was putting into practice its first National Sustainable Development Strategy, approved in 2017, including by means of cross-cutting activities. Coordination of the Strategy's implementation was provided by the Interministerial Conference for Sustainable Development established for that purpose. To achieve Goal 7, Belgium was focusing on sustainable construction, renovation and energy efficiency in buildings, including through tools and incentives, such as a road map for renovation, an Energy Performance Certificate and digital passports for houses. Goal 11 was being achieved through a "smart city" approach. Concerning Goal 12, the "Flemish Materials Programme", comprising economic, legal and awareness-raising actions to support a circular economy, had won the "Circulars Award" at the 2016 World Economic Forum. Since April 2017, Belgium had been working in partnership with the private sector towards Goal 15 through the implementation of the BeBiodiversity Strategy, which aimed at shifting markets to more biodiversity-friendly products by working on both the supply and demand sides.

18. Czechia had analysed each Sustainable Development Goal target and assigned responsible institutions in the different sectors to take the lead in efforts to achieve it. The largest number of targets had been assigned to environment (34), followed by the Office of the Prime Minister (24), social affairs and labour (20), industry and trade (19), interior (19) and other sectors. To ensure strong coordinating capacity, leadership and an integrated approach to the 2030 Agenda, a Government Council for Sustainable Development had been set up under the Office of the Prime Minister. The Council also supported the implementation of commitments under the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 and other international agreements. The Council developed concrete implementation measures for six key areas identified for the development of Czechia, namely people and society, economic model, resilient ecosystems, municipalities, global development and good governance. It also ensured alignment between the Sustainable Development Goals and their targets and the six areas. Concerning Goal 6, the main challenges to address were access to drinking water and sanitation for marginalized people; nitrates and phosphorus pollution from diffuse sources; and water shortages due to climate change. Efforts on Goal 7 focused on keeping energy bills below 10 per cent of domestic expenditures, a move to sustainable and renewable energy sources and a decrease in energy consumption by 30 per cent. Action on Goal 15 was being taken within the framework of the Biodiversity Strategy 2016–2025, including to protect the landscape from water and wind erosion and to decrease agricultural land.

19. Finland had a twofold approach to the 2030 Agenda: to demonstrate the Government's political leadership and commitment; and to engage the whole of society in implementation through participatory partnerships. The Government's Implementation Plan for the 2030 Agenda, adopted in February 2017, focused on carbon neutrality, the efficient use of resources, non-discrimination, equality and competence. A monitoring system, comprised of 40 newly updated national sustainable development indicators, and an interactive participatory online follow-up mechanism enabled a multi-stakeholder discussion on the progress made, gaps and prospects for future development. To support its actions, Finland was planning to include sustainable development considerations in the budget planning for 2019. The National Commission for Sustainable Development, established in 1993, had provided a solid institutional framework for over 25 years operating under the Prime Minister's leadership. In addition to promoting a whole-of-government approach, involving the whole of society in concrete action and innovations for sustainable development was a priority in the country. This was carried out through the "Society's Commitment to Sustainable Development" policy framework for the public administration, civil society and other stakeholders until 2050. The policy framework had gathered over 700 commitments from all societal actors and levels towards the vision of a prosperous Finland within the limits of the carrying capacity of nature.

20. For Kazakhstan, many of the plans for the achievement of the six Goals under review in 2018 were guided by the concept of the transition to green economy. Notably, for Goal 6, the county was making good progress in providing constant access to the central drinking water supply both in urban and rural areas, improving efficiency in water use in general and improving the productivity of water resources in agriculture, forestry and fisheries. Activities to achieve Goal 7 focused on increasing the share of renewable energies, with targets of 3 per cent by 2020, 10 per cent by 2030 and 30 per cent by 2050. Goal 11 was being achieved through action on decreasing emissions of pollutants into the air and on reducing gas combustion as well as by introducing ecologically effective nature protection measures. Delivering on Goal 12 included work to transition to green economy, to increase the share of recycled waste and to promote environmentally friendly transportation. Achieving Goal 15 involved plans to preserve and effectively manage ecosystems, fisheries and biodiversity, including preserving the Saiga and snow leopard populations and reintroducing the Turanian tiger. The Green Bridge Partnership Programme and the International Centre for Green Technologies and Investment Projects supported the achievement of Goal 17 by facilitating technology transfer and developing and producing technological solutions locally with a focus on the Central Asian subregion and neighbouring countries.

21. To support the process of preparing its Voluntary National Review in 2018, Romania had established an institutional framework for sustainable development, including the Department of Sustainable Development under the Office of Prime Minister and the Interministerial Committee for the Coordination of the Integration of Environmental Protection into Sectoral Policies and Strategies led by the Minister of Environment. Furthermore, a complex matrix had been developed, mapping main processes and actions required to reach each target of the Sustainable Development Goals. The matrix identified the responsible institutions for reaching each target; the multilateral environmental agreements and global and regional policies that could support achieving the target; the existing national policies and those under development to support the 2030 Agenda; the national and United Nations indicators to measure progress in accomplishing the targets; and the financial resources and other implementation means required. An open-ended working group under the Interministerial Committee was drafting the Voluntary National Review based on the matrix. The draft would then be submitted to the Government for approval before submission to the United Nations Secretariat.

22. In Sweden, the country's transparent and accountable institutions, long tradition of cooperation nationally and internationally, its experience of working in an integrated manner,

its dynamic and innovative private sector and well organized social partners, and the processes and activities already in place constituted a favourable starting position for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, leadership by the Government, the establishment of a national Committee for the 2030 Agenda with an advisory role and the involvement of all levels of society, including director generals from 40 authorities and representatives of civil society organizations, provided a good approach. Good progress had been made in reaching Goals 6, 7, 15 and 17, while challenges remained to be addressed in delivering on Goals 11 and 12. Next steps involved making an overall gap analysis, identifying conflict areas and considering trade-offs with a view to adopting a national action plan and developing a support system for delivery and follow-up activities, including through broader and new partnerships. Involving youth and enhancing education and communication efforts were seen as important prerequisites in ensuring a timely delivery on the 2030 Agenda.

23. The Committee then heard from representatives of other ECE sectoral committees on the experience and challenges faced by their committees in adapting their work and activities to support the 2030 Agenda. The Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry had adopted the Warsaw Integrated Programme of Work on Forests (2018–2021) to realign its work and provide direct support to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its Goals 15, 12, 7 and 13. The Committee on Sustainable Energy concentrated its work on supporting countries' efforts to achieve Goal 7, with a focus on addressing the high energy consumption in the region, 80 per cent of which came from fossil fuel; modernizing energy infrastructure; developing standards and norms, for instance on energy efficiency in the housing sector; and providing a platform for policy dialogue. The Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships helped countries to implement the 2030 Agenda in a cross-cutting manner, and in particular Goal 12, by fostering a circular economy, including by means of innovation for sustainable development reviews for interested countries, and promoting People-first Public-Private Partnerships for the Belt and Road Initiative and the Sustainable Development Goals.

24. In the ensuing discussion, delegations asked questions and considered the information provided.

25. The Committee took note of the developments in ECE activities linked to the 2030 Agenda. It welcomed the information shared by representatives of Belgium, Czechia, Finland, Kazakhstan, Romania and Sweden on their national experience in identifying practical ways and means of approaching national implementation of the 2030 Agenda and relevant Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goals 6, 7, 11, 12, 15 and 17, from an environmental perspective, and invited Committee members to continue such exchanges of experience and good practice on that topic at its future meetings.

26. Furthermore, the Committee welcomed the background document, prepared by the Bureau with support from the secretariat, presenting information on the role of the Committee in supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda (ECE/CEP/2017/15), agreed to continue using the document at its next session to bolster the discussion on the contribution of the Committee in supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and:

(a) Reiterated its call to make full use of existing processes and mechanisms, focusing on added value, within existing available resources and avoiding any duplication of efforts;

(b) Welcomed the initiation of the activity aimed at strengthening the cooperation with other ECE sectoral committees through the organization of dedicated discussions to exchange information and experience, expressed its appreciation to the chairs and other representatives of the ECE sectoral committees, including the Committee on Sustainable Energy, the Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry and the Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships, for their contributions and appreciated the

opportunity to learn about activities of those sectoral committees in adapting their work to support the 2030 Agenda;

(c) Recommended that the ECE Executive Committee consider asking other sectoral committees to map their activities that supported the achievement of relevant Sustainable Development Goals and their targets, with a view to assisting, in a more informed and efficient manner, the identification of possible areas where cooperation between the ECE sectoral committees might be enhanced to support countries' efforts in an integrated manner in line with the 2030 Agenda.

27. Concerning the ECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development to be organized in March 2018, the Committee requested the secretariat, in consultation with the Bureau, to prepare a short background note based on the discussions relevant to the 2030 Agenda held at the present session and to submit it to the Regional Forum. The Committee encouraged its members and observers to consider promoting the key messages related to Sustainable Development Goals derived from the discussions at the Committee's twenty-third session.

IV. Multilateral environmental agreements

28. Opening the discussion on ECE multilateral environmental agreements, the Chair of the Committee on Environmental Policy welcomed the chairs and vice-chairs of the ECE multilateral environmental agreements and recalled that the present session would continue reviewing efforts under each treaty to define its role in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, with a particular focus on Sustainable Development Goals 6, 11, 12 and 17.

29. The Chair of the Meeting of the Parties to the Air Convention emphasized the treaty's contribution to attaining at least 10 Sustainable Development Goals, namely Goals 2, 3, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 17. The draft workplan for the Convention for 2018–2019 reflected links to relevant Goals. The Convention's contribution to Goal 11 included setting targets for a number of pollutants, leading to improved air quality at the national and city level, and implementing the International Cooperative Programme on Effects of Air Pollution on Materials, including Historic and Cultural Monuments, which resulted in less degradation of historic buildings and monuments by air pollution. Goal 12 was supported by setting targets for pollutants and releases of chemicals into the air; providing scientific support, informing policy developments and helping countries to monitor progress in reducing air pollution under the Cooperative Programme for Monitoring and Evaluation of the Long-range Transmission of Air Pollutants in Europe (EMEP); and assessing the degree and geographical extent of the acidification of surface waters under the International Cooperative Programme on Assessment and Monitoring of the Effects of Air Pollution on Rivers and Lakes. In sum, the Convention contributed to the attainment of the relevant Goals by reducing air pollution and subsequently also the effects of air pollution on other natural resources, such as water.

30. The Chair of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention presented the Convention's contribution to assisting countries to achieve and monitor Goal 6, and in particular target 6.5 to implement by 2030 integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary water cooperation. The Water Convention was a custodian agency for indicator 6.5.2 on transboundary water cooperation and provided the framework for reporting and monitoring of the indicator for both Parties and non-Parties. The first reporting exercise had already been held, with 102 out of 154 countries that shared transboundary waters submitting reports. Furthermore, by conducting participatory water-food-energy-ecosystem nexus assessments in a number of basins, the Convention was implementing an intersectoral approach to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The main lessons learned from the assessments included the benefit of a broad participation of different sectors in a dialogue about balancing development and the environment; the need

to identify mutual interests or benefits, such as water and energy efficiency; and the need for targeted communication in addressing the different sectors.

31. The Chair of the Conference of the Parties to the Industrial Accidents Convention highlighted activities contributing to Goals 6, 11, 12 and 17. The Joint Expert Group on Water and Industrial Accidents, shared with the Water Convention, had prepared the publication *Safety Guidelines and Good Industry Practices on Tailings Management Facilities* and was working on guidelines for the management and retention of firefighting water, in support of target 6.3 on improving water quality by reducing pollution and minimizing the release of hazardous chemicals. *Guidance on Land-use Planning, the Siting of Hazardous Activities and Related Safety Aspects* had been developed jointly with the Espoo Convention and its Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment as a contribution to Goal 11 (targets 11.5 and 11.b). Subregional workshops on chemicals management and industrial accident prevention held in the Caucasus, Central Asia, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe had supported Goal 12, target 12.4, to achieve by 2020 the environmentally sound management of chemicals, in accordance with agreed international frameworks. To enhance North-South, South-South and triangular regional and international cooperation (target 17.6), the Convention cultivated partnerships with other regional and global actors, leading to initiatives such as the joint ECE-OECD seminar on fostering the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (November 2016) and follow-up activities.

32. The Vice-Chair of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention illustrated the role of the Convention in supporting the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals, noting that Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) was fundamental for achieving all the Goals. The Aarhus Convention promoted transparency and inclusive and effective public participation in decision-making on a wide range of issues that had an impact on the environment and human health. For example, in Estonia, electronic tools had helped to raise public awareness and to make the complex issues related to a national water price control mechanism understandable to the general public, in fulfilment of the Convention's obligations regarding access to information, but also supporting Goal 6 on water. Effective public participation in urban planning and management in the establishment of an online inventory of landfills had helped to reach Goal 11 in Ukraine. In the Netherlands, the engagement of the public had been key to achieving sustainable consumption and production under Goal 12 and for putting into practice Goal 17, for example, by founding a citizen-owned electric company.

33. The Chair of the Meetings of the Parties to the Espoo Convention and its Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment observed that, as cross-cutting legal instruments, the two treaties could help achieve targets under nearly all Sustainable Development Goals. In particular, the treaties provided for early integration of environmental and health considerations into all economic and regional development planning and fostered international cooperation on that issue. Furthermore, they enshrined the precautionary approach that made it possible to anticipate, prevent and mitigate environmental damage. Additionally, the treaties contributed to rendering decision-making more inclusive, transparent and participatory by requiring consultation of authorities and the public. The Minsk Declaration, adopted by the Meetings of the Parties, emphasized the treaties' role in translating global commitments into practical action at the national level. In addition, the treaties' joint workplan for 2017–2020 contained activities contributing to achieving Sustainable Development Goals: for example, developing guidance on the application of strategic environmental assessment to urban planning in contribution to target 11.3.

34. The Chair of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers presented the Protocol's role in enabling fact-based, informed decision-making and for tracking success in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The Protocol had a twofold role, as a reporting tool and as a source of pollution-related data,

thereby contributing to the prevention and reduction of pollution by increasing transparency and by encouraging improvements in environmental performance in production and consumption. It helped countries to monitor pollutant releases and transfers over time; made information on pollution releases and waste transfers public, leading to companies reducing their pollution and identifying smarter production methods; made pollutant release and transfer register data more useful through combination with other types of information, such as health, infrastructure, demographic and economic data; and provided an online tool for decision makers to identify and scale-up possible future actions. There were many examples illustrating the Protocol's role in contributing to the attainment of the Goals in practice, including in the European Union (Goal 6), Israel and Sweden (Goal 11), Norway (Goal 12) and Serbia (Goal 17).

35. The Chair of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Water and Health underscored the Protocol's role in reaching Goals 6 and 11. For example, in Serbia implementing the Protocol had led to an assessment of water quality that had identified a lower quality of water supplies in rural as compared with urban areas. The country had also carried out an assessment of water, sanitation and hygiene facilities in schools that had shown that, although there were a sufficient number of facilities, their maintenance was lagging behind. Moreover, Serbia had set targets under the Protocol in 14 thematic areas and planned to adopt a policy on water safety plans, considering the lessons learned from the floods in 2014. In addition, the country planned to conduct an assessment on equitable access to water and sanitation using the Protocol's Equitable Access Score-card.

36. The Chair of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol also summarized the discussions at the most recent meeting between the representatives of the governing bodies of the ECE multilateral environmental agreements and the Committee on Environmental Policy, held on 13 November 2017. Participants had shared experiences on challenges and opportunities with regard to ratification and implementation of the respective treaties, with a particular focus on Central Asia, and had exchanged information on efforts to define the role of the treaties in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

37. The Committee welcomed the interactive discussion on the ECE multilateral environmental agreements, expressed its appreciation to the chairs and other members of the bureaux for their contributions, took note of the information provided with regard to efforts made thus far under each agreement to define its role in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, with a particular focus on Sustainable Development Goals 6, 11, 12 and 17 under review in 2018, and:

(a) Acknowledged that the ECE multilateral environmental agreements offered helpful frameworks to pursue different types of activities for advancing Goals 6, 11, 12 and 17;

(b) Encouraged its members to promote the transparent and participatory decision-making in pursuing the 2030 Agenda;

(c) Recognized that achieving the Sustainable Development Goals implied an increase in the cooperation between the multilateral environmental agreements, and between the multilateral environmental agreements and the Committee on Environmental Policy;

(d) Underlined the need to consider ways to further improve cooperation and synergies between the Committee and the multilateral environmental agreements;

(e) Took note of the recent developments at the informal joint meetings between the representatives of the governing bodies of the ECE multilateral environmental agreements and the Committee.

V. Follow-up to the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference and preparation of the mid-term review of the Conference's main outcomes

38. One and a half years after committing to green the economy and improve air quality across the region at the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, delegates shared progress and their insights into challenges in delivering on those commitments. Representatives of Belarus, Czechia, Portugal, Switzerland and Ukraine – guests of the Batumi Talk Show – were interviewed by the talk show hosts and the Directors of the ECE Environment Division and the UNEP Regional Office for Europe. The guests highlighted action taken to achieve voluntary commitments under the Batumi Initiative on Green Economy and the Batumi Action for Cleaner Air. During the talk show, entitled “Scoring Sustainable Development Goals through action on green economy and clean air”, the representative of Ukraine announced new actions under the green economy initiative. In addition, representatives of Belarus, Czechia, Portugal and Switzerland discussed steps they had taken to implement their commitments made in Batumi and plans for future action. The discussion also addressed the relevance of the commitments for the Sustainable Development Goals with a focus on Goals to be reviewed globally in 2018.

39. During the talk show it was noted, since the Batumi Conference, the number of stakeholders in and commitments to the two initiatives had increased, with new commitments from Canada, France, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, the WHO Regional Office for Europe and the Interstate Commission on Sustainable Development of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea. At the time of the Committee's twenty-third session, 26 countries and 13 organizations had joined the Batumi Initiative on Green Economy with 121 commitments, and 27 countries and 4 organizations had joined the Batumi Action for Cleaner Air with 108 commitments. Those commitments supported their efforts to move towards greener and more inclusive economic patterns and to improve air quality. The two initiatives remained open for new commitments.

40. The Vice-Chair of the Air Convention presented activities to promote the Batumi Action for Cleaner Air, including promoting the initiative at several events and regular consideration of progress in implementing commitments under the initiative during the meetings of the Working Group on Strategies and Review.

41. Representatives of the ECE secretariat and UNEP reported on activities to promote green economy, the Pan-European Strategic Framework for Greening the Economy and the Batumi Initiative on Green Economy. Batumi Talk Shows had been organized on the margins of the sixty-seventh session of ECE, on 27 April 2017, and during the annual meeting of the OECD GREEN Action Task Force, on 26 October 2017 in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The Batumi Initiative on Green Economy had been promoted at the Partnership for Action on Green Economy Ministerial Conference in March 2017, at the Partnership Exchange special event during the high-level political forum on sustainable development in July 2017 and at several other high-level events in 2017. Also in 2017, ECE and UNEP had jointly conducted a mapping of activities by international organizations in support of greening the economy in the pan-European region. A representative of the GREEN Action Task Force also presented the work of the Task Force, focused on activities in the area of green economy.

42. The Chair informed delegates about the Bureau's recommendations based on lessons learned from the organization of the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference and the Secretary to the Committee presented key results of a post-conference survey.

43. Furthermore, the Chair presented the Bureau's recommendations for preparing the mid-term review of the Batumi Conference main outcomes and participants discussed the preparation of the mid-term review.

44. The Committee took note of the document on lessons learned from the preparation, organization and running of the Batumi Conference (ECE/CEP/2017/17), and agreed with the Bureau recommendation to prepare a short satisfaction survey to be circulated on the last day of future Environment for Europe ministerial conferences. Another short survey could also be prepared, as necessary, after the mid-term reviews of conference outcomes to identify the priorities and themes for the next conference.

45. The Committee welcomed follow-up activities to implement the main outcomes of the Batumi Conference and:

(a) Also welcomed the Batumi Talk Show as an effective mechanism for promoting the Batumi Initiative on Green Economy (BIG-E) and the Batumi Action for Cleaner Air (BACA) and invited interested countries and organizations to consider organizing a Batumi Talk Show at relevant events, as appropriate;

(b) Expressed appreciation to Belarus, Czechia, Portugal, Switzerland and Ukraine for participating in the Batumi Talk Show, sharing their experience in implementing their commitments under the Batumi initiatives and announcing new commitments;

(c) Invited countries and organizations participating in the Batumi initiatives to continue implementing their commitments and sharing their experience and good practice at Committee meetings;

(d) Welcomed the increasing number of stakeholders and commitments for the Batumi initiatives, noting with appreciation that, since the last session of the Committee, Canada and WHO had joined the Batumi Action for Cleaner Air and Ukraine and the Interstate Commission on Sustainable Development had joined the Batumi Initiative on Green Economy and Kazakhstan has submitted a new commitment to that initiative;

(e) Reiterated the invitation to countries and organizations to consider joining the Batumi initiatives and submitting additional actions to green the economy and improve air quality;

(f) Welcomed the information provided by the Vice-Chair of the Meeting of the Parties to the Air Convention on activities to promote the Batumi Action for Cleaner Air, and invited representatives of the Convention to continue informing the Committee in that regard at its next meetings;

(g) Also welcomed the information provided by representatives of ECE and UNEP on activities to implement the Pan-European Strategic Framework for Greening the Economy, including the promotion of the Batumi Initiative on Green Economy at national, regional and global high-level meetings and their efforts to support the initiative's implementation;

(h) With regard to greening the economy, stressed the importance of the active involvement of the private sector and of other stakeholders across the pan-European region and at the global level;

(i) Welcomed the information provided by the GREEN Action Task Force secretariat, hosted by OECD, on the Task Force's ongoing work, and invited the Task Force secretariat to inform the Committee regularly about the Task Force's activities.

46. Regarding the mid-term review, the Committee welcomed the document prepared by the Bureau with support from the secretariat on organizing the mid-term review of the main outcomes of the Batumi Conference (ECE/CEP/2017/16), approved the proposed scope, format and modalities for organizing a mid-term review of the Conference's main outcomes as presented in that document and:

(a) Decided to organize a one-day mid-term review of the Batumi Conference main outcomes as part of the Committee's twenty-fourth session;

(b) Invited the ECE secretariat in cooperation with relevant partners to proceed with the organization of the mid-term review in accordance with the provisions in document ECE/CEP/2017/16, the Committee's discussions at its present session and further recommendations by the Bureau in that regard;

(c) Invited countries and organizations to actively participate in the organization of the mid-term review and in the review itself;

(d) Invited the partners and stakeholders identified in document ECE/CEP/2017/16 to proceed with the preparation of the mid-term review reports, which should be kept short and focused but without compromising their quality, in line with the template included in annex II of that document. Additional substantive information could be provided in annexes to the mid-term review report, as necessary;

(e) Noted that dialogue and cooperation with relevant organizations and other stakeholders were essential in promoting Environment for Europe initiatives, encouraged efforts to involve a wide range of stakeholders, including business, civil society and others, and proposed to consider involving also youth organizations;

(f) Decided to use a mix of different interactive formats for the mid-term review.

VI. Environmental monitoring, assessment and reporting

47. The Vice-Chair of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment presented the progress achieved on monitoring and assessment since the Committee's January 2017 session. With regard to future work, the Chief of the Operational Activities and Review Section of the ECE Environment Division introduced two documents for the Committee's consideration: an outline of activities leading up to 2021 of the Working Group (ECE/CEP/2017/13); and modalities for the regional environmental information and assessment network of networks (ECE/CEP/2017/14). He drew attention, in particular, to the planned mid-term review of progress in establishing the Shared Environmental Information System.

48. Delegates considered the progress of work and the proposed future activities. The Committee recognized the need to increase the participation from European Union countries in the activities of the Working Group and to ensure adequate financial resources to support the work. In terms of future work, it was suggested that the Working Group could consider data for the green economy and the environmental dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals.

49. The Committee welcomed the work of the Working Group and:

(a) Requested the Working Group to revise and streamline the outline of its activities up to 2021 by including measurable outcomes and giving priority to its core activities in accordance with the financial resources available;

(b) Took note of the modalities for the regional environmental information and assessment network of networks;

(c) Requested the Working Group to encourage and facilitate broadened participation by member States, relevant organizations and existing regional environmental information and assessment networks;

(d) Reiterated the invitation to member States and relevant organizations to participate actively in the activities and meetings of the Working Group, and invited member States that were not represented in the Working Group to nominate representatives by 1 December 2017 and to submit those nominations to the secretariat;

(e) Took note of the Working Group's invitation to member States to take an active part in responding to the questionnaire to be circulated to members of the Committee and national representatives designated to the Working Group, with a view to accurately assessing the progress to date in the establishment of the Shared Environmental Information System in the pan-European region;

(f) Agreed to the inclusion of additional substantive information in an annex to the short report on the mid-term review of progress in the establishment of the Shared Environmental Information System, as appropriate.

50. The Chief of the Operational Activities and Review Section then presented the main outcomes of the work of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators and the Joint Task Force's proposal for its renewed mandate and terms of reference (ECE/CEP/2017/12, annex). The Joint Task Force had particularly emphasized the need for it to:

(a) Keep the guidelines on environmental statistics and indicators under review and work towards the alignment of the guidelines with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

(b) Support countries in the production and use of environmental indicators;

(c) Apply the Shared Environmental Information System principles with regard to both the production and sharing of environmental information.

51. The Chair of the Committee reminded the delegates that the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians had approved the renewed mandate and terms of reference of the Joint Task Force for the period 2016–2021.

52. The Committee greatly appreciated the work of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators and:

(a) Adopted the renewed mandate and terms of reference of the Joint Task Force for 2018–2021 and requested the secretariat to submit the renewed mandate to the ECE Executive Committee for approval;

(b) Took note of the planned reduction in the frequency of meetings of the Joint Task Force.

53. The Committee Chair recalled that, in April 2017, ECE had requested its secretariat to engage with the European regional committee of the United Nations Initiative on Global Geospatial Information Management to gain a better understanding of how geospatial information could complement and support existing ECE activities, particularly in the area of reviewing progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. A representative of the ECE Statistical Division reported on the Division's activities related to the work of the United Nations Initiative in Europe and ECE involvement. Another representative of the Statistical Division presented the Division's other environment-related activities.

54. The Committee welcomed the information provided by the ECE Statistical Division on the specific activities related to environmental statistics and indicators and on the United Nations Initiative on Global Geospatial Information Management.

55. The Committee invited member States and organizations to provide in-kind and financial support to the environmental monitoring and assessment programme and, in particular, thanked the European Union, through the European Environment Agency, the Russian Federation and Switzerland for their financial support, and also UNEP and the European Environment Agency for their substantive support to the programme.

VII. Environmental performance reviews

56. The Secretary to the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews gave an overview of activities in 2017. The review missions for the third reviews of Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina had taken place in January/February and March/April 2017, respectively. The review mission for Mongolia had taken place in May 2017, in close cooperation with the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. In those reviews, for the first time, the Expert Group had integrated consideration of the Sustainable Development Goals. In August 2017, the Third Environmental Performance Review of Tajikistan had been published and launched in Dushanbe. At its October 2017 meeting, the Expert Group had worked on the three reviews carried out in 2017 and had taken stock of the experience of integrating the Sustainable Development Goals in the reviews.

57. Presenting planned activities for 2018, the Expert Group Secretary said the preparatory missions for the third environmental performance reviews of Kazakhstan and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia would be carried out on 27 and 28 November 2017 and on 26 and 27 February 2018, respectively. The country missions for the third reviews would be conducted in March and September 2018, respectively. Romania and Ukraine were next in line for their third environmental performance reviews. The reviews of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Mongolia would be published during the first half of 2018 and launched in the second half of the year.

58. The Secretary said that two subregional capacity-building workshops would be held in 2017 based on the needs identified in the environmental performance reviews: one to strengthen national capacity in Central Asia in transitioning to sustainable energy policy and practices (Astana, November 2017); and a workshop for the Caucasus, Central Asia, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe focused on transitioning to sustainable transport policy and practice (Tbilisi, December 2017). In 2018, a project to strengthen national capacities for evidence-based environmental governance and sustainable environmental policies in support of implementation of the 2030 Agenda would be carried out in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in the period March 2018–December 2021 in the framework of a United Nations Development Account project.

59. The Committee welcomed the information provided on activities of the Environmental Performance Review Programme and expressed its appreciation to the secretariat for the excellent work in support of the Programme. It greatly appreciated the work of the Expert Group in 2017, and invited delegations to nominate representatives to the Expert Group. Looking to 2018, the Committee welcomed the commencement of the third environmental performance review of Kazakhstan, and the requests from Romania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Ukraine to undergo their third environmental performance reviews.

60. Furthermore, the Committee took note of the information provided by the secretariat on resource mobilization for the Environmental Performance Review Programme in 2017 and in particular thanked:

- (a) Germany, Portugal and Switzerland for their financial support;
- (b) France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, UNEP and WHO for providing expertise;
- (c) Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Montenegro, the Republic of Moldova, Romania and Switzerland for having delegated their experts to the ECE Expert Group;
- (d) Sweden for offering a training course to the Environmental Performance Review Programme secretariat;

(e) UNDP for logistical support.

61. In addition, the Committee appreciated the close cooperation of the ECE Sustainable Energy, Forests, Land and Housing, Statistics and Sustainable Transport Divisions with the Environmental Performance Review Programme.
62. The Committee encouraged delegations to provide in-kind (expert) and financial support to the Environmental Performance Review Programme.
63. Subsequently, the Committee proceeded with the peer review of the environmental performance of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Mongolia.
64. The rapporteur for the review (Switzerland) summarized the main findings and recommendations of the Environmental Performance Review of Mongolia, conducted by the Expert Group on 25 and 26 October 2017. The Director General of the Department of Green Policy and Planning of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism of Mongolia presented key environmental challenges of the country. Following a discussion on the review, the Committee adopted the recommendations in the Environmental Performance Review of Mongolia (information paper No. 2).
65. The rapporteur for the review (Estonia) summarized the main findings and recommendations of the Third Environmental Performance Review of Albania, conducted by the Expert Group on 23 October 2017. The Deputy Minister of Tourism and Environment of Albania presented key challenges of the country and progress made since the second review in 2011. Following a discussion on the review, the Committee adopted the recommendations in the Third Environmental Performance Review of Albania (information paper No. 3).
66. The rapporteur for the review (Belarus) summarized the main findings and recommendations of the Third Environmental Performance Review of Bosnia and Herzegovina, conducted by the Expert Group on 24 and 25 October 2017. The Head of the Environmental Protection Department of the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations of Bosnia and Herzegovina shared with the delegates the main environmental challenges faced by the country and progress since the second review in 2010. Following a discussion on the review, the Committee adopted the recommendations in the Third Environmental Performance Review of Bosnia and Herzegovina (information paper No. 4).
67. The representative of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia then reported on the implementation of the 47 recommendations from its second review. The Committee welcomed the information provided on the implementation of recommendations contained in the Second Environmental Performance Review of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, conducted in 2011.
68. The Chair informed the Committee that the document, “Role of environmental performance reviews in supporting the achievement and monitoring of Sustainable Development Goals in the pan-European region”, prepared by the Expert Group and approved by the Committee at its twenty-second session, had been processed in its final edited version (ECE/CEP/2017/11).
69. The representative of Switzerland presented the outcomes of the Expert Group discussion on the first experience of integrating the Sustainable Development Goals in the framework of the three reviews conducted in 2017.
70. The representative of the United Nations Resident Coordinator Office in Bosnia and Herzegovina presented the experience of Bosnia and Herzegovina in reaching out to civil servants and the public at large and building ownership of Sustainable Development Goals.

71. The representatives of Albania and Mongolia commented on the experience of their countries on awareness-raising on Sustainable Development Goals, related challenges and the advice provided by their respective reviews.

72. The Committee greatly appreciated the first experience of integrating the relevant Sustainable Development Goals and targets in the environmental performance reviews conducted in 2017. It emphasized the importance of integrating the relevant Goals and targets as much as possible in all the focal areas or chapters for each review.

73. The Committee furthermore welcomed the exchange of experience and good practices on raising awareness on the environment and sustainable development, in particular the Sustainable Development Goals, and reaching out to civil servants and the public at large and:

(a) Recognized the multiple challenges encountered by countries in raising awareness and actively engaging the public and civil servants in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals;

(b) Acknowledged the need for the exchange of experience and good practices in this regard, including in the framework of the environmental performance reviews.

VIII. Cross-sectoral activities

74. The Committee was informed about recent developments under a number of ongoing cross-sectoral activities undertaken under the leadership of ECE, or in partnership with other organizations.

A. Education for sustainable development

75. The Secretary to the Committee presented developments under the ECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development. In 2017, the work under the Strategy had focused on following up to the decisions of the High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries held in 2016 within the framework of the Batumi Conference.

76. The Committee took note of the information provided on the work under the ECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development, while noting the difficult situation with regard to mobilizing voluntary contributions sufficient to enable the continuation of the regional intergovernmental platform and other activities to share experience and good practice with a view to advancing education for sustainable development across the region.

B. Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme

77. The Vice-Chair (Austria) of the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP) informed delegates about developments since the Committee's twenty-second session. Activities had centred on preparing THE PEP High-level Meeting in autumn 2019 and on promoting the integration of the transport, health and environment sectors by means of symposiums, workshops, relay races and side events.²

78. The Committee welcomed the information provided on and the progress of work under THE PEP.

² For more information, see <https://thepep.unecce.org/events/15th-session-pep-steering-committee>.

C. Environment and security

79. The Director of the ECE Environment Division gave an overview of ongoing contributions of ECE to the Environment and Security Initiative (information paper No. 5).

80. The Committee took note of the information provided with regard to the Environment and Security Initiative.

D. European Environment and Health Process

81. The Chair of the WHO European Environment and Health Task Force (Austria) informed the Committee about the main outcomes of the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health (Ostrava, Czechia, 13–15 June 2017).

82. The representative of the WHO Regional Office for Europe presented the proposed follow-up activities to the Ostrava Conference.

83. Concerning the establishment of a joint secretariat for the Process, the Chief of the ECE Operational Activities and Review Section introduced the document containing possible arrangements for a joint ECE-WHO Regional Office for Europe secretariat (ECE/CEP/2017/18).

84. The Committee welcomed the information provided on the outcomes of the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health. It recognized the close interlinkages existing between environment and health.

85. The Committee also welcomed the document prepared by the secretariat in consultation with the Bureau on possible arrangements for a joint secretariat for the European Environment and Health Process. It decided that ECE should maintain the status quo and remain a strong partner of the European Environment and Health Process, without joining the secretariat of the Process at present, and to consider the issue again should there be extrabudgetary resources made available by interested countries for additional work by ECE on the Process.

86. The Committee concluded that the wider engagement of environment ministries in the European Environment and Health Process was essential to tackle the challenges of the environmental impacts on health in the region in a more effective and integrated manner.

87. With regard to the European Environment and Health Ministerial Board, the Committee requested the secretariat to send letters to those ministers of environment who had expressed interest in serving on the Board in 2017–2018, informing them about the new institutional arrangements under the Process that no longer included the Board.

88. The Committee took note of the invitation to nominate national environment focal points for the European Environment and Health Task Force. It encouraged its members to liaise with their health counterparts engaged in the European Environment and Health Process to avoid potential contradictions between future decisions taken within the Process with those taken by the Committee.

E. Green building

89. A representative of the ECE Forests, Land and Housing Division presented the work of the Committee on Housing and Land Management related to “green building”.

90. The Committee on Environmental Policy took note of the activities of the Committee on Housing and Land Management, in particular the progress of work on energy efficiency in buildings.

IX. Programme of work of the Environment subprogramme

A. Mainstreaming a gender perspective into environmental activities

91. The gender focal point of the Environment Division gave an overview of the main activities related to mainstreaming a gender perspective into environmental activities carried out in 2017. A representative of the Water Convention secretariat and a representative of the non-governmental organization Journalists for Human Rights jointly presented the work under the Protocol on Water and Health to ensure equitable access, based on an example of the assessment of equitable access to water and sanitation conducted in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

92. The Committee took note of the information provided with respect to gender mainstreaming in environmental activities carried out by the ECE Environment Division since the Committee's last session, as part of the implementation of the ECE Policy for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women for 2016–2020 and:

(a) Welcomed the information provided on the work on equitable access to water and sanitation under the Protocol on Water and Health, in particular to address the gender dimension of access to water and sanitation;

(b) Acknowledged the importance of gender disaggregated data to enable better understanding of the gender dimension of environmental issues.

B. Performance assessment of the Environment subprogramme in 2016–2017 and performance plan for 2018–2019

93. The Chair recalled the decision of the Committee in 2014 to continue to produce performance assessments and plans on a biennial basis for the Environment subprogramme.

94. The Committee approved the biennial performance report of the Environment subprogramme for 2016–2017 (ECE/CEP/2017/8). It also approved the biennial performance plan of the Environment subprogramme for 2018–2019 (ECE/CEP/2017/9).

C. Programme of work and list of publications of the Environment subprogramme for 2018–2019

95. The Chair informed delegates that the programme of work for 2018–2019 and list of publications for that biennium were contained in document ECE/CEP/2017/7.

96. The Committee adopted the programme of work of the Environment subprogramme for 2018–2019, and the list of publications annexed thereto, and asked the secretariat to submit it to the ECE Executive Committee for approval.

D. Proposed strategic framework for the Environment subprogramme for 2020–2021

97. The Chair said that the Bureau had considered the document presenting a proposed strategic framework for the Environment subprogramme for 2020–2021 at its June meeting and had agreed to submit it to the Committee for review. The Committee reviewed the proposed strategic framework of the Environment subprogramme for 2020–2021 (ECE/CEP/2017/10).

E. Overview of resources for environmental activities and criteria for financial support for participation in meetings and events

98. The Secretary to the Committee announced that he continued to be unable to report on the status of resources of the Environment subprogramme for the biennium 2016–2017, as requested. The United Nations Umoja enterprise resource planning system, in place for ECE since November 2015, was still not fully functional and that had prevented the preparation of the report.

99. The Committee took note of the information provided about persisting problems in reporting on the status of financial resources for environmental activities and:

(a) Expressed concern about the difficulties arising due to Umoja not being fully operational;

(b) Requested the secretariat to provide information on the status of resources in the Environment subprogramme for the biennium 2016–2017 at the twenty-fourth session of the Committee;

(c) Invited countries and other stakeholders to consider making voluntary contributions to the Environment for Europe trust fund to support participation of eligible participants in the meetings of the Committee and its Bureau, and expressed gratitude to Norway and Switzerland for their financial contributions to support secretariat activities under the Environment for Europe process;

(d) Requested the secretariat to send letters to all ECE member States highlighting the progress achieved in the work of the Committee and asking them to consider making contributions to support its work.

100. Concerning the criteria for financial support for participation in meetings and events, the Committee agreed with the Bureau recommendation to continue with the criteria for financial support as adopted by the Committee at its twenty-second session in January 2017 (using data for 2015). At the same time, the Committee asked the Bureau, with support from the secretariat, to verify the availability of data for 2016 (for example, in December 2017 and in February and May 2018) and, if available for all countries with economies in transition, to prepare revised criteria for financial support for approval by the Committee by email through a silence procedure.

X. Presentation and exchange of views on the third session of the United Nations Environment Assembly

101. The Director of the UNEP Regional Office for Europe informed the Committee about the preparations for the third session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, which would be held from 4 to 6 December 2017 under the overarching theme of pollution.

102. The Committee welcomed the information on the preparations for the third session of the United Nations Environment Assembly and invited UNEP to continue informing the Committee about relevant developments under the Assembly.

XI. Terms of reference

103. The Committee finalized its draft revised terms of reference by establishing a drafting group, chaired by the representative of Norway, that worked during the Committee's session.

104. The Committee approved its draft revised terms of reference, as annexed to the present document, and asked the secretariat to submit them to ECE for prospective adoption at its sixty-eighth session in 2019.

XII. Rules of procedure

105. Delegates discussed the need for specific rules of procedure of the Committee. The Committee decided to continue the current practice of conducting its meetings and organizing its business in accordance with the ECE rules of procedure.

XIII. Election of officers

106. The Committee decided to postpone the election of officers to the next session of the Committee, with the current Bureau continuing until then.

XIV. Calendar of meetings

107. The Chair presented the schedule of meetings of the Committee and its Bureau for the period until 2020.

108. The Committee approved the proposed schedule of Committee and Bureau meetings until 2020, as presented in information paper No. 8, while deciding to organize the Committee's twenty-fourth session in Geneva in the week of 28 January to 1 February 2019 and respectively adapting the preparatory schedule.

109. Furthermore, the Committee invited the Bureau and the secretariat to seek the views of Committee members and observers on the format of Committee meetings and to explore the possibility of preparing and organizing a meeting of the Extended Bureau, possibly back to back to the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development in the ECE region in 2018, with a view to discussing the format of the Committee's meetings.

XV. Closure of the meeting

110. Supported by the secretariat, the Chair compiled and presented a summary of the outcomes of and decisions taken by the Committee at its twenty-third session. Following a discussion, the draft summary was finalized and approved.³

111. The Committee requested the Bureau and the secretariat to follow up on the Committee's decisions, including by preparing the documents and reports necessary for the Committee's work at its next session.

112. Regarding the two side events organized on the margins of the meeting, the Committee:

(a) Expressed appreciation to ECE and UNEP for organizing a side event on "The environmental dimension of the Belt and Road Initiative: opportunities and challenges";

³ The approved summary was circulated to the Committee by email on Tuesday, 21 November 2017, and was also made available on the ECE website. The present report was prepared based on the approved summary. The text has been officially edited since adoption. Any changes are strictly editorial and do not affect the substance of the decisions.

(b) Expressed appreciation to ECE, OECD, UNEP and UNIDO for organizing a side event on “Greening Economies in the Eastern Neighbourhood: from commitment to results”.

113. The Committee expressed strong appreciation for the work of the ECE secretariat in preparing the present meeting.

114. The Chair informed delegates that the report of the present meeting and the list of participants would be posted on the ECE website after the meeting. The Chair thanked the participants and closed the meeting.

Annex

Terms of reference of the Committee on Environmental Policy

1. The Committee on Environmental Policy concentrates its efforts on preventing environmental damage, including from climate change, promoting sustainable management of environmental resources and contributing towards the development of cooperation in the field of the 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 the 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) Promote and define the modalities of environmental performance reviews in interested countries, using a country needs-based approach, adopt the conclusions and recommendations of the reviews and assist member States in their implementation;
 - (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) Promote and strengthen environmental information and observation capacity and the use of indicators to assess progress, particularly in countries of the Caucasus, Central Asia and Eastern and South-Eastern Europe and other ECE countries, as appropriate, 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 effective and cost-efficient cooperation among all parties concerned in the areas of its mandate;
 - (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 national practice of ECE member States;
 - (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 upon the request of a member State;

(j) Assist member States, as necessary, to integrate environmental considerations into other policies, to promote cross-sectoral approaches 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 ECE 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.
