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Economic Commission for Europe**Committee on Environmental Policy****Twenty-sixth session**

Geneva, 9–11 November 2020

Item 2 of the provisional agenda

Outcomes of the work of the Bureau**Outcomes of the work of the Bureau for the period
January–July 2020****Report by the Bureau of the Committee on Environmental Policy***Summary*

At its twenty-fifth session (Geneva, 13–15 November 2019), the Committee on Environmental Policy requested its 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 in November 2020. The present document outlines the outcomes of the Bureau's work during the period January–July 2020, with a view to supporting the Committee's work at its twenty-sixth session (Geneva, 9–11 November 2020).



Introduction

1. At its twenty-fifth session (Geneva, 13–15 November 2019), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Committee on Environmental Policy mandated its Bureau, with support from the secretariat and in cooperation with relevant stakeholders, to proceed with the necessary organization of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, including preparing for the next session of the Committee the following: the first drafts of the two background thematic documents; a first draft of the provisional annotated agenda for the Conference; other documents that might be recommended by the Bureau. The Bureau was also mandated to carry out a number of activities, including to: (a) prepare the Committee's twenty-sixth session; (b) prepare revised criteria for providing financial support for participation in meetings and events; and (c) follow up on the progress made on the next pan-European environmental assessment (ECE/CEP/2019/15, paras. 21 (c), 50 and 69).
2. During the intersessional period, due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the Bureau worked by means of electronic consultations, including online consultations on 15 April 2020 and an online meeting on 4 June 2020.
3. The Bureau of the Committee on Environmental Policy comprises the Chair from Portugal and Vice-Chairs from Belarus, Belgium, Estonia, Georgia, Germany, Kazakhstan, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Switzerland and the United States of America.

I. Provisional agenda for the Committee's twenty-sixth session

4. During its online meeting in June 2020, the Bureau considered for approval the draft provisional annotated agenda for the Committee's twenty-sixth session (ECE/CEP/2020/1) and the provisional time frame for the meeting (information paper No.1). In particular, the Bureau recommended continuing the practice of preparing an official document on all cross-sectoral activities under the auspices of the ECE Environment subprogramme and asked the secretariat to prepare it for the Committee's twenty-sixth session.
5. The Bureau also took note of the information provided by the secretariat on the current restrictions and limitations on physical meetings at the Palais des Nations in Geneva. Considering that the total seating capacity with safety distance of room XII in the Palais des Nations (currently reserved for the Committee's twenty-sixth session) was limited to 42 persons only, the Bureau requested the secretariat to liaise with the United Nations Office at Geneva Conference Management Service to enquire as to the possibility of assigning for the Committee's twenty-sixth session another room that had total seating capacity to accommodate at least one person per delegation with safety distance.

II. Preparation of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference

6. At its twenty-fifth session (Geneva, 13–15 November 2019), the Committee decided to organize the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, including the Third High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries, in Nicosia, from 3 to 5 November 2021. The Committee also agreed on the following two themes for the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference: (a) greening the economy in the pan-European region: working towards sustainable infrastructure; and (b) applying principles of circular economy to sustainable tourism. The Committee mandated the Bureau, with support from the secretariat and in cooperation with relevant stakeholders, to proceed with the necessary organization of the Conference (ECE/CEP/2019/15, paras. 21 (b) and (c) and 27 (b)).
7. As the currently agreed dates for the Conference (3–5 November 2021) overlapped with the new dates for the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (new dates: 1–12 November 2021), the Bureau at its virtual meeting on 4 June 2020 agreed to recommend that the Committee

consider rescheduling the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference to take place in 2022 (preferably late spring – beginning of summer 2022). The Bureau also agreed that, when doing so, the host country ought to be consulted and its preferences taken into account. To facilitate the informed discussion by the Committee, the Bureau requested the secretariat to prepare a list of global/regional meetings scheduled to take place in 2022 (information paper No. 8).

8. In accordance with the Reform of the “Environment for Europe” process: reform plan (see ECE/CEP/S/152, annex I), a decision on the agenda of the Conference should be taken at the regular meeting of the Committee approximately 12 months prior to the Conference, and further preparatory work should then commence.

9. At its twenty-fifth session, the Committee mandated the Bureau, with support from the secretariat and in cooperation with relevant stakeholders, to prepare a first draft of the provisional annotated agenda for the Nicosia Conference (ECE/CEP/2019/15, para. 21 (c) (ii)). The Bureau at its virtual meeting on 4 June 2020 agreed to come back to drafting the agenda of the Conference in due time, pending the discussion and possible decision on the dates of the Conference by the Committee at its twenty-sixth session.

10. During its online consultations on 15 April, the Bureau discussed the relevance of the two themes for the Nicosia Conference taking into account the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the ECE countries and their economies. With regard to the first theme “Greening the economy in the pan-European region: working towards sustainable infrastructure”, the Bureau recommended that it be kept unchanged. With regard to the second theme “Applying principles of circular economy to sustainable tourism”, the Bureau recommended that sustainable tourism be kept, but that the focus be adjusted to make it more relevant to the countries taking into consideration the current situation regarding the pandemic and its heavy impact on the tourism sector.

11. During its online meeting on 4 June 2020, the Bureau discussed the first drafts of outlines of two background thematic documents and agreed to:

(a) Seek further comments/proposals on the first drafts of outlines by the Bureau members and partner organizations;

(b) Discuss the revised drafts at its next virtual meeting in September 2020, with a view to agreeing on the structure and advising the secretariat on further steps.

12. At its twenty-fifth session, the Committee considered the document on organizational issues for the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (ECE/CEP/2019/19) and recommended reducing the maximum size of delegations for the Conference by 20 per cent (ECE/CEP/2019/15, para. 27 (d)). Pending the Committee’s discussion at its twenty-sixth session and possible decision on the dates of the Conference, the Bureau at its virtual meeting on 4 June 2020 agreed to put on hold the preparation of the new document regarding organizational issues for the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (ECE/CEP/2020/8) as it would be based on the dates of the Conference.

13. At its twenty-fifth session, the Committee selected option 3¹ from among the options for the next pan-European environmental assessment set out in document ECE/CEP/AC.10/2019/6, subject to the availability of resources, and requested the secretariat and the United Nations Environment Programme, working in close cooperation with the European Environment Agency, to prepare a limited indicator-based and thematic assessment, and to regularly inform the Bureau of progress made (ECE/CEP/2019/15, para. 37 (k) (i) and (ii)).

14. The Bureau at its virtual meeting on 4 June 2020 discussed the information provided on progress in preparation of a limited indicator-based and thematic pan-European environmental assessment, and:

¹ A light indicator-based and thematic assessment, which would be limited to the review of progress in establishing the Shared Environmental Information System and to addressing the two conference themes by using the conference background papers that are foreseen to be produced for the next ministerial conference.

- (a) Took note of the fact that the mandate to prepare an indicator-based and thematic pan-European environmental assessment could not be fulfilled because of a lack of resources;
- (b) Took note of the alternative proposal from the secretariat and the United Nations Environment Programme in the absence of dedicated resources;
- (c) Agreed to once more reopen the discussion on funding and asked its members to actively strive to raise the necessary amount (at least \$50,000).

III. Criteria for financial support for participation in meetings and events

15. At its twenty-fifth session, the Committee approved the revised criteria for providing financial support for participation in meetings and events and requested the Bureau, with support from the secretariat, to periodically verify the availability of data for 2018 and, if available, for all countries with economies in transition, to prepare revised criteria for financial support for approval by the Committee at its next session (ECE/CEP/2019/15, para. 50). The Bureau asked the secretariat to verify the availability of data for 2018 and to report to the Bureau on the matter at its next virtual meeting in September 2020.

IV. Other business

16. The Bureau at its virtual meeting on 4 June 2020 also took note of the information provided on:
- (a) The further steps of the expected approval of the Terms of reference of the Committee on Environmental Policy by the Economic and Social Council;
 - (b) The photography contest entitled “Humans locked down, nature unlocked: A global photo contest on flora and fauna in the time of COVID-19 in support of the restoration of ecosystems” launched by ECE, and asked members of the Bureau to consider acting as judges for that photography contest on a voluntary basis.
17. The Bureau agreed to have its next virtual meeting in September 2020.
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