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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

**COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY**  
Ad Hoc Preparatory Working Group of Senior Officials  
"Environment for Europe"

**REPORT OF THE FIRST SESSION**

At its first session, the Ad Hoc Preparatory Working Group of Senior Officials discussed the possible topics for the Fifth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" (Kiev Conference) but agreed that the agenda would remain open for the present (para. 20). It proposed a change of dates for the Kiev Conference in view of the preparations for Rio+10 and requested the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources of Ukraine to consult by letter with his counterparts in other countries and offer possible new dates for the Conference (para. 26). It elected its bureau, referred to as the Executive Committee (para. 28), and it considered its work plan for 2001 (para. 33).

1. The first session of the Ad Hoc Preparatory Working Group of Senior Officials "Environment for Europe" took place in Geneva on 29 September 2000.
2. The session was attended by delegations from: Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, and the United States of America.
3. It was also attended by representatives of the European Commission.
4. Representatives of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Health Organization/Regional Office for Europe (WHO/EURO), the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy, the Project Preparation Committee (PPC), ECO Forum, the International Council of Environmental Law, the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe, and the World Conservation Union (IUCN) also participated as observers.
5. The session was chaired by Mr. Yaroslav Movchan (Ukraine).

#### **I. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA**

6. The Working Group adopted the agenda for the first session as contained in document CEP/AC.11/2000/1.
7. In his opening statement, the Chair noted that, with the convening of this first meeting of the Working Group of Senior Officials, the preparations for the Fifth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe", to be held in Kiev, Ukraine, had officially begun. He asked the participants to be prepared to meet the challenges and opportunities that lay ahead, and he sought the good cooperation of all participants in reaching productive and positive results.

#### **II. REVIEW OF DECISIONS TAKEN AT THE FOURTH MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE "ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE" IN AARHUS, DENMARK, THAT RELATE TO THE ORGANIZATION OF THE FIFTH MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE**

8. Mr. Leo Bjornskov, from the delegation of Denmark, the host of the Fourth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe", introduced this item, with reference to documents CEP/AC.11/2000/4 and Add. 1. In his introduction, Mr. Bjornskov noted that many of the issues contained in these documents had been discussed during the seventh session of the Committee on Environmental Policy, which had just concluded, and that the Committee had taken initial decisions regarding the follow-up of the following items, among others: integrating environmental considerations into sectoral policies; environmental monitoring and the third assessment report to be prepared by the European Environment Agency; the proposal from the Government of the Netherlands concerning compliance with environmental conventions;

strategic environmental assessment; transport, environment and health; and local initiatives towards sustainable consumption.

9. The representative of the OECD Task Force for the Implementation of the Environmental Action Programme (EAP) for Central and Eastern Europe reviewed follow-up activities to decisions taken at the Aarhus Conference. He noted that the Task Force had adopted a work programme for 1998 to 2000 that was divided into two sub-programmes: one for central and eastern Europe and the other for the newly independent States (NIS). The results of this phase of the work would be presented at the next EAP Task Force meeting in Almaty, in October 2000, and the work programme for 2000-2002 adopted.

10. The strategic priorities for the central and east European sub-programme remained the same as defined in the original mandate. These were (a) the integration of environmental considerations into the process of economic reconstruction to ensure sustainable development; and (b) institutional capacity-building. Three main themes were proposed for organizing the activities of the NIS sub-programme. These were (a) strengthening environmental policies in NIS; (b) environmental finance; and (c) supporting reform in the urban water sector. There was also a stronger emphasis on the use of demonstration projects in order to achieve concrete results “on the ground.”

11. The EAP Task Force envisaged two possible inputs to the Kiev Conference. One was the presentation of more in-depth analysis and recommendations on key challenges; the second was a report on the implementation of the policy statement adopted in Aarhus on environmental management in enterprises.

12. Attention was also drawn to the Ministerial Consultation on Environmental Policy-making in Central and Eastern Europe that had taken place on 19 June 2000 in Szentendre, Hungary. At that meeting, the Ministers had considered that the Working Group of Senior Officials would begin its work in September 2000 and that it should, *inter alia*: (a) welcome and support the ongoing work on a possible legally binding instrument on health, transport and environment; (b) take into consideration the outcome of the meeting of NIS Economic and Environment Ministers to be organized in Kazakhstan on 16-17 October 2000; (c) welcome the ongoing work for the negotiation of a protocol on strategic environmental assessment and on guidelines for environmental compliance and enforcement; (d) take into account the outcome of the Governmental Conference “Biodiversity in Europe” organized in Latvia in March 2000; and (e) welcome the ongoing work concerning a protocol on environmental liability.

13. The Chair of the Council of the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy reported on progress in the implementation of the Strategy. He referred in particular to the second five-year Action Plan 2001-2005, based on decisions taken by the Aarhus Conference, and the conclusions of the Intergovernmental Conference “Biodiversity in Europe” held in Riga, Latvia, on 20-23 March 2000. The representative of the Council of Europe also called the attention of the Working Group to the Conference on Conservation and Monitoring of Biological and Landscape Diversity in Ukraine. She further informed the Working Group that a new European landscape convention would be opened for signature in Florence, Italy, in the near future.

14. Based on these activities, the Chair of the Council proposed that the Kiev Conference should include an item on the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy that would cover the following points: (a) improving the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity in Europe; (b) integrating biodiversity considerations in sectoral policies, including agriculture, tourism and transport; (c) increasing the financial resources for biodiversity conservation; and (d) strengthen the capacity of central and eastern Europe and the newly independent States in the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. Two specific products were foreseen: an updated Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy and an assessment of the state of biodiversity in Europe.

15. The delegation from Armenia noted that it had requested UNEP to support the preparation of a new convention for the sustainable development of the Caucasus similar to the convention for the Carpathian Mountains proposed by the Government of Ukraine in document CEP/AC.11/2000/4/Add. 1.

16. The representative of UNEP stated that 2002 was the United Nations Year of the Mountains, and that this would be a particularly appropriate time to develop conventions for the Carpathians and the Caucasus. He stated that UNEP would be ready to support these developments.

17. The representative of the Project Preparation Committee reported on its activities in central and eastern Europe in follow-up to the decisions taken at Aarhus. Among the main challenges still facing PPC were the following: (a) the need to develop mechanisms to enable international finance institutions to lend to small and medium-sized municipalities; (b) support to project development and financing within the scope of the Stability Pact; (c) strengthen the portfolio of projects on climate change; and (d) attract private-sector financing. It was the intention of PPC to report to the Kiev Conference with information on a substantial increase in projects.

18. The European ECO Forum reported on its activities, including its meeting in Kiev on 16 September 2000. At that meeting it had been proposed that the Fifth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" should focus on the following continuing issues: (a) the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice; (b) the Environmental Action Programme (EAP); (c) financial assistance; (d) the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy; (e) sustainable energy structures for Europe; and (f) the Protocols on Heavy Metals and on Persistent Organic Pollutants. In addition, ECO Forum proposed the following new key issues: (a) environmental policy integration; (b) the framework convention on transport, environment and health; (c) freshwater; (d) strategic Environmental assessment; (e) environmental liability; (f) phasing out nuclear energy; (g) a five-year freeze on GMOs; (h) the use of the precautionary principle in the regulation of chemicals; (i) a charter on environmental education; and (j) the guidance on public participation in environmental impact assessment in a transboundary context.

19. Several delegations proposed other topics that might be included on the agenda at the Fifth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe": forestry and agriculture; public-private partnerships and good practices for financing.

20. It was agreed that the agenda would remain open for the moment. All organizations currently working on issues that they would like to see brought to the Kiev Conference should continue to develop this work. Decisions on the agenda would be made later, in part based on the stage of preparation of these issues. Proposals were also made concerning the structure of the Kiev Conference itself. It was suggested that the Conference should last three days. It might have three segments: an "informative period," which would cover items to be brought to the attention of the Ministers; an NGO segment, which might give emphasis to inclusion of the business sector; and a segment to discuss and sign new legal instruments.

21. There was wide agreement that the topic "integration of environment into sectoral policies" could serve as an overarching theme for the Conference as a whole.

### **III. DATES OF THE CONFERENCE**

22. The Ad Hoc Preparatory Working Group of Senior Officials discussed at length the possibility of changing the dates of the Kiev Conference. Many delegations, including the delegations of France, speaking on behalf of the European Union, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Poland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and the United States, proposed that the Kiev Conference should be postponed until the second quarter of 2003. Because of the considerable importance placed by countries in the region on the "Environment for Europe" ministerial process, representatives wanted to ensure that sufficient high-level attention was given to the preparations for the Kiev Conference as well as to participation in the Conference itself.

23. Because of competing demands from the preparations for the ten-year review of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, most representatives noted that the possibilities for a successful Conference in Kiev would be enhanced if it were to take place several months after the conclusion of the Rio+10 Conference.

24. In addition, the platform for Rio+10 could provide an excellent opportunity for the countries of the region to promote the Kiev Conference.

25. Some other delegations, notably those of Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation, were concerned that postponing the Kiev Conference would jeopardize the momentum of the "Environment for Europe" process and create too long a period between the Fourth and Fifth Ministerial Conferences. In addition, they hoped that, by moving the Kiev Conference to a date prior to Rio+10, the Ministerial Conference could send a strong message from the region to Rio+10 and, in particular, underline the issues of concern to NIS and central and eastern Europe.

26. Taking into account the views expressed in favour of postponing the Conference, the Working Group decided that further consultation was needed. The original decision about the schedule for the Kiev Conference was made by Ministers at the Fourth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" in Aarhus, Denmark. In as much as decisions to change the dates should also be taken by Ministers, the Working Group requested the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources of Ukraine to write as soon as possible to his counterparts in the Governments of all other ECE member States, appraising them of the discussions on this topic at the Working Group of Senior Officials and offering a possible new date for their consideration.

Ministers could be asked to respond to the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources of Ukraine before the end of the year 2000.

#### **IV. ORGANIZATION OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE WORKING GROUP OF SENIOR OFFICIALS**

27. The terms of reference of the Ad Hoc Preparatory Working Group of Senior Officials call for the establishment of an Executive Committee which will serve as the Bureau of the Working Group. The Executive Committee should be composed of two senior officials from central and eastern Europe, two from newly independent States and four from western Europe.

28. The Working Group at its first meeting elected to its Executive Committee members from the following countries: from western Europe: Denmark, Germany (Mr. Bert-Axel Szelinski), Italy and Norway; from central and eastern Europe: Bulgaria (Ms. Vanya Grigorova) and Poland (Mr. Janusz Zürek); and from newly independent States: Georgia. The Chair of the Working Group, Mr. Yaroslav Movchan, would represent Ukraine.

29. It was also agreed that other member States that expressed interest in specific issues to be considered by the Executive Committee might be invited to participate. The Executive Committee would work in close cooperation with the Bureau of the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy.

30. According to the terms of reference of the Working Group, the Chairs of the ECE Committee on Environmental Policy, the Task Force for the Implementation of the Environmental Action Programme for Central and Eastern Europe, the Project Preparation Committee, and the Council for the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy were invited to participate as observers. The Working Group also decided to invite as observers the European Commission and ECO Forum.

#### **V. WORK PLAN FOR THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AND THE WORKING GROUP**

31. The Chair drew the attention of the Working Group to document CEP/AC.11/2000/5 on the proposed schedule of preparatory meetings for the Kiev Conference.

32. The Working Group decided that, at the beginning of the preparatory process, it would be useful to have more meetings of the Executive Committee and fewer of the Working Group as a whole. As preparations proceeded, the Working Group could meet more frequently.

33. It was proposed that the second meeting of the Executive Committee should take place in late January or early February 2001, in Geneva, preferably back to back with a meeting of the Bureau of the Committee on Environmental Policy. The third meeting could possibly be at the end of June, in Kiev. The Working Group scheduled its second meeting in connection with the meeting of the Committee on Environmental Policy, in Geneva, in September 2001. The first meeting of the Executive Committee was scheduled to take place immediately following the adjournment of the first meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group of Senior Officials, on 29 September 2000.