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COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY
(Ninth session, 4 - 6 November 2002)
(Item 4 of the provisional agenda)

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BUREAU
OF THE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY
(Geneva, 11 September 2002)**

Prepared by the secretariat in consultation with the Chairman

I. OPENING OF THE MEETING AND ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

1. The Bureau of the Committee on Environmental Policy met in Geneva on 11 September 2002.
2. The meeting was opened by its Chair, Mr. Hugo von Meijenfeldt (Netherlands), and attended by Mrs. Helena Čizkova (Czech Republic), Mr. Jon Kahn (Sweden), Ms. Sibylle Vermont (Switzerland) and Ms. Lynette Poulton (United States of America). The secretariat was represented by Mr. Kaj Bärlund (Director), Ms. Christina von Schweinichen (Secretary to the Committee), Mr. Bo Libert, Mr. Rainer Enderlein, Mr. Wiek Schrage, Mr. Jeremy Wates and Ms. Tea Aulavuo.
3. The Bureau added the following items to its agenda: (i) prioritization of the Committee's programme elements and activities; (ii) environmental education; (iii) water initiatives; and (iv) election of members for the European Environment and Health Committee (EEHC), changed the order of the items and adopted its agenda.

II. FUTURE CHALLENGES AND EMERGING DIRECTIONS OF ECE ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES AND ON FUTURE OF THE “ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE” PROCESS

4. The Bureau discussed the future directions of ECE in environment in the light of the outcome of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and on the basis of the papers on “Challenges and emerging directions of ECE environmental policies” (CEP/2002/2), prepared by a consultant, Mr. Branko Bosnjakovic,¹ and on “Pan- European environmental governance” (CEP/2002/9), prepared by the Chairman of the Bureau, Mr. Hugo von Meijenfeldt.

5. The Bureau exchanged views on the outcome of the Summit. Although some members were critical about the negotiated text, it was felt that many outcomes of the Summit were useful for the future work. Despite the abstract language used concerning the regional commissions, it was felt that the outcome of the Johannesburg Summit had a positive impact on the role of the regional commissions, especially regarding the enhancement and implementation of agreed regional sustainable development strategies, taking into account the relevant provisions of the Agenda 21. These were reflected in the provisions of the Plan of implementation agreed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (paras. 73-74 and 141 – 144).

6. The Bureau concluded that:

(a) In the light of the outcome of the World Summit, the Committee on Environmental Policy should most likely redirect and readapt its future strategic role in a way described in the “intermediate” option 3 set out in document CEP/2002/2. The core mandate of the Committee should be conserved but its lead role in the sustainable development process within ECE should be expanded and strengthened. The Committee, representing the environmental pillar, should widen its scope of work to give more emphasis to the other two pillars (social, economic) of sustainable development and continue to take measures and strengthen the implementation of the regional environmental conventions and protocols effectively;

(b) ECE should strengthen cooperation among the different sectors and with the “Environment for Europe” partners, for implementing the priority actions on sustainable development as reflected in the Ministerial Statement adopted at the Regional Ministerial Meeting for the World Summit (ECE/AC.22/2001/2, paras. 32 to 46 of the Ministerial Statement);

(c) Guidance is also needed at a higher level and ECE should play a crucial role in providing the link with different sectors and cooperating with the other regional commissions. The participation of the private sector and NGOs should be further encouraged and strengthened.

7. The Bureau was informed that the ECE Spring Seminar organized in conjunction with the Commission's session in March 2003 would deal with different aspects of sustainable development. The Commission would also decide on its follow-up to the World Summit.

¹ The issues discussed under this item of relevance to document CEP/2002/2 are reflected in an addendum (CEP/2002/2/Add.1).

8. To continue the discussions on the future of the environmental strategic directions, the Bureau agreed that:

(a) The consultant, Mr. Bosnjakovic, should write a summary on the outcome of its discussion at the present meeting, in an addendum to document CEP/2002/2 to be presented at the ninth session of the Committee under item 4 of the provisional agenda (ECE/CEP/85);

(b) At the end of the Committee's ninth session, following the debate on the above-mentioned item, the consultant would update document CEP/2002/2 in time for the (extraordinary) tenth session of the Committee, to be held on 18-19 February 2003;

(c) The consultant should thereafter finalize the paper in late spring 2003 on the basis of decisions taken by the Committee in February 2003, on the outcome of the Kiev Ministerial Conference and the future of the "Environment for Europe" process, together with the decision taken by the Commission on the role of ECE in relation to the follow-up to the World Summit. The Bureau might wish to approve the document at its meeting in June-July 2003 for presentation and final adoption at the Committee's eleventh session (20-22 October 2003).

9. The Bureau requested the secretariat to prepare a table containing the relevant items as reflected in the Plan of implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the Committee's programme elements, to see which items were not dealt with by the Committee and which might need more attention.

10. This table would be presented at the Committee's ninth session together with the other above-mentioned documents to facilitate the discussion on item 4.

III. OTHER ISSUES

A. Common European economic space

11. The Bureau was informed about the discussions within ECE, initiated by its Executive Secretary, on the role of ECE in interregional cooperation in the post-EU enlargement era, taking into account the ongoing bilateral negotiations between EU and the Russian Federation on the creation of a common European economic space. A broader definition of this economic space to cover also the other non-accession countries (South-East Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States) to further promote their economic integration had been suggested. The cooperation between the Russian Federation and EU was guided by a high-level group established at a summit in 2001 to develop a concept for a closer economic relationship between the Russian Federation and EU, based on the wider goal of bringing them closer together.

12. The Bureau concluded that:

(a) As the other non-accession countries did not seem to be directly involved in this exercise, the adequacy as well as the specific objectives of the suggested "extension" of the economic space as well as the role of ECE in it needed to be further examined and clarified;

(b) If ECE were to pursue activities, it needed to work in close cooperation with the EU and the Russian Federation; there should be no "competition";

(c) The ECE environmental activities were based on a pan-European concept: all member countries were included on an equal footing and the tools for improving the

environment were non-discriminatory. For instance:

- (i) The "Environment for Europe" ministerial process was designed to take the needs of the whole region and its subregions into account based on the priority concerns identified. In the preparations for the Kiev Conference, to be held in 2003, the environmental problems of the group of 12 newly independent States (G-12) were being given particular emphasis, however within the broader European context;
- (ii) The ECE environmental conventions formed a legal basis for environmental cooperation. All of these legal instruments had been drafted with the active participation of the European Commission and the Russian Federation. EU legislation had had an impact and ECE legal instruments had had an impact on EU legislation;
- (iii) The Transport, Environment and Health Pan-European Programme (THE PEP) would promote and coordinate the implementation of policies in the three sectors, with a view to achieving transport sustainable for the environment and health. Both the Russian Federation and the European Commission were actively involved in identifying priority areas and actions, however the decisions were taken at the pan-European level.

B. Prioritization of the Committee's programme elements and activities

13. With a view to preparing the budget request for the 2004 – 2005 biennium, the Bureau was asked to discuss and prioritize the Committee's programme elements and activities. The Bureau decided to consult all member States through the Committee's heads of delegation. Due to the short-term nature of some of the current activities, the secretariat was requested to indicate those programme elements which would terminate after the Kiev Ministerial Conference, and therefore not be included in the programme of work for the next budget biennium 2004-05. The Committee might, at its eleventh session in 2003, adopt a new strategic direction and decide on new programme elements, and at the same time agree on a new priority ranking.

C. Environmental education

14. Mr. Jon Kahn (Sweden) gave a short update on the initiative by Sweden and the Russian Federation to prepare an environmental education strategy for the region, which would be submitted to the Kiev Conference. A draft document was being prepared for the coming sessions of the Committee on Environmental Policy and of the Working Group of Senior Officials, both taking place in November 2002. The next meeting of the drafting group was scheduled for December 2002. An effort would be made to overcome the lack of participation of the ministries of education. The Bureau agreed that the Committee's representatives should be invited to promote coordination at national level and establish focal points.

D. Water initiatives

15. The secretariat informed the Bureau about the EU Water Initiative, including its component for the newly independent States (NIS), launched at the World Summit for Sustainable Development. The EU Water Initiative would be further developed and submitted at the third World Water Forum (March 2003, Japan) for consideration. Thereafter, the NIS component of the EU Water Initiative would be submitted to the Kiev Ministerial Conference for adoption as part of the G-12 environmental strategy. In its present form, the NIS component had three pillars: (a) urban water supply and sanitation, including financing of water infrastructure, mainly prepared under the auspices of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Environmental Action Programme (EAP) Task Force; (b) integrated water resources management, including transboundary river basin management issues, mainly prepared under the auspices of UNECE and the Global Water Partnership; and (c) coastal zones and marine environment, mainly prepared under the auspices of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

16. The Bureau also noted the ongoing work on the G-12 environmental strategy to be adopted at the Kiev Ministerial Conference. As concerns the water-related issues of the environmental strategy and the NIS part of the EU Water Initiative, the Bureau particularly appreciated that the above organizations had made arrangements to guarantee consistency in both undertakings, including their further development.

17. Ms. Vermont (Switzerland) reported on a Swiss side event during the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Switzerland, in partnership with the Bureau of the Ramsar Convention as well as with the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), was developing a policy on the sustainable management of water resources through a holistic ecosystem approach. A policy document was presented. It was the intention of Switzerland to revise that paper on the basis of comments received and present it at the third World Water Forum in Japan (16-23 March 2003).

E. Ongoing negotiations under the ECE conventions

18. The Bureau was informed of progress in the negotiations of the legally binding instruments on pollutant release and transfer registers (PRTR) under the Aarhus Convention and on civil liability under the Water and the Industrial Accidents Conventions. These instruments were expected to be ready in time for adoption and signature at the forthcoming Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" in Kiev in 2003.

19. The Chairman of the Working Group on the protocol on strategic environmental assessment (SEA), Mr. Terje Lind, reported on the progress made in the negotiations of the protocol. He informed the Bureau on the achievements, in particular the provisions on health-related matters and on the field of application. He also indicated that a number of issues were still under discussion, with different opinions on the final outcome.

20. In order to ensure that the SEA protocol would be adopted and signed by as many countries as possible, the Bureau encouraged the Committee's heads of delegation to coordinate, with their national experts taking part in the Working Group, their related input.

21. Furthermore, the Bureau agreed that both it and the Committee should provide all necessary support for the finalization of the protocol before the Kiev Conference, as decided by

the Regional Ministerial Meeting for the World Summit and reflected in the Ministerial Statement (ECE/AC.22/2001/2, para. 44 of the Ministerial Statement).

F. Election of members of the European Environment and Health Committee

22. The Bureau requested the secretariat to inform Committee's delegations about the results of the election, held by the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Committee for Europe, to select the new members of EEHC from the health sector, namely: Hungary, Turkey, United Kingdom and Uzbekistan. The Committee's delegations were requested to put forward their candidates for the elections to be at the ninth session. The following countries had served in EEHC from the environment side: Austria, Bulgaria, Italy and the Republic of Moldova.

IV. NEXT MEETING

23. The Bureau decided to hold its next meeting on Monday, 4 November 2002, starting at 9.30 a.m. before the ninth session of the Committee on Environmental Policy.