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Item 5 (g) of the provisional agenda

The Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference: draft agenda for the Conference

Various options for the format of group discussions

Note by the secretariat

Summary

At its twentieth session (Geneva, 28–31 October 2014), the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) mandated its Bureau, with support from the ECE secretariat and in cooperation with relevant stakeholders, to proceed with the preparation of the Eighth Environment for Europe (EfE) Ministerial Conference (Batumi, Georgia, 8–10 June 2016), including preparing for the twenty-first session of CEP documents that might be recommended by the Bureau (ECE/CEP/2014/2, paras. 84 (c) and 98 (gg) (xi) c). In accordance with that mandate, the Bureau recommended preparing an overview of various options for the format of group discussions at the Batumi Ministerial Conference.

The present document was prepared by the secretariat in consultation with the CEP Bureau. It provides an overview of various formats for group discussion that could be considered as potential formats for organizing relevant agenda items of the Eighth EfE Conference. The paper aims to facilitate the discussion by CEP on the agenda and organization of the Eighth EfE Ministerial Conference.



Introduction

1. The Environment for Europe (EfE) Reform Plan contains specific provisions regarding the format of the ministerial conferences, including with a view to enhancing interactive high-level discussion. In that regard, the Plan states that the discussions at the conferences should be arranged in an interactive manner and combine various types of sessions, e.g., plenary sessions, round tables and moderated panel discussions, with a limited number of main speakers from different stakeholders (e.g., United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) member States, EfE partners and major groups). When possible, interactive sessions, such as round tables, could be run in parallel (ECE/CEP/S/152 and Corr.1, annex I, para. 13 (c)).

2. Furthermore, the results of the survey on the promotion of the EfE process and the outcomes of its ministerial conferences (ECE/CEP/2013/21, annex II, section 6.1–6.1.3 and annex III, section 6.1–6.1.3) and the proposed framework for preparing the Eighth EfE Ministerial Conference (ECE/CEP/2014/9, paras. 44–46 and annex) included suggestions by participating member States and stakeholders for improving the interactive discussion formats at future ministerial conferences.

3. Several of those suggestions, as well as numerous others, are presented in the present document. The document provides a list of alternative types of interactive discussions, one or several of which may be particularly beneficial for the purposes of the Eighth EfE Conference.

4. The length of time available and the number of attendees allowed for each format presented in the current document may be adapted, depending on the space and technological availabilities at the Conference centre, as well as the budget of the host country. Several of these options may also be combined to occur in parallel.

5. It should be noted that plenary sessions will continue to be structured as they have been in the past, and that the options presented only concern the interactive discussion portion of the Conference.

I. Proposed formats

6. The 12 potential discussion formats presented in sections A-L below demonstrate only a portion of the available options for interactive discussions. Some of these formats have already been tested at Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP)-related meetings and are more familiar to the CEP members than others. Details regarding participants and technological requirements for each discussion format option presented below are included in an annex.

7. At the same time, member States and other EfE stakeholders are welcome to send to the secretariat additional options and ideas for the format of group discussion, in particular those which had proven to be effective for a high-level or ministerial interactive multi-stakeholder discussion.

A. Panel discussion

8. The first option is a panel discussion, similar in structure to the panel discussions that took place at the recent Regional Ministerial Consultation on Monitoring and Accountability for the post-2015 Development Agenda (Geneva, 15–16 September 2014). In this type of format, a moderator introduces the topic(s) or question(s) to be addressed during the discussion. A maximum of five panellists (three ministers, one non-

governmental organization (NGO) representative and one business representative) then take turns presenting their responses to the specified topic(s) or question(s), for a maximum of 10 minutes per person.

9. At the end of each presentation, the moderator briefly (i.e., one minute or less) summarizes the key points of each presentation before introducing the next panellist. At the conclusion of the remarks of all five panellists, the floor is opened for questions for the panellists, coming from the observing audience of other ministers and stakeholders, and an interactive discussion takes place, lasting approximately 45 minutes. Alternatively, the floor can be opened twice for discussion: i.e., for up to 20 minutes after the presentation of the first three panellists, and for up to 25 minutes after the last two presentations, including wrapping up the entire panel discussion.

B. Parallel round-table discussion

10. Secondly, a parallel round-table discussion format may be used, with a maximum of two round-table discussions occurring in parallel, with one of these sessions conducted with interpretation in the three official ECE languages (English, French and Russian) and the other in English only (given potential resource constraints in the host country, which would need to ensure additional teams of interpreters and adequate technical equipment). The round-table discussions could comprise up to 30 participants, including ministers and heads of delegation of ECE member States (up to 19 seats), international governmental organizations (IGOs) (up to 2 seats), NGOs (up to 4 seats), Regional Environmental Centres (RECs) (up to 2 seats) and private sector representatives (up to 4 seats).

11. Each of the round table's parallel sessions would open with introductory remarks by a moderator. Participants in the round table would then be invited to engage actively in the discussion, and to address the agreed questions for discussion. In their interventions, participants could address one or more questions for discussion and/or react to the interventions of others.

12. Speeches prepared in advance would be strongly discouraged during the round tables; instead, participants would be encouraged to exchange views on the theme under discussion. To allow each participant at the round table to intervene at least once during the discussion, the time limit for interventions would be up to three minutes. Following the discussion, the moderator would highlight key points to be brought to the attention of the Conference plenary.

13. In their responses to the EfE Survey, 20 countries and 2 other stakeholders "strongly agreed" with continuing with the round-table format, while five countries and three other stakeholders "somewhat agreed", and one stakeholder "somewhat disagreed".¹

C. Thematic commission

14. A "thematic commission" arrangement would involve setting out one or several themes (perhaps the two main topics of the Conference) and creating two "commissions" under each topic that would bring together groups of 15 to 20 diverse stakeholders (with most seats going to ministers or their direct representatives) to address a subtopic of the central theme (each commission could address a specific question related to the main topics of the conference, for example). To illustrate how this approach might look, the

¹ For further details, see ECE/CEP/2013/21, annexes II and III, available from www.unece.org/index.php?id=32257.

International Committee of the Red Cross set up a portion of their agenda for a recent conference in the following manner:

- (a) Theme 5.2. Strengthening local humanitarian action:
 - Commission A — Migration: ensuring access, dignity, respect for diversity and social inclusion;
 - Commission B — Furthering the auxiliary role: partnership for stronger National Societies and volunteering development;
- (b) Theme 5.3. Addressing barriers to health care:
 - Commission C — Health Care in Danger: Respecting and protecting health care in armed conflict and other situations of violence;
 - Commission D — Health inequities: reducing the burden on women and children.

15. Each commission would meet in different rooms and discuss their question or subtopic for approximately 45 minutes. After this time, all of the commissions would gather together in a central room, where a designated spokesperson from each commission would present their findings, solutions, additional questions and main points of discussion in 7 to 10 minutes. After all the spokespersons have presented, a general discussion could take place for approximately 30 minutes, including questions from observers who did not participate in the commissions.

D. Perspective sessions

16. An additional option would be to have several concurrent “perspective sessions” in which different groups of stakeholders take charge of the discussion (i.e., NGOs are in charge of one discussion, businesses another, ministers a third, etc.). In this format, the central presentation in each session would be that stakeholder group’s perspectives on a given topic, question, or set of questions. Their presentation would be followed by an open discussion among 20 to 30 participants from other stakeholder groups, with additional stakeholders able to attend as observers.

17. The final 20 to 30 minutes of the session would be reserved for questions from the observer audience for the stakeholder group. No prepared statements would be allowed, other than the presentation from stakeholder in charge of the session. This type of discussion could be set up to allow for several concurrent presentations (depending on the number of rooms available), or the two-hour time period could be divided between two stakeholder groups on one day, and two other stakeholder groups on another day.

E. Talk show

18. A “talk show” discussion panel could also be used to bring together stakeholders and country representatives in a casual conversation. Much like a typical television talk show, a “host” or moderator would interview and converse with “guests”, who would be ministers or representatives from the various stakeholder groups. Each “guest” would speak with the “host” for approximately 15 minutes in a casual, mostly unstructured dialogue revolving around a particular theme, topic, or question. After their conversation, the guest would leave the stage or front of the room and another guest would take their place.

19. The same topic or theme could be discussed, or a different topic could be introduced, depending on the wishes of the conference organizers. After four or five guests

have had their conversation with the host, all the guests would return to form a panel, and a general discussion could take place among the host, guests and audience of observers. This general discussion could last as long as an hour. Depending on the number of rooms available and the overall organization of the conference, several talk shows based on different themes could take place concurrently in the conference venue.

F. Thematic symposiums

20. Yet another option is a more typical “thematic symposium”, which would provide an opportunity to present limited and focused statements on one topic. This type of session would be directed by a moderator and would involve three presenters and one discussant. The symposium could be scheduled for two hours, including 20-minute presentations from each speaker, a 15-minute presentation by the discussant and 45 minutes for open discussion among the panel, moderator and audience of observers.

G. Revolving round table

21. A “revolving round table” discussion would involve five or six small groups of 10 to 12 people each (including a combination of ministers, NGO, IGO and business representatives), with each group spending approximately 15 minutes at a table with a moderator, who records the main points of the discussion. Each table focuses on a different, but interrelated, issue or question related to the topics of the conference.

22. As the groups rotate, the table moderators give a brief summary of the points raised so far, thus allowing the new group(s) to pick up where the previous group(s) left off. After enough rounds of discussions have occurred for each group to have participated at each table, the cumulative key points from each table are presented to the entire group by each table moderator, and a final group discussion of approximately 30 minutes follows.

H. Question Time

23. One suggestion that was received from feedback to the EfE survey conducted in 2013, and has been listed in the proposed framework for preparing the Eighth EfE Ministerial Conference, was to hold discussions in the format of the British Broadcasting Company’s television show, “Question Time”. In this format, the main panel consists of one moderator and four expert panellists of diverse backgrounds. Questions on two to three predetermined topics are prepared by audience members in advance of the panel and the moderator picks several questions from among them to be addressed during the one-hour session.

24. Panellists are not informed of the questions before the discussion begins and must answer each question without preparation. Each panellist is given two to three minutes to answer the question. Once all panellists have responded, the other panellists are given a chance to comment or respond for three to four minutes, and then audience members are given a chance to comment for up to five minutes. This process continues through several questions and topics until the conclusion of the one-hour session.

25. Depending on the time and space available, this option could be extended to a two-hour session, or a new set of panellists and/or a new moderator could replace the first group, beginning a second round of questions on the same topic or on a new topic. Multiple “Question Time” sessions could be held concurrently, if there is adequate space and technological support at the conference venue.

26. In response to the EfE Survey, 11 countries “strongly agreed” with the proposal for a “Question Time”-type of format, with an additional 7 countries and 6 other stakeholders that “somewhat agreed”.²

I. Fishbowl conversation

27. A “fishbowl conversation” involves setting up the chairs in the conference room in two concentric circles: one small central circle consisting of five chairs and a second larger outside circle where the rest of the participants sit as an audience (the number of seats in the audience can be as few as 15 or as many as 100, as needed). In a “closed” fishbowl format, five ministers and stakeholders are chosen from the discussion participants to begin the conversation by sitting in the seats in the central circle. A moderator presents a topic or question to be addressed by those in the central circle, while the outer circle observes. After 30 minutes, the discussion is closed, and the audience is allowed to express their reactions to the discussion for five to seven minutes. After this time, a new group of five ministers and stakeholders are chosen. The process continues until the total allotted time has run out or all relevant topics have been addressed.

28. This type of format can be adjusted to create an “open” fishbowl conversation, where one of the five chairs in the central circle is left open. Members of the audience in the outer circle can enter the conversation in the inner circle by seating themselves in the empty fifth chair. Once a new person joins the conversation by filling the empty seat, someone who was already participating in the conversation must voluntarily leave the discussion so that one seat in the inner circle always remains empty. The remainder of the organization of this version can occur as in the “closed” version.

29. Additionally, the fishbowl conversation format may be turned into a panellists’ fishbowl. In this case, a traditional panel discussion is held, but instead of a debriefing of the panel discussion with the audience, the members of the panel take the seats within the fishbowl, where they are able to speak with each other, in front of the audience, and express their responses to each other’s presentations.

30. Another variation is a heterogeneous fishbowl, where the five seats in the inner circle are occupied by one representative from each stakeholder group (ministers, NGOs, IGOs, business, and an educator or expert). The version is otherwise the same as the “closed” fishbowl, and could be useful as a means of bringing together many different viewpoints.

J. Problem-solving poster presentation

31. Another option is an informal “problem-solving poster presentation”-type of discussion. Four to six representatives from the various stakeholder groups would be asked to prepare a poster or display that details research, specific case studies, or other real-life issues that are related to a topic, theme, or set of questions.

32. The posters could be set up around a large conference room, and attendees would have 20 to 25 minutes to walk around the room, read the posters and discuss the content with each other. After this time, each of the representatives would have up to seven minutes to present their research, case study, etc.

² For further details, see ECE/CEP/2013/21, annexes II and III, available from www.unece.org/index.php?id=32257.

33. Observers would then be free to discuss, ask questions, and present possible solutions to the representative for 5 to 10 minutes immediately following their presentation, after which time the next representative would discuss their display. The remaining time would be designated for an informal group conversation with thoughts and questions applicable to any of the presentations or displays, with a moderator to guide the discussion.

34. The goal of this format would be to collectively provide the stakeholder representatives with potential solutions to the issues they raised in their presentations, as well as to agree as a group on general recommendations for avoiding related issues in the future, across stakeholder groups and member States.

K. World café

35. Another option is the “world café” method. In this scenario, participants in the plenary meeting split into three to four groups at the conclusion of the plenary session and each group participates in a thematic session. Each of the groups have approximately 90 minutes to separately address a set of three to four key questions or topics in an informal, interactive way. The group discussions focus on coming up with proposals for how to deal with issues related to the topics and finding solutions to the issues and questions at hand.

36. A summary of each group’s conclusions is reported back to the plenary by a moderator for the final 30 minutes of the two-hour session. A brief written summary of the conclusions of all of the groups is also submitted to the plenary for its review and use.

L. Serious game

37. A final option is the “serious game”, which was suggested by a member of the CEP Bureau and supported by several other members.

38. Serious games are simulations of real-world events or processes designed for the purpose of solving a problem and can be tailored to a wide variety of audiences. Serious games can be of any genre, use any game technology and be developed for any platform. The games are made to provide an engaging, self-reinforcing context in which to motivate, educate and train the players.

39. In the case of an EfE conference, the serious game method could be adapted to the context of two themes of the conference and the EfE stakeholders, i.e., ministers, NGOs, business and IGOs, by developing a scenario simulating a real-world event (e.g., over a limited period of time air pollution is considerably exceeding the air quality standards set for ambient concentrations of specific pollutants, leading to adverse health effects and increased death rates of the population of a fictional city) or process (e.g., greening the economy of a fictional country).

40. The development of an appropriate scenario for the Batumi EfE Ministerial Conference could be entrusted to the CEP Bureau, with support from the secretariat in consultation with relevant EfE partners, for subsequent consideration and testing by CEP at its special session in February 2016.

II. Additional comments and suggestions

41. Some of the specific EfE survey responses from member States regarding the interactive format for the Ministerial Conference included the following:

- (a) Slovenia suggested regional or subregional round tables or workshops in order to enable respective ministers to use their own language, or another language of the region that she or he can speak;
- (b) The Czech Republic was of the opinion that the ETE process would benefit from a more pronounced political and expert involvement;
- (c) The NGO BIOTICA suggested that NGOs be given a larger role in round table discussions;
- (d) Poland liked the idea of a “Question Time” format, with the caveat that due care should be given to organizational particulars with such a format.

Annex

Details regarding participants and technological demands for each discussion format option

<i>Format</i>	<i>Total participants and inactive observers</i>	<i>Number of active participants</i>	<i>Key participants</i>	<i>Moderator needed?</i>	<i>Rapporteur needed?</i>	<i>Technology demands</i>	<i>Languages</i>
Panel discussion	Limited only by the size of the room available	5, plus 150–200 active audience members	Ministers (3), NGOs (1), business (1)	Yes	Yes: the moderator will also be the rapporteur	Microphones, interpreters, interpretation headphones	English (ENG), French (FRE), Russian (RUS)
Parallel round-table discussion	Limited only by the size of the room available, minimum of 150 people	Up to 30	Ministers and heads of delegation (up to 19), IGOs (up to 2), NGOs (up to 4), RECs (up to 2), business (up to 3)	Yes, one for each round table	Yes: one for each round table	Microphones, interpreters, interpretation headphones	One session in ENG, FRE, RUS; the second session in ENG only
Thematic commission	A maximum of 300 people, divided between four rooms, or one or two larger rooms separated into smaller areas	15–20 for each of four groups, plus a maximum of 50 observers of each of the four commissions	Ministers (up to 15), NGOs, IGOs, Business (up to 5 total for all three categories)	No	Yes: each commission will choose a spokesperson/ rapporteur from among themselves	None, unless each commission wishes to have microphones for their discussions. (Interpreters and interpretation headphones for one commission, if desired)	ENG only, or one of the four commissions may have interpretation in ENG, FRE, RUS if desired

<i>Format</i>	<i>Total participants and inactive observers</i>	<i>Number of active participants</i>	<i>Key participants</i>	<i>Moderator needed?</i>	<i>Rapporteur needed?</i>	<i>Technology demands</i>	<i>Languages</i>
Perspective sessions	Limited by the size and number of the rooms available; minimum of 4 rooms holding 50–75 people each	8–10 group representatives, plus 30–40 discussion participants, for a maximum of 50 per group, up to 4 groups	8–10 members of one stakeholder group (NGOs, ministers, business, IGOs), up to 4 separate groups	No	Yes: one for each interest group session	Microphones (interpreters and interpretation headphones for one commission, if desired)	ENG only, or one of the groups may have interpretation in ENG, FRE, RUS if desired
Talk show	Limited only by the size of the room available	6 at the front table and as many as 80–100 audience participants	5 “guests” (3 ministers, 1 NGO, 1 IGO or business)	Yes	Yes: the moderator will also be the rapporteur	Microphones, interpreters and interpretation headphones (if desired)	ENG, FRE, RUS, if interpretation is desired
Thematic symposiums	Limited only by the size of the room available	4 at the front table and as many as 150 audience participants	3 presenters (1 minister, 1 NGO, 1 IGO or business), 1 discussant	Yes	Yes: the moderator will also be the rapporteur	Microphones, interpreters and interpretation headphones (if desired)	ENG, FRE, RUS, if interpretation is desired
Revolving round table	Limited only by the size of the room available; minimum of 100 people	10–12 people in 5–6 small groups, one moderator per table, for a total of up to 80 people	Up to 50 ministers, up to 10 NGO representatives, up to 8 business, up to 5 others	Yes: one moderator for each of the 5–6 tables	No: the moderators would also serve as the rapporteurs	Microphones, interpreters and interpretation headphones (if desired)	ENG, FRE, RUS, if interpretation is desired
Question Time	Limited only by the size of the room available; minimum of 100 people	5 at the front of the room, plus up to 100 active audience members	4 panellists (2 ministers, 1 NGO, 1 IGO or business representative)	Yes	Yes, or the moderator could serve as the rapporteur	Microphones, interpreters and interpretation headphones	ENG, FRE, RUS

<i>Format</i>	<i>Total participants and inactive observers</i>	<i>Number of active participants</i>	<i>Key participants</i>	<i>Moderator needed?</i>	<i>Rapporteur needed?</i>	<i>Technology demands</i>	<i>Languages</i>
Fishbowl conversation	Limited only by the size of the room available; minimum of 100 people	As few as 15 and as many as 100 active audience members, plus 6 people in the “fishbowl”	5 participants (a mix of ministers, NGOs, IGOs and business)	Yes	Yes, or the moderator could serve as the rapporteur	Microphones, interpreters and interpretation headphones	ENG, FRE, RUS
Problem-solving poster presentations	Limited only by the size of the room available; minimum of 100 people	80–100 active participants (mostly ministers)	1 representative from each of the stakeholder groups, up to 6 presenters	No	Yes	Computer, projector, screen (if any presenter has a digital presentation), microphone	ENG
World café	Limited only by the number and size of the rooms available; minimum of 200 people	200+ active participants, divided into 4–6 groups	Ministers and heads of delegation, IGOs, NGOs, RECs, business in each of 4–6 groups	Yes	Yes: each of the 4–6 groups would pick a rapporteur among them for their discussion	Microphones, interpreters and interpretation headphones (for concluding discussions)	ENG, FRE, RUS (although each group could be divided by language or region in order to avoid translation requirements)
Serious game	Limited only by the number and size of the rooms available as well as by the number of participating ministers; can include all ministers and several representatives of NGOs and other stakeholders depending on the game scenario	Can be adapted depending on the scenario developed (mostly ministers)	Ministers, NGOs, business in each of the groups formed	Yes	Yes, for each of the groups formed	Microphones, interpreters and interpretation headphones (for concluding discussions)	ENG, FRE, RUS (although each group could be divided by language or region in order to avoid translation requirements)