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CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Fifty-third plenary session
(Geneva, 13-15 June 2005)

**MATTERS ARISING FROM THE FEBRUARY 2005
SESSION OF THE ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE**

Note prepared by the ECE Secretariat

SUMMARY

The 2005 annual session of the Economic Commission for Europe was held in Geneva from 22 to 25 February 2005. This note provides an overview of the main outcomes of the session, highlighting the implications that are relevant to the Conference of European Statisticians and its programme of work.

Several issues of interest to the Conference were discussed at the session. The following were the main substantive agenda items:

- a) Sustainable development in the UNECE region;
- b) The UNECE's cooperation with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE);
- c) The UNECE Reform;
- d) Proposed programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007 and matters relating to the programme of work planning and evaluation processes;
- e) Achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration, as well as implementing the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits;
- f) Major policy issues of the UNECE and their impact on the UNECE programme of work;
- g) The work of the UNECE – achievements and constraints;
- h) Technical cooperation activities of the UNECE.

INTRODUCTION

1. The annual session of the ECE defines the overall directions of work of the ECE. It intervenes for arbitration among sub-programmes in the case of major additional activities or resource changes and addresses new issues or demands that cannot be handled by the existing Principal Subsidiary Bodies (PSBs) of the ECE, of which the Conference of European Statisticians is one.
2. Any possible follow-up to the matters arising from the February 2005 session of the Economic Commission for Europe will be reflected in operational terms with the UNECE Statistical Programme for 2006.

ISSUES DISCUSSED AT THE COMMISSION SESSION OF RELEVANCE TO THE CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Sustainable development in the UNECE region

3. The Commission examined major policy options for water, sanitation and human settlements in the UNECE region, taking into account the outcome of the Regional Implementation Meeting in January 2004, the conclusions of the twelfth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development in April 2004 and the challenges identified by the Parties to the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes and by the Committee on Human Settlements.
4. The Commission stressed that, despite the progress achieved, there was a need for action-oriented local and national measures as well as regional cooperation to speed up efforts to meet the internationally agreed development goals and Johannesburg Plan of Implementation commitments, particularly in countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia and some South-East European countries.

Issues relevant to the work of the Conference

5. One of the seminars at the 2005 plenary session of the CES is dedicated to the measurement of sustainable development, which may lead to some follow-up work.

UNECE cooperation with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

6. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the UNECE and OSCE was signed in December 2004. Preparatory work is underway for review of the OSCE commitments under the cluster of integration, trade and transport at the OSCE Economic Forum in May 2005. The UNECE also assists the OSCE concerning an early warning mechanism.
7. Some member states expressed concern that the implementation of the MOU may generate extra work within UNECE. However, it was emphasised that support to the OSCE should not be to the detriment of other UNECE activities, and that the additional workload be

mitigated by the measures identified by the Group of Experts on the Programme of Work of the Commission (E/ECE/1430/Add.1).

Issues relevant to the work of the Conference

8. The new relationship with the OSCE may have implications on the programme of work of the Statistical Division, in particular the provision of macroeconomic and other statistical data to the Economic Analysis Division.

The UNECE reform

Comprehensive report on the state of the UNECE

9. The team of external evaluators selected to undertake a comprehensive report on the state of the UNECE was introduced to the Commission. The team, consisting of Mr. Pekka Haavisto (former Minister for Environment and Development of Finland), Mr. Karl Paschke (former United Nations Under-Secretary General for internal oversight), Ms. Johanna Bernstein (international lawyer with expertise in international environment) and Mr. Tapio Wallenius (expert on public sector administration) informed the Commission of the scope of the evaluation and the methodology to be used. The comprehensive report will provide an analysis of the role, mandate and functions of the UNECE in the light of the changed European institutional landscape and will produce recommendations to determine any necessary changes. The methodology consists of an initial desk study phase, consultations with member states during the Annual Session, visits to capitals in selected UNECE member countries, and collection of views through a questionnaire to UNECE governments, international organizations and other stakeholders. The responses from the questionnaire, along with the results of other evaluation activities, will be used to develop concrete recommendations, which will be contained in the final report of the evaluation team due for submission in June 2005.

10. The Commission was informed that the comprehensive review was not a budget cutting exercise but a timely opportunity to refocus and ensure the best use of available resources and expertise of UNECE, taking into account the work of other organizations also active in the region, and the value added that the UNECE could provide. Member states requested the secretariat to make any necessary modifications to the 2006-2007 programme of work to take into account the outcome of the comprehensive review.

Issues recommended to be followed by the Conference

11. The evaluation team sent out at the beginning of March 2005 the questionnaires to countries and relevant international organizations to collect views on the work of the UNECE. The questionnaire addresses general questions regarding the role, functions, governance and management of the UNECE, as well as detailed questions related to the sectoral areas of UNECE work. It includes a specific part dealing with statistics.

Towards an E-strategy for the UNECE

12. During the discussion on this topic, the delegations acknowledged the usefulness of the information and communications technologies (ICT) as a means of increasing the efficiency of UNECE activities and enhancing the secretariat capacity to serve and communicate with member states, other partners and the general public. Additional efforts should be made to have the timely posting of documents on the UNECE website in the three working languages (English, French and Russian).

13. The Commission agreed that the UNECE should promote the use of ICT in the UNECE work programme with the aim of increasing its efficiency and efficacy on a demand-driven basis. The Commission encouraged PSBs to further strengthen their efforts to develop and use appropriate e-applications in a cost-efficient manner and agreed to evaluate progress that had been made at the sixty-first Annual Session.

Issues relevant to the work of the Conference

14. The UNECE Statistical Division uses Internet as the main information distribution channel. The Division's web page (<http://www.unece.org/stats/>) provides information about its activities, documents of the meetings, access to statistical databases, etc. The Teams of Specialists working under the auspices of the CES make efficient use of electronic means of communication, like e-mail and tele- and videoconferences.

Proposed programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007 and matters relating to the programme of work planning and evaluation processes

15. The Commission considered this item on the basis of documents "Programme of Work Planning and Evaluation Processes" and "Recommendations of the Group of Experts on the Programme of Work (GEPW) on the Programme Planning Processes". The Executive Secretary briefed the Commission on the state of the UNECE's programme budget submission for the 2006-2007 biennium and on actions taken to implement the recommendations of the GEPW on the programme budget narratives.

16. The Commission underlined the need to ensure that the outcome of the forthcoming UNECE comprehensive review be taken into account in the programme of work for 2006-2007.

17. The Commission adopted the recommendations of the GEPW concerning new programme planning processes as follows:

- the UNECE needs to work on the basis of priorities clearly defined by the Commission and its Principal Subsidiary Bodies (PSBs);
- member states request the Executive Secretary to provide clear and complete figures on the allocation of all resources to all UNECE activities;
- member states request the Executive Secretary to seek a more priority-driven approach from PSBs.

18. Concerning statistics, the member states support the budget narratives as proposed by the secretariat and are confident that the secretariat will be able to deliver the expected outputs with the given level of P- and G-staff resources. In this respect, the competent PSBs should clearly define the activities and outputs that are of highest priority.

Issues to be followed by the Conference

19. The Conference should continue its efforts to prioritise more clearly within the subprogramme on statistics of the UNECE work programme.

Achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration, as well as implementing the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits

20. In September 2005, the General Assembly will meet at the level of Heads of State for a review of the goals contained in the Millennium Declaration. As part of the preparatory process for this Summit, the theme of the high-level segment of the substantive session of ECOSOC in June 2005 will be: "Achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration, as well as implementing the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits". Like the other regional commissions, the UNECE is providing a regional contribution to this process.

21. The Commission considered the involvement of the UNECE in the follow-up to United Nations global conferences whose themes are directly related to its mandated areas of activity. Support was expressed for the activities of the UNECE that contribute to the achievement of these goals at the sub-regional and regional levels.

Issues to be followed by the Conference

22. The CES Bureau has raised concern on several occasions about the quality of data on MDG indicators in many countries and that it will not be possible to measure the achievement of the MDGs without statistical capacity building. Different opportunities should be used to bring this message to the attention of the policy people at national and international levels, through governments, ministries, politicians, national delegates to policy meetings, etc.

23. The UNECE Statistical Division will continue its activities in the area of gender statistics and indicators related to the achievement of the MDGs. The outcomes of the September 2005 meeting of the UN General Assembly may have implications on the programme of work of the UNECE Statistical Division.

Major policy issues of the UNECE and their impact on the UNECE programme of work

24. Under this item of the agenda, the Commission analysed the major policy issues and recent trends at the global and regional level. Challenges such as globalization, security and the heterogeneity in the transition process risk creating new dividing lines in the region. UNECE's response to these challenges includes a number of activities aimed at strengthening European integration and in particular assisting the less advantaged economies in transition. Support was

expressed for the work aimed at integrating the economies in transition into the European and global economy.

25. The Commission highlighted the need to address aspects of issues such as globalization, transition and environmental policies within the scope of UNECE's mandate. Furthermore, the Commission reconfirmed that the setting of priorities of the Commission rests with the member states and that the overall objective within the UNECE remains the promotion of stability and prosperity across the UNECE region.

Issues relevant to the work of the Conference

26. The work of the Conference is already largely in line with the recommendations made by the annual session of the Commission. Statistical activities are undertaken in the area of globalization, crime and assisting the less statistically developed economies in transition.

Technical cooperation activities of the UNECE

27. The representatives from CIS countries emphasized the need for UNECE technical cooperation activities to assist transition economies of the UNECE region, meeting their needs in the most effective way within the agreed areas of the programme of work.

28. The Commission reiterated the importance of the UNECE technical cooperation activities, which should be demand-driven and result-oriented. The Commission stressed the need to increase assistance to low-income countries in a targeted and systematic manner. The Commission welcomed the efforts of the UNECE secretariat, carried out in close partnership with UNESCAP, to strengthen its support to economic cooperation and development in Central Asia, in particular work aimed at strengthening the UN Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA).

29. The Commission also encouraged the development of joint technical cooperation projects in cooperation with other organizations. It recognized UNECE's potential in delivering technical assistance in those areas where it has expertise and comparative advantages, and encouraged OECD and other donor organizations to better utilize this potential in their development aid efforts. The Commission emphasized the importance of the work of the Regional Advisers in supporting technical cooperation activities in the fields of environment, transport, statistics, energy, trade, entrepreneurship and SMEs, and development policy.

30. The technical cooperation activities in statistics undertaken by the UNECE Statistical Division and the Regional Advisor in Statistics will be presented to the Conference in a separate document (CES/2005/1.Add.1).

Issues recommended to be followed by the Conference

31. In reviewing the technical cooperation activities in statistics, particular attention should be paid to the following conclusions of the Commission:

- technical cooperation should be focused on countries most in need, should be demand-driven and result-oriented, and it should be carried out in accordance with the UNECE core sub-programmes of work;

- there is a need to allocate more resources to activities for low income member states;
- the development of joint technical cooperation projects in cooperation with other organizations is encouraged.

The work of the UNECE: achievements, constraints and perspectives

32. The Chairpersons of all PSBs were invited to participate in this session and make presentations on the work of their respective subsidiary bodies. Irena Krizman, Director General of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia and Vice-Chair of the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians, represented the Conference.

33. The Commission considered this agenda item on the basis of the document prepared by the UNECE secretariat “The work of the UNECE: achievements, constraints and perspectives”. The Executive Secretary emphasized that the UNECE exists, and will continue to exist, because its work is valuable and contributes to the formulation and implementation of the UN values, policies and tasks in the region. It continues to be an instrument of economic integration that works to meet the needs of its members and helps to forge bridges and reduce gaps among them.

34. The Chairpersons of PSBs presented their major achievements and future programme of activities, underlying the difficulty of carrying out their tasks with the budgetary constraints facing the secretariat. The debate that followed showed the high value attached to the work of the PSBs.

35. The Commission agreed to encourage participation of non-UNECE countries that are contracting parties to legal instruments administered by the subsidiary bodies of the Inland Transport Committee (ITC). Whether to grant voting rights to such countries needs further discussion.

36. The Commission also thanked the Chairpersons of the UNECE’s Principal Subsidiary Bodies for their work and presentations. It urged the secretariat, PSBs and all member states to continue to improve both horizontal and vertical communications.

Issues relevant to the work of the Conference

37. The Conference may note the encouragement of participation in the work of UNECE by countries outside the UNECE region.

DRAFT DECISION BY THE CONFERENCE

38. The outcome of the session requires some follow-up by the Conference. Therefore, it is proposed that the Conference:

- take note of the matters arising from the February 2005 Session and specified in this paper under “Issues relevant to the work of the Conference” and “Issues recommended to be followed by the Conference”;
- agree that the Bureau of the Conference, the Conference itself and the secretariat of the Statistical Division should continue to work actively towards contributing positively to strengthening the UNECE as an Organization;

- ask the Bureau of the Conference to continue to evaluate the programme of work of the Conference and review regularly the activities in its programme of work and to report on the outcome to the annual plenary sessions;
- follow-up to the UNECE evaluation process and implement the recommendations for adjusting its work;
- continue its efforts to prioritise within the subprogramme on statistics of the UNECE work programme;
- take note of the concern about the quality of data on MDG indicators in many countries and the need for statistical capacity building to be able to measure the achievement of the MDGs;
- agree that the UNECE Statistical Division should continue to be involved in technical cooperation activities through the Regional Adviser Programme and that the Statistical Division should seek ways of increasing its technical assistance through the Conference's regular meeting programme and its current regular budget and extra-budgetary resources;
- agree that the UNECE Statistical Division should regularly draw the attention of the members of Conference to those statistical areas where the less developed statistical offices in the UNECE region need technical assistance but are currently under-funded;
- thank Eurostat, EFTA and the World Bank for facilitating the participation of representatives of Central and Eastern European countries and of CIS countries in the annual plenary sessions of the Conference of European Statisticians and in selected other high priority meetings in the Conference's work programme.

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