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Economic Commission for Europe

Sixty-fourth session

Geneva, 29–31 March 2011

Item 5 of the provisional agenda

Issues calling for decision by the Commission

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Note by the secretariat

I. Mandate

1. At its thirty-ninth meeting on 16 December 2010, the Executive Committee of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) endorsed the provisional agenda of the sixty-fourth session of ECE. The rules of procedure of the Commission require basic documents to be prepared in relation to the agenda items as appropriate. This document is being submitted to support the discussions under item 5 at the sixty-fourth session of ECE.

II. Frequency of the Commission Session

2. The Work Plan on ECE Reform adopted in December 2005, stated that the Commission would meet once every two years in Geneva as of 2007 and that at its 2009 session, it would review the question of frequency of its sessions. At its 2009 session, the Commission decided to postpone the review of the effects of the biennialization of the Commission sessions until its sixty-fourth session in 2011.

3. As a background for the Commission to decide on maintaining the frequency of its sessions at 2-year intervals, the following may be considered.

4. The ECE Work Plan states that, as the highest decision-making body of the organization, the Commission has two main functions: taking strategic decisions and providing a forum for policy dialogue at high level on the economic development for the region.

5. During its 2007 and 2009 sessions, the Commission has successfully fulfilled these functions by organizing its work in two segments:

(a) a high-level segment which reviews the economic developments in the region as a recurrent item and examines a specific theme. This was achieved in the two last sessions where, in addition to the recurrent theme, the specific theme dealt with sustainable

development in the ECE region in 2007, and climate change adaptation and mitigation in 2009. In both sessions, the high level segment had a duration of one and a half days and was composed of high-level panels including participation at the ministerial level. Substantive conclusions were drawn from discussions at these panels and provided guidance to the ECE work where appropriate.

(b) A general segment which addresses the different work areas of ECE and any specific issues including those calling for decision by the Commission. This was also achieved in the 2007 and 2009 sessions where the Commission decided to hold the Regional Implementation Meetings for Sustainable Development and the Beijing +15 meeting. In 2007, following the reform, it also adopted the revised Terms of Reference of the Sectoral Committees. Furthermore, at its sixty-fourth session in 2009, the Commission adopted two decisions: A (63) on the work of ECE which, inter alia, reiterated the importance of ECE and reaffirmed the strategic directions adopted by the ECE reform and B (63) on Officers of the Commission and the Executive Committee.

6. The overall guidance and decisions resulting from the two above-mentioned segments were followed up by the Executive Committee for implementation, in compliance with the relevant provision of the Work Plan on the ECE Reform.

Proposed Action:

7. In view of the satisfactory implementation of the ECE Reform and the above-mentioned accomplishments of the biennial sessions held so far, together with the fact that the Executive Committee is empowered to act, in conformity with its Terms of Reference, on behalf of the Commission in between the biennial sessions of the latter, the Commission may wish to confirm the frequency of its sessions at two-year intervals.

III. Regional Preparatory Meeting for the Conference on Sustainable Development

8. At its sixty-fourth session the United Nations General Assembly decided to organize, in 2012, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) at the highest possible level, including Heads of State and Government or other representatives, and accepted the offer of the Government of Brazil to host the Conference (A/RES/64/236).

9. The objectives of the Conference are to secure renewed political commitment for sustainable development, assessing the progress to date and the remaining gaps in the implementation of the outcomes of the major summits on sustainable development and addressing new and emerging challenges.

10. The focus of the Conference includes the following themes, to be discussed and refined during the preparatory process: *a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication* and *the institutional framework for sustainable development*. The Conference should result in a focused political document.

11. The first Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) for the Conference took place in New York from 17 to 19 May 2010. It elected the Bureau, produced a roadmap for the preparatory process and began discussion of the substantive issues. The roadmap for the further preparatory process is as follows:

- first intersessional meeting on 10–11 January 2011 in New York;
- second PrepCom 7–8 March 2011 in New York;

- second intersessional meeting 14–15 November 2011 in New York;
- third intersessional meeting still to be confirmed, tentatively planned for 5–7 March 2012 in New York;
- third PrepCom immediately prior to UNCSD in Brazil.

12. The General Assembly at its sixty-fourth session also decided that ‘Regional implementation meetings will become regional preparatory meetings for the Conference in 2011’ (A/RES/64/236, paragraph 25 d). This means that the preparatory meeting for the ECE region would follow the format of the ECE Regional Implementation Meetings for Sustainable Development, with interactive discussions and the active participation of relevant stakeholders, including organizations and bodies of the United Nations, international financial institutions and major groups involved in the area of sustainable development.

13. The Meeting will be prepared in close cooperation with other organizations and bodies working in the areas of green economy and sustainable development governance, in particular the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The UNCSD Secretariat and the vice-chairs of the UNCSD Bureau responsible for the regional preparations will also be closely involved.

14. The outcomes of ECE meetings in 2011 with relevance to the UNCSD themes will serve as additional inputs into the UNCSD preparatory meeting. This applies in particular to the Seventh Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe” from 21–23 September in Astana/Kazakhstan which will focus on greening the economy in the ECE region.

15. In order to ensure timely preparations, it is proposed that the Commission decide, at its sixty-fourth session, to organize the Regional Preparatory Meeting for the UNCSD. The suggested dates are 1–2 December 2011 (two full days), which would allow sufficient time for preparing the Meeting as well as allowing for its results to be fed into the preparatory process for the UNCSD.

16. To prepare for and convene the Regional Preparatory Meeting for the UNCSD, it is estimated that approximately US\$ 45,000 would be needed, as follows, for:

- consultancy fees to produce substantive papers for the meeting: US\$ 20,000;
- travel and daily subsistence allowance of one representative from each of the eligible¹ member States: US\$ 25,000.

17. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs has informed that they would be able to provide funds for the participation of only very few countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia and South-East Europe. No funds for consultancies will be available.

Proposed Action:

It is proposed that the Commission decide to organize the Regional Preparatory Meeting for the UNCSD on 1–2 December 2011 in Geneva. ECE member States are invited to explore the possibilities of making an extrabudgetary contribution to help defray the above-mentioned costs.

¹ According to the criteria for financial support approved by the Committee on Environmental Policy at its sixteenth session, 20-23 October 2009 (ECE/CEP/155, Annex I).