



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
24 January 2011

Original: English

Economic Commission for Europe

Sixty-fourth session

Geneva, 29–31 March 2011

Item 6 of the provisional agenda

Report on the activities of the Executive Committee

Report on the activities of the Executive Committee

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 6 at the sixty-fourth session of ECE.

II. Functions of the Executive Committee

2. The Executive Committee (EXCOM) was established by ECE member States as a result of the reform of 2005. According to the Work Plan on ECE Reform (E/ECE/1434/Rev.1), the Executive Committee acts on behalf of the Commission between the biennial sessions of the latter and can seize itself of all matters related to ECE activities in conformity with its Terms of Reference. The implementation of the overall guidance set by the Commission is entrusted to the Executive Committee.

3. The Executive Committee has the following main functions:

- (a) Preparing the sessions of the Commission;
- (b) Ensuring programmatic coherence and oversight: approving the programme of work of the Sectoral Committees and reviewing its implementation; approving groups under the Sectoral Committees; reviewing the strategic framework and programme narratives; avoiding duplication and overlap in ECE activities; and exchanging views with the Chairs of the Sectoral Committees;

* This document has been submitted after the official documentation deadline due to processing delays.

(c) Addressing any emerging issues calling for a decision in between the biennial sessions of the Commission;

(d) Overseeing the work of the secretariat.

4. Since its establishment in 2006, the Executive Committee has been chaired by a representative of Belgium. Over the years, the Vice-chairs have included representatives from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Serbia and Switzerland.

5. At its sixty-fourth session in 2009, ECE decided that the Chairperson and Vice-chairpersons of the Commission would also serve as the Chairperson and Vice-Chairpersons of the Executive Committee for the period of the biennium.

6. The Executive Committee has met on an ad hoc basis and the agenda of each meeting is set by the Chairperson in consultation with the Vice-chairpersons and the Executive Secretary.

7. The Chairs of the Sectoral Committees – or the Vice-Chairs – have been invited to the meetings of the Executive Committee to report, at least once a year, on the work of their respective Committees. At each meeting, the Executive Secretary briefs the EXCOM on the latest developments and major activities carried out by the secretariat.

III. Main achievements

8. The EXCOM has actively performed its role as the standing governing body of ECE, reviewing the work of all the Sectoral Committees, approving their programmes of work and the establishment and renewal of subsidiary bodies, and addressing issues requiring attention or decision in between the biennial sessions of the Commission.

9. Since the last Commission session, the EXCOM has taken a number of actions. These are enumerated below and include decisions/actions taken during formal segments as well as informal segments.

Programme-related:

(a) The EXCOM invited the Sectoral Committees to consider the outcome of the Commission session of 2009, with a view to examining how the ideas and suggestions contained in the annex of the report of the Commission session could be taken on board.

(b) It reviewed and approved the programme of work of each Sectoral Committee.

(c) It reviewed and gave comments on the strategic framework for the biennium 2012–2013 which was later adopted by the General Assembly.

(d) It reviewed the programme narratives as part of the proposed programme budget for 2012–2013.

(e) It approved a template that provides a new format to ensure a results-based presentation and a common planning cycle across sectors. This new format also provides a clearer linkage with the strategic framework and the cluster framework used for the biennial evaluations. The EXCOM also requested all Sectoral Committees to apply this format when preparing their programme of work in the future.

Structure-related:

(a) The EXCOM took up further discussions concerning the Committee on Trade throughout 2009. An Informal Group on the Committee on Trade met several times to prepare the decision of EXCOM on the future of the Committee on Trade. The Chairman also convened a small technical group in early September 2009 that considered all available options. Bilateral consultations were also held in order to find a proposal that would be acceptable to all parties. Finally EXCOM approved its recommendations on the Committee on Trade in February 2010 (ECE/EX/5).

(b) It approved the establishment and/or renewal of subsidiary groups of the different Sectoral Committees.

Specific issues/specific events related:

(a) The EXCOM provided guidance in the organization of the Regional meeting for Beijing+15 that took place in November 2009, supported by the EXCOM Informal Group on the Economics of Gender.

(b) It followed up on the progress made in the implementation of its recommendations concerning UN/CEFACT. In particular it made sure that the needs and priorities of countries with economies in transition were taken into account in the work of UN/CEFACT, that transparency in all undertakings was ensured and that the principle of ascertaining support by at least three countries for a new standard to be developed was effectively applied. The Chairman of UN/CEFACT attended several meetings of EXCOM in order to present his report on this matter.

(c) It revised the "Guidelines for the Establishment and Functioning of Teams of Specialists within UNECE" (ECE/EX/2/Rev.1), removing the clause that specified that the meetings of such groups did not require full interpretation and translation, in order to alleviate the problem of obtaining interpretation and translation from UNOG Conference Services for meetings of ECE subsidiary groups.

(d) It welcomed the elaboration of the draft "tolerance package" for the introduction of the digital tachograph under the European Agreement concerning the Work of Crews of Vehicles engaged in International Road Transport (AETR) and encouraged the Contracting Parties of the European Union (EU) to support it. At the same time, it invited non-EU Contracting Parties to the AETR to accelerate their preparations for the introduction of the digital tachograph.

(e) It underlined the importance of ensuring good governance and financial transparency in the TIR system.

(f) It guided the secretariat in the preparations of the 2011 session of the Commission, including the determination of the dates, the duration of the session, the selection of high-level segment themes and other items of the provisional agenda.

10. In addition, EXCOM addressed various matters and issues raised by the secretariat, such as: programme priorities and challenges of ECE in the context of the secretariat's preparation of a proposal on the programme budget 2012–2013; technical cooperation activities in ECE.

IV. Looking ahead

11. At the height of the ECE reform follow-up, the EXCOM held 11 meetings in 2006 and 9 in 2007. However, this number has stabilized to around 6 to 7 meetings per year and

this level of frequency seems to be sufficient for EXCOM to fulfill its tasks as the intersessional governing body of ECE.

12. Working through informal groups of EXCOM as and when necessary has proved to be helpful and should be continued as it provides the opportunity for EXCOM delegates to go more in-depth on specific subjects, to resolve differences of opinions and disagreements on certain issues, and to prepare in advance the discussions and important decisions to be taken at the plenary. These groups have a very informal character and can be convened at short notice, supported by short informal documents if needed. Once the relevant issues have been resolved, they no longer meet. This was the case of, for example, the Informal Group on Matters relating to the Committee on Trade and UN/CEFACT. The only informal group which is of a continuing nature is the Informal Group on the Economics of Gender whose activity intensifies around the preparations of major events (for example, during the preparatory phase of the ECE regional meeting on Beijing+15) and decreases during other periods.

13. One area that needs further reflection is how to better interact with the Chairpersons of ECE Sectoral Committees. In line with the ECE reform, EXCOM meets with the Chairpersons of the Sectoral Committees at least once a year under the relevant agenda item in a meeting usually held back-to-back with the annual session of each Committee. This is a useful channel for EXCOM to exercise its oversight and governance over the different sectors. However, there is little discussion at EXCOM sessions in response to the reports of the Sectoral Committee Chairpersons (which are submitted both in written form and through oral presentation) and the challenge remains to make this dialogue more interactive and mutually beneficial.

14. The ECE reform assigned the EXCOM the task of considering and approving the request by Sectoral Committees to set up new subsidiary bodies and/or renew existing ones. Experience has shown that there are many such requests from Sectoral Committees, each request having necessitated a formal decision on the basis of formal documents in three languages. In order to lighten the load of EXCOM and the ECE secretariat, as well as that of UNOG Conference Services, EXCOM may wish to consider whether it would be necessary to continue this practice, especially in the case of small task forces and highly focused groups of technical experts that are formed to accomplish very specific tasks within a period of less than one year.

V. Proposals

15. The Commission may wish to:

- (a) Express its views on the functioning of the Executive Committee so far;
- (b) Invite the Executive Committee to consider how to better interact with the Chairpersons of ECE Sectoral Committees with the aim of ensuring its role in terms of governance and oversight; and
- (c) Invite the Executive Committee to consider its modality of approving new task forces or expert groups that are small, highly technical and with specific and short-term tasks of less than one year.