



# Economic and Social Council

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## Economic Commission for Europe

### Sixty-seventh session

Geneva, 26 and 27 April 2017

Item 5 of the provisional agenda

### Report on activities of the Executive Committee

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### Note by the Chairperson of the Executive Committee

#### I. Background

1. The rules of procedure of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) 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-seventh session of UNECE.

#### II. Functions of the Executive Committee

2. The Executive Committee (EXCOM) was established by UNECE member States as a result of the Reform of 2005. Between the biennial sessions of the Commission, the Executive Committee acts on behalf of the Commission and is competent on all matters related to UNECE activities in conformity with its Terms of Reference (ECE/EX/3/Rev.1).

3. At its sixty-sixth session in 2015, the Commission elected Kazakhstan as its Chair, and Switzerland and Latvia as its Vice-Chairs.

4. EXCOM meets on a regular basis, and the agenda of each meeting is set by the Chairperson in consultation with the Vice-Chairpersons and the Executive Secretary.

5. EXCOM prepares the sessions of the Commission; ensures programmatic coherence and oversight; address emerging issues calling for a decision in between the biennial sessions of the Commission; and oversees the work of the secretariat.

6. The Chairs of the Sectoral Committees — or the Vice-Chairs — are invited to the meetings of EXCOM to report on the work of their respective Committees. At each meeting, the Executive Secretary briefs EXCOM on the latest developments and major activities carried out by the secretariat.

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### III. Main achievements

7. As stated in Decision A(65), the Outcome of the review of the 2005 reform of UNECE, the EXCOM should “see to it that all subsidiary bodies and the secretariat apply the Guidelines on Procedures and Practices”.<sup>1</sup>

8. The secretariat continued the practice of circulating for the information and verification of the permanent missions of member States prior to meetings of the UNECE subsidiary bodies: draft lists of participants; nominated candidates for the Bureaux of different UNECE bodies; draft decisions, conclusions and recommendations.

9. Since the last Commission session and until the time of submission of this report, EXCOM held thirteen meetings and over fifteen informal consultations. Two more formal meetings are expected to be held before the Commission session in April 2017.

10. In line with General Assembly resolutions 70/1 “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, 67/290 “Format and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum on sustainable development” and 70/299 “Follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the global level”, the 2016 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development was held as a special informal segment of EXCOM on 10 May 2016.

11. EXCOM approved the following matters relating to the Sectoral Committees and programmes of work:

- (a) the programme of work of the Environment subprogramme for 2016-2017; the renewal until December 2016 of the mandate of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment and its revised terms of reference; and the renewal until November 2017 of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Indicators, including the new name “Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators”, and its revised terms of reference;
- (b) the programme of work of the Transport subprogramme for 2016-2017; the establishment of the Group of Experts on Benchmarking Transport Infrastructure Construction Costs and its terms of reference; the renewal of the mandate until May 2017 of the Group of Experts on Euro-Asian Transport Links, until 2016 of the Group of Experts on Road Signs and Signals, until 2016 of the Group of Experts on Improving Safety at Level Crossings, and their respective terms of references; and the renewal until 2016 of the mandate of the Group of Experts towards Unified Railway Law and its revised terms of reference;
- (c) the programme of work of the Statistics subprogramme for 2016-2017 and the mandates of the Teams of Specialists under the Conference of European Statisticians and their respective terms of reference;
- (d) the programme of work of the Economic Cooperation and Integration subprogramme for 2016-2017 and the plan for its intersessional implementation; the renewal of the mandates and terms of reference of the Team of Specialists on Innovation and Competitiveness Policies and the Team of Specialists on Public-Private Partnerships for 2016-2017; EXCOM subsequently decided to establish the Working Party on Public-Private Partnerships and its terms of reference to replace the Team of Specialists on Public-Private Partnerships as of its first session in 2017;

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<sup>1</sup> See *Biennial Report of UNECE*, Sixty-fifth session, E/2013/37-E/ECE/1464, annex III, para. 27.

- (e) the programme of work of the Sustainable Energy subprogramme for 2016-2017; the renewal of the mandates until 31 December 2017 of the Group of Experts on Energy Efficiency, the Group of Experts on Cleaner Electricity Production from Fossil Fuels, the Group of Experts on Renewable Energy, the Group of Experts on Coal Mine Methane and their respective Work Plans for 2016-2017; the Work Plan of the Expert Group on Resource Classification for 2016-2017; and the Work Plan of the Group of Experts on Gas for 2014-2017;
  - (f) the programme of work of the Trade subprogramme for 2016-2017 and the plan for its intersessional implementation; the Geneva Understanding on Agricultural Standards, the renewal of the mandates and terms of reference of three Groups of Experts under the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies for the period 2016-2018; and the suspension of the requirement for the meetings of the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards and the Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships to be held back-to-back to facilitate effective meeting servicing;
  - (g) the programme of work of UN/CEFACT for 2015-2016;
  - (h) the programme of work of the Forestry and Timber subprogramme for 2016-2017 and the renewal of the mandates of the UNECE/Food and Agriculture Organization Teams of Specialists and their terms of reference;
  - (i) the programme of work of the Housing and Land Management component of the Housing, Land Management and Population subprogramme for 2016-2017; the renewal of the mandate of the Real Estate Market Advisory Group and its terms of reference until 2018; and the renewal of the mandate of the Working Party on Land Administration for 2016-2020 and its terms of reference;
  - (j) the programme of work of the Population component of the Housing, Land Management and Population subprogramme for 2016-2017.
12. Over the past intersessional period until the date of submission of this document, EXCOM was also seized on the following items:
- (a) approval of the UNECE evaluation work plans for 2016-2017 and 2018-2019;
  - (b) the UNECE Strategic Framework and the Proposed Programme Budget for the 2018-2019 biennium;
  - (c) the UNECE technical cooperation activities 2014 and 2015;
  - (d) approval of extrabudgetary projects;
  - (e) launch of the secretariat for the Secretary-General's Special Envoy on Road Safety and a draft proposal for establishing a United Nations Fund on Road Safety;
  - (f) a new UNECE resource mobilization strategy;
  - (g) institutional arrangements on geospatial information management;
  - (h) decision to forward the Conclusions of the 2016 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development as regional input to the High-level Political Forum; request to prepare the 2017 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development to be held on 25 April 2017;
  - (i) the general concept and modalities of a future Regional Forum on Sustainable Development;

- (j) preparations for the seventieth anniversary of the Inland Transport Committee;
- (k) preparations for the sixty-seventh Commission session in 2017.

13. In keeping with the guidelines on procedures and practices for UNECE bodies (E/2013/37-E/ECE/1464, appendix III), which specify that work should be “carried out in a way that is member driven, participatory, consensus-oriented, transparent, responsive, effective, efficient, results-oriented and accountable”, EXCOM was kept abreast of the secretariat’s efforts to strengthen its working methods and managerial practices focused on the four key management principles promoted by the Executive Secretary: accountability, transparency, participation and equality. These initiatives include:

- (a) the creation of the online platform Open UNECE that has strengthened transparency and accountability;
- (b) the UNECE accountability framework and note on UNECE Management and Accountability with clearly defined roles and responsibilities in management decision making;
- (c) the risk treatment plan to enhance the capability for risk assessment and mitigation.

14. In this regard EXCOM also welcomed, appreciated or supported:

- (a) the revamped visual branding and identity that have enhanced the organization’s visibility;
- (b) the new UNECE Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women: Supporting the SDGs implementation in the UNECE region (2016-2020);
- (c) the work of UNECE on the evaluation of its activities including reports on evaluations and the evaluation work plans;
- (d) the UNECE Climate Neutral Strategy;
- (e) the posting of EXCOM documentation on the UNECE website to increase transparency;
- (f) the implementation of various recommendations made by the Office of Internal Oversight Services, which has included, inter alia:
  - a revised Directive on Establishment of Agreements and Management of Extrabudgetary Resources with strengthened procedures for extrabudgetary funding, trust funds, projects, agreements and conflict of interest;
  - a mapping of inter-sectoral and inter-divisional initiatives and activities;
  - the adoption of a UNECE knowledge management policy and action plan.

#### **IV. Challenges and way ahead**

15. At the time of submission of this document, EXCOM is in the process of preparing the sixty-seventh session of the Commission, which will also mark its 70th anniversary. As this is the first session of the Commission following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the session will focus on “UNECE at 70: Economic cooperation and integration towards 2030”. It will provide an opportunity to reflect on what the region should look like in 2030 and highlight trends and challenges. This will serve to identify how UNECE activities can effectively support member States in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

16. Guided by EXCOM, delivering on the 2030 Agenda in areas within the mandate of UNECE will be the overarching task in the years ahead. In the past years, already before the final adoption of the 2030 Agenda in September 2015, the UNECE subsidiary bodies and Secretariat have made significant strides to align the programmes of work and outputs to the Sustainable Development Goals. As stipulated in the Strategic Framework 2018-2019, UNECE “will align every subprogramme to their specific Sustainable Development Goals and related targets, with due consideration to climate change mitigation and adaptation measures”.<sup>2</sup> A main challenge ahead is to further implement this strategic direction.

17. In this regard, UNECE has been enhancing cross-sectoral action among its divisions. This takes place in the form of Joint Programmes of Work, such as in the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme; and through joint intergovernmental groups including the Joint Task Force on Energy Efficiency Standards in Buildings, which brings together expertise from both the Housing and Land Management and the Sustainable Energy Committees. Several areas of work promote regular cross-sectoral interaction, such as the multilateral environmental agreements, the environmental performance reviews, the work on Public-Private Partnerships and the studies on regulatory and procedural barriers to trade. The secretariat has undertaken a mapping of inter-sectoral and inter-divisional activities and will, at the request of EXCOM, further explore opportunities to deepen such activities in support of the 2030 Agenda.

18. UNECE has also made considerable progress in cultivating partnerships within and outside of the United Nations system to improve the development and implementation of its conventions, standards, norms and guidelines and to implement the 2030 Agenda. These partnerships take multiple forms, including close collaboration with other United Nations entities working in the system through the Regional Coordination Mechanism and the Regional United Nations Development Group, which have now been merged into a Regional United Nations System meeting; the seventeen United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks that UNECE has contributed to; the signature of fourteen new Memoranda of Understanding which establish partnerships with governments and civil society in order to develop, promote and improve the use of UNECE products; and joint processes or programmes with other entities. This is an area that increasingly will need the guidance from and support of EXCOM.

19. In recent bienniums, several reductions in the budget of UNECE have led to cuts in both post and non-post resources and pose a challenge for the Commission. Although several initiatives to improve efficiency have been undertaken to help alleviate the impact of these reductions, UNECE is experiencing difficulties in implementing the breadth of its mandates and to meet the increased demands from member States, including for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, within these decreased resources.

20. The mobilization of extrabudgetary resources will therefore be an increasingly important element within the overall budget of UNECE, and this will require sustained efforts and support by EXCOM. In 2016, the secretariat developed a resource mobilization strategy that was adopted by EXCOM. It seeks to identify the most effective ways to mobilize extrabudgetary resources for mandated activities, in particular in support of the 2030 Agenda, and outlines the roles of different stakeholders for its implementation. An accompanying multi-year Action Plan identifies goals, actions, timing and responsibilities for resource mobilization in UNECE.

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<sup>2</sup> A/71/6 (Prog.17), para. 17.2.

21. The wealth of knowledge of UNECE benefits its member States and already, in many cases, reaches well beyond the region. In Decision A(64), the Work of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, member States have “welcomed the global outreach of UNECE’s instruments, norms standards, activities for the benefit of other countries and regions”.<sup>3</sup> Drawing on the mapping of the reach of UNECE products prepared by the secretariat, an important role for EXCOM will be to further explore opportunities to deepen the impact of these global public goods in the region and beyond to support the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

22. An important challenge for EXCOM is to ensure that, through effective interaction between member States and the secretariat, this governing body will focus on strategic and programmatic issues within its competence. At the same time, EXCOM needs to entrust the secretariat with the efficient administration and implementation of its programmes of work and to ensure that UNECE can continue to connect countries, drive progress and impact lives in the region and beyond.

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<sup>3</sup> See *Biennial Report of UNECE*, Sixty-fourth session, E/2011/37-E/ECE/1462, chap. IV.