

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
109th Meeting
Geneva, 17 February 2020

EXCOM/CONCLU/109

CHAIR'S CONCLUSIONS

Meeting of the Executive Committee
17 February 2020

FORMAL SEGMENT

Item 1 – Adoption of the agenda.

1. The provisional draft agenda for the 109th meeting was adopted.

Item 2 – Chair’s conclusions from the last meeting.

2. The conclusions from the 108th meeting of EXCOM (EXCOM/CONCLU/108) were adopted.

Item 3 - Matters relating to the Working Group on Ageing.

(a) Meeting with the Chair of the Working Group on Ageing

3. The Chair of the Working Group on Ageing (WGA), Mr. Edmundo Martinho, made a presentation to EXCOM on the achievements of WGA over the past year and its plans for the future.
4. The representative of Belarus supported the WGA and expressed appreciation for the work on the Road Map for Mainstreaming Ageing of Belarus, the conclusions of which had become the basis for a national project for decent senior years.
5. The representative of the United States supported the WGA including its emphasis on the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA). He disagreed with suggestions that had been raised in other UN fora that proposed new mechanisms or processes should be put in place for older persons, and believed that more should be done under existing structures to implement the MIPAA. He supported the themes chosen for the future work of the WGA.
6. The representative of the European Union and its member States appreciated and supported the WGA and its planned work programme.
7. The representative of the Russian Federation placed great importance on the implementation of the MIPAA and its Regional Implementation Strategy and noted the important role of the WGA in that context. He said the WGA helped establish and support contacts between national coordinators, facilitated interagency cooperation and boosted the awareness of the international community on ageing-related topics. He welcomed the linkage between the implementation of the MIPAA and the 2030 Agenda and the outputs of the WGA such as the Road Maps and guidelines for Mainstreaming Ageing .
8. The representative of Switzerland supported the WGA and its emphasis on the implementation of MIPAA at the national level.

9. The Chair said that the question of ageing was cross-cutting and worked on by many UN organizations. He asked Mr. Martinho about the leadership the WGA could show on this topic in the region and about the institutional links between the WGA, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA).

10. Mr. Martinho highlighted the importance of coordination and collaboration on ageing by all relevant international organizations working on the topic, as longevity and ageing societies had effects across many sectors. The WGA invited participation and input by various organizations at its meetings and aimed to be inclusive in terms of topics addressed.

11. The Secretary of the WGA added that the WGA hosted the interagency group of Geneva-based organizations working on population and ageing, which met one or two times a year to coordinate activities. The WGA likewise worked closely with other agencies on campaigns to combat ageing and preparations for the Decade of Healthy Ageing; further it received support from UNFPA for certain projects such as the Road Map of Belarus.

12. The Chair concluded that EXCOM thanks the Chair of the Working Group on Ageing for the comprehensive report. EXCOM appreciates being informed about the activities and achievements of the Working Group and being kept aware of future directions of its work.

Item 4 - Matters relating to the Committee on Environmental Policy.

(a) Meeting with the Chair of the Committee on Environmental Policy:

13. The Chair of the Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP), Ms. Elisabete Quintas da Silva, made a presentation to EXCOM on the achievements of CEP over the past year and its plans for the future.

14. The representative of the European Union and its member States appreciated the update on the planned work programme and the preparations for the 9th Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference. Taking into account the continuous requests for budgetary cuts, she inquired how the additional resources mentioned in paragraphs 13 and 20 of informal document 2020/2 would be secured. She also requested further details on how the Protocol on Water and Health would deepen synergies with the global climate change programme of the Water Convention.

15. The representative of the United States recognized the importance of the work of UNECE on the environment, particularly under the Air and Aarhus Conventions and on improving water and sanitation. He did not support the call for additional resources for the globalization of the Water Convention and expressed concern about setting a precedent by expanding a regional convention to the global level, especially on an issue as localized as water.

16. The representative of the Russian Federation supported the CEP and attached great importance to the preparations for the 9th Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference. He welcomed the hosting of the Conference by Cyprus, noted the constructive approach of the participants of the recent CEP session towards choosing the themes of the Conference, and counted on similarly productive cooperation in the future. He was in favour of strengthening UNECE's environmental work, including in the context of further developing the multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs). He supported the technical assistance offered to countries

of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia towards accession to and implementation of the Air and Industrial Accidents Conventions.

17. The representative of Switzerland supported the CEP and the preparations for the 9th Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference.

18. The representative of Cyprus said that the country was honoured to host the Ministerial Conference and would do its utmost to make the event a success.

19. Ms. Da Silva highlighted that the MEAs had their own governing bodies. The CEP was regularly briefed about the MEAs and provided recommendations. She recalled that a few of the MEAs had been open to all UN Member States for the start, with others gaining that status following protracted negotiations as to whether they had been sufficiently refined, and noted the wide interest from outside the region in accession to these instruments. She thought it important to be able to offer existing solutions to other regions who needed them. Of course, any significant increase in the number of Contracting Parties carried implicit additional resource requirements.

20. The Executive Secretary recalled that the request for additional resources for the Water Convention had not been met. Regarding the similar request for the Protocol on Water and Health, she recalled that the Protocol had a new mandate following its November 2019 Meeting of the Parties (MoP) to expand the scope of programme areas 1 and 5 and thus required additional regular budget resources. Based on the request from the MoP, the secretariat would hold informal consultations in the spring where the Chair of the Protocol would present the outcome of the MoP and discuss the way forward.

21. Regarding the links with climate change, the Director of the Environment Division noted that the Water Convention worked on adaptation and mitigation measures in river basins and the Air Convention worked on black carbon. Due to the close links between these instruments and SDG implementation and their high value added, there was wide demand for them both within and outside the region. He also recalled that 16 EU countries were Parties to the Protocol and had asked for the additional resources.

22. Referring to the pending endorsement of UNECE decisions by ECOSOC, the Chair noted that delegations in both New York and Geneva should engage on this matter. In recent informal consultations at UN Headquarters, a number of non-UNECE delegations had expressed doubts about making UNECE outputs available beyond the region. There seemed to be misunderstandings about these arrangements. He encouraged UNECE member States to discuss with these delegations and highlight the importance of these outputs and the benefits that they yielded already for non-UNECE-member States. He concluded that EXCOM thanks the Chair of the Committee on Environmental Policy for the comprehensive report. EXCOM appreciates being informed about the activities and achievements of the Committee and being kept aware of future directions of its work.

INFORMAL SEGMENT

Item 5 – Annual report on evaluation 2019.

23. The Executive Secretary presented the 2019 Annual Evaluation Report to EXCOM for information, noting that the secretariat would submit the 2022 Evaluation Plan in the context of the submission of the 2022 proposed programme budget following the transition to annual programme budgets.

24. The representative of the United States appreciated the report and said it was critical for assessing impact, transparency and accountability across subprogrammes. He looked forward to reviewing the 2019 report by the Office of Internal Oversight.

25. The representative of the Russian Federation said the regular presentation of this report to EXCOM contributes to enhanced efficacy and transparency of the work of UNECE. He welcomed the annual meeting organized by the Programme Management Unit between all UNECE divisions to exchange opinions and experience on the basis of evaluations. This boosted general awareness on the results of evaluations and allowed for better implementation of common evaluation recommendations. He noted the section where recommendations were divided into 6 main areas of activity and said this comprehensive analysis provided a good understanding of areas requiring deeper focus. He fully supported the recommendation on improving the planning of timelines for project implementation.

26. The representative of the European Union and its member States recalled that the implementation of the 17 recommendations from the evaluation of gender mainstreaming in UNECE would be detailed in the 2020 Annual Report on Evaluation. She inquired if the secretariat was still planning to hold additional discussions on this topic in June 2020. In light of ongoing discussions on cooperation with third countries, she referred to the implementation of the recommendations to further promote the results of UNECE projects outside the region. In this regard, she expressed the preference to present UNECE work as regional, with possible application outside the UNECE region.

27. The representative of Switzerland appreciated the evaluations conducted in 2019 and found they provided important lessons. He expressed satisfaction at the closure of all recommendations during the year, and thanked PMU for organizing the annual meeting mentioned by the representative of the Russian Federation.

28. In response to the EU, the Secretary confirmed that additional discussions on gender mainstreaming would be scheduled before June 2020, as agreed during the 108th meeting of EXCOM. Regarding cooperation with third countries, she recalled that this was the topic of ongoing informal consultations held under the aegis of the Chair.

29. The Chair concluded that EXCOM takes note of the annual report on evaluations for 2019.

Item 6 - 2020 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development

30. The Executive Secretary updated EXCOM on the preparations for the 2020 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development to be held in Geneva on 19 – 20 March 2020.

31. The representative of the European Union appreciated the informal consultations feeding into the preparation process. She asked when the relevant extrabudgetary project contained in informal document 2019/52 would be updated and presented to EXCOM.

32. The representative of Switzerland said his government was financing part of the event and that the final financing agreement would be submitted to the secretariat later that the week.

33. The representative of the Russian Federation inquired if there would be a traditional seminar during the event for countries preparing Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs).

34. In response to the EU, the Executive Secretary said the extrabudgetary project would be updated following receipt of the financing agreement from Switzerland.

35. The Director of the Sustainable Development and Gender Unit confirmed that there would be a global VNR workshop as well as a regional one and promised to forward relevant information from the Department of Economic and Social Affairs as it arrived.

36. The Chair concluded that EXCOM thanks the secretariat for the update on the preparations for the 2020 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development. EXCOM encourages delegations to facilitate high level attendance from capitals.

Item 7 – Preparations for the sixty-ninth session of the Economic Commission for Europe.

37. The Chair recalled that three rounds of productive and efficient informal consultations had taken place on 14 November 2019, 29 November 2019 and 23 January 2020 on preparations for the 2021 Commission session. He thanked delegations for their flexible approach and noted that the consultations had deliberated on the following topics: i) Improving UNECE working methods (including the designation of a cross-cutting theme of the high-level segment of the 2021 Commission session; ii) streamlining meetings of EXCOM; iii) opportunities for more operational flexibility and greater efficiency in the approval and reporting of extrabudgetary projects); and iv) interaction with third countries. On the format of EXCOM meetings, member States had expressed satisfaction with the status quo. Delegations, especially donor nations, had agreed to discuss the approval of and reporting on extrabudgetary projects among themselves before bringing the matter back to the plenary. On engagement with third countries, member States had expressed appreciation for the thorough and informative paper prepared by the secretariat, and had decided not to develop a conceptual framework or position about such engagement at this time. Rather, delegations had agreed to actively engage in practical outreach to non-UNECE member States to raise awareness and visibility of UNECE products, including at ECOSOC and other key meetings on Regional Commission topics in New York. Background materials prepared by the secretariat would be welcome in this regard.

38. Regarding the choice of a theme for the high-level segment of the 2021 Commission session, delegations had agreed on the topic “Promoting circular economy and sustainable use of natural resources in the UNECE region”. The Chair presented the draft decision on the theme and modalities of future planning for the session as contained in informal document 2020/4. If the decision were adopted, he would invite sectoral committees to submit ideas on how they could contribute to this theme at the Commission session. The decision also specified that a lessons learned exercise would be conducted after the session on the practice of early designation of a cross-cutting theme, to inform the preparation of future Commission sessions.

39. The representative of the European Union and its member States agreed to proceed on the basis of the draft decision. She welcomed the opportunity to study the post-session lessons

learned survey on how this approach could benefit UNECE overall and said the EU would welcome the opportunity for member States to discuss the modalities of the survey with the secretariat at a later stage.

40. The representative of the Russian Federation believed early adoption of the theme would help better prepare the session. He noted the leading role of Belarus in organizing the informal consultations.
41. The representative of the United States supported the draft decision.
42. The representative of Switzerland supported the draft decision.
43. The Chair concluded that EXCOM decides to:
 - i. designate “Promoting circular economy and sustainable use of natural resources in the UNECE region” as cross-cutting theme for the high-level segment of the 69th Commission session.
 - ii. invite relevant subsidiary bodies of UNECE and the secretariat to consider how they may contribute, as appropriate, to the cross-cutting theme of the 69th Commission session within their respective mandates, ongoing work and existing resources, and while making full use of the existing nexuses.
 - iii. request the secretariat to prepare a background document on the cross-cutting theme, detailing a number of relevant UNECE activities and their impact, for discussion at the 69th Commission session.
 - iv. request the secretariat to conduct a post-session lessons learned survey to review the implications of the practice of designating a cross-cutting theme early in the process, and to present to EXCOM a proposal for the preparation of future Commission sessions taking the survey findings into account.

Item 8 - Repositioning of the United Nations development system (Information update):

44. The Executive Secretary informed member States about a recent briefing held by the Deputy-Secretary-General for member States in New York on the reform of the UN Development System (UNDS). She highlighted that consultations with member States on the regional review would take place in New York from late February to end of March, led by the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Reforms. UNECE was coordinating with other Regional Commissions to prepare a joint position and questions on outstanding issues.

45. The representative of the United States praised efforts to streamline the regional level through the Regional Collaborative Platform (RCP). He remained concerned about the expanded role UNECE would play under this system, particularly related to the oversight, performance management and appraisal of the UN Country Teams and Resident Coordinators (RCs). An RC system heavily influenced by any single body’s or country’s development priorities could put the neutrality and reputation of the UN at risk and erode donor confidence. For the UNDS to function well, individual agencies should be well managed and have the flexibility to respond to needs on the ground and deliver results. He noted that the input of member States should be taken into account as the RCP develops to guarantee the flexibility of the RC system.

46. The representative of the European Union and its member States expressed satisfaction at the progress made so far in the reform process. She welcomed a regional reform to ensure that the regional assets of the UN better support the 2030 Agenda and are more results-oriented and efficient. She looked forward to the options to be proposed by the Secretary-General for implementation of the reform recommendations on a region-by-region basis. She appreciated that the Deputy-Secretary-General would chair the RCPs to ensure proper governance and coherence with the rest of the UNDS. It was important to have clear reporting lines and accountability at all levels and to ensure coherent implementation of future reform steps both in New York and elsewhere. She looked forward to further information on reform implementation, including related challenges.

47. The representative of Switzerland expressed satisfaction at the progress made so far in the reform process. He viewed the establishment of an independent RC system with empowered RCs positively. Questions remained on the regional dimension of the reform and a strong coordination mandate for the Development Coordination Office needed to be established. The governance of the RC system was a priority for Switzerland. Adequate decision making mechanisms and clear reporting lines were key to ensuring the regional global and country level lived up to spirit of a reinvigorated RC system. He reiterated the following questions put forward by the Swiss delegation at the briefing of the Deputy-Secretary-General:

- i. Switzerland wishes to better understand the links between the coordination of the RC system and the RCPs. The UN Development Coordination Office (DCO) provides the secretariat to the RCP but should have a strong coordination mandate at all levels to manage all aspects of the RC system. A clear answer on the governance arrangements for the RC system was not included in the documents provided at the briefing of the Deputy-Secretary-General. Switzerland saw the need for Issue-based Coalitions (IBCs) but thought they should be clearly separated from the coordination of the RC system.
- ii. Regarding the recommendations on regional knowledge hubs and data and statistics, Switzerland wished to better understand how expertise, data and knowledge present in the UN regional assets would be made available in an accessible, transparent and collaborative manner, and how this would be funded. Switzerland wished for a better overview of existing capacities.
- iii. Would the review be used as an opportunity to improve overall efficiency and effectiveness, including of the Regional Commissions? It was important for work at the latter to fit into a more robust, system-wide approach to deliver on mandates and report on results.

48. The Executive Secretary noted that the UNECE was supportive of the reform process. In response to the United States, she said that DCO and not UNECE was in charge of assessment and evaluation of RCs. UNECE cooperated with RCs and would contribute its views to DCO's assessment of RCs. Regarding the establishment of regional knowledge hubs, she said their establishment would require resources. In response to Switzerland, she remarked that the governance of the RCs should not be confused with the RCP, which coordinated not only the RCs but across the regional UN system, including the Regional Commission. Questions remained on this governance. IBCs had their origin in the UNECE region and were a good example of a coordinated and coherent approach to delivering results for member States. Two more IBCs would be established.

49. The Director of the Sustainable Development and Gender Unit noted that, back to back with the 2020 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, there would be a 2 day meeting of the RCs organized by DCO in Istanbul. The RCs would also meet with the Deputy-Secretary-General and were encouraged to engage with the Regional Forum. UNECE had a good tradition of working with UNDP and was also establishing productive cooperation with DCO.

50. The Director of the Statistics Division recalled that an online platform for Statistics for SDGs had been launched in December 2019. A set of SDG indicators, a dashboard and a background report would be presented at the Regional Forum. She thanked Switzerland for supporting the visual design of this work. 24 agencies in the region were active in data and statistics. Terms of Reference for a new regional UN coordination group on data and statistics for Europe and Central Asia had been agreed in January 2020. This body would include representatives from all 24 agencies and would be co-chaired by the UNECE regional advisor on statistics and UN Environment. Its objective was to promote coherent and integrated system-wide action amongst regional actors in the UN system with regard to collection, analysis and dissemination of accurate, reliable, comparable and disaggregated data on the SDGs. The group would have virtual meetings every quarter and submit an annual report to the Conference of European Statisticians. She emphasized that all of this had been achieved by building on already available resources in an efficient way.

51. The Chair concluded that EXCOM thanks the secretariat for the briefing on the reform of the UN Development System and looks forward to future updates on the issue.

Item 9 - Strategic Heritage Plan.

52. The Secretary of the Commission informed member States that renovations for the Palais would start in May 2020 and would limit the availability of meeting rooms and interpretation by around 40 per cent for the next three years. A temporary structure with three meeting rooms with a capacity of 200 participants each was being built and would be completed in April 2020. After the start of the renovations, priority would be given to meetings of the official calendar approved by the General Assembly. UNECE would have an allocation of up to 3 meeting rooms and related interpretation per day. The possibility to have extra rooms without interpretation could only be confirmed on an ad hoc basis close to the meeting date. Side events could thus be accommodated mostly during breaks of the official meetings in the main meeting rooms. UNECE would do its best to uphold usual standards and services but asked for the understanding of member States in light of the constraints imposed by the renovations.

53. The representative of the European Union and its member States hoped creative solutions to the room shortage could be explored and did not favour the relocation of meetings to other countries, as this could bear additional costs for both the secretariat and participants.

54. The Chair concluded that EXCOM thanks the secretariat for the information provided on the impact of the Strategic Heritage Plan on meeting planning and servicing arrangements and looks forward to further updates, as appropriate.

Item 10 - Important new updates: briefing by the Executive Secretary

55. The Executive Secretary introduced the new Director of the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division, Ms. Elisabeth Tuerk.

56. The Secretary of the Commission updated EXCOM on the pending endorsement by ECOSOC of decisions arising from the 68th Commission session. She noted that the recent informal discussions had demonstrated that there was need to create a better understanding among the ECOSOC membership of UNECE's mandates and their historical origins. She hoped that UNECE delegations could engage with ECOSOC in this context as well.

57. The Secretary of the Commission informed EXCOM about the following recent meetings and events:

- i. 22-24 January, Davos: World Economic Forum

58. The Secretary of the Commission informed EXCOM about the following upcoming events:

- i. 19-20 February, Stockholm: 3rd Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety
- ii. 25-28 February, Geneva: 82nd session of the Inland Transport Committee
- iii. 9 March, New York: 64th session of the Commission on the Status of Women
- iv. 19-20 March, Geneva: Regional Forum for Sustainable Development
- v. 23 March, Geneva: 14th session of the Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships

Item 11 – Extrabudgetary projects (for approval)

59. Regarding the project contained in informal document 2020/5, the representative of the Russian Federation did not oppose the project but inquired if the Russian Federation would be covered under ECCA30 initiative mentioned therein.

60. The representative of the United States did not oppose the project but inquired how UNECE planned to engage with the partners listed in the project document, including the Global Partnership on Forest and Landscape Restoration (GPFLR). He hoped the engagement with the latter would be through the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF).

61. The representative of Tajikistan confirmed interest in the project.

62. The Director of the Forests, Land and Housing Division confirmed that the Russian Federation was geographically included in the ECCA30 initiative but was free to decide if it would join and issue a pledge. In response to the United States, she said the GPFLR had been listed as a partner as it was a member of the ECCA30 initiative but that UNFF was indeed the primary partner for UNECE and would remain the main reporting channel.

63. Regarding the project contained in informal document 2020/6, the representative of the United States inquired if the database mentioned therein pertained to urban tree planting or to resources, best practices and tools on urban forestry.

64. The Director of the Forests, Land and Housing Division responded that the database would track the pledges issued by cities under the UNECE Trees in Cities initiative.

62. Regarding the project contained in informal document 2020/6, the representative of the European Union reiterated her request from the last EXCOM meeting for a concept note of phase 2 of the Pathways Project. Recalling that options for that phase were currently under discussion at the Bureau of the Committee on Sustainable Energy (CSE), she suggested it might be useful to seek the views of the broader CSE membership. She took note of the fact that the project had two donors and covered all energy sources. She retained concerns about the funding and said she would appreciate further assurance from the secretariat regarding compliance with due diligence requirements before she could approve the project.

65. The representative of Tajikistan expected that the project would assist in extending the role of selected technologies and innovations and collaboration across sectors towards carbon neutrality. He said the project met the strategic target of Tajikistan to radically reduce emissions by 2030.

66. The representative of Switzerland did not oppose the project but inquired clarification on the process of bringing this project to EXCOM. He noted that the CSE had give a mandate to the relevant Working Group to develop this project, but that this body was composed of experts who did not represent UNECE countries. He understood that the project had not been submitted to CSE for review and approval before being tabled at EXCOM. He thought the process should be clarified and hoped the secretariat could ensure consistency across all sectoral committees on this topic.

67. In response to the European Union, the Secretary of the Commission recalled that EXCOM had adopted a due diligence process for engagement with private sector partners at its 93rd meeting. She assured EXCOM that this process had been followed for this project and that the Executive Secretary had deemed the World Nuclear Association (WNA) to be a suitable partner for UNECE. She noted that the WNA had had consultative status with ECOSOC since 1993 as a non-governmental organization. With regards to US Energy Association, which was the other donor for the project, the due diligence process had been initiated but when it was learned that the original source of funding was the US Department of Energy acting on a congressional mandate, the process was discontinued as there was no need for further due diligence.

68. The Director of the Sustainable Energy Division confirmed that the Bureau of CSE was discussing options for phase 2 of the Pathways Project and said he would forward to it the request to solicit the views of member States. The Bureau had expressed strong views that the benefits of the tool developed under phase 1 should not be lost. The project under discussion would build on these benefits and extend them while phase 2 was being developed. In response to Switzerland, he said that the idea of carbon neutrality had been discussed several times in the CSE and was in the work plan of the Group of Experts on Cleaner Electricity Systems. Given the presence of this mandate, he noted that bringing the project back to CSE would unnecessarily lengthen the approval process. He offered to discuss this topic further informally to clarify standing practices.

69. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the extrabudgetary project contained in informal documents 2020/5, 2020/6 and 2020/7.

Item 12 – Other business

70. The Chair informed EXCOM that the next meeting would take place on 3 April 2020.

71. The representative of Tajikistan invited all governments to attend the 2nd High Level International Conference on the International Decade for Action “Water for Sustainable Development” 2018-2028 (18-20 June 2020, Dushanbe).
