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Committee on Sustainable Energy

Group of Experts on Coal Mine Methane

Fourteenth session

Geneva, 7-8 November 2019

Report of the Group of Experts on Coal Mine Methane

I. Introduction

1. The fourteenth session of the Group of Experts on Coal Mine Methane (CMM) was held from 7-8 November 2019.
2. This report summarizes the discussions on the work of the Group of Experts at its fourteenth session. All the documents and presentations of the session are available on the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) website¹.

II. Attendance

3. The meeting was attended by experts from the following ECE member States: Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, Kazakhstan, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and United States of America.
4. Experts from Australia, China, India, and South Africa participated under Article 11 of the Commission's Terms of Reference.
5. A representative from the European Commission (EC) Directorate-General (D.G.) Energy participated.
6. The following international associations were represented: Global Methane Initiative, and European Association for Coal and Lignite EURACOAL.
7. Representatives of the following non-governmental organizations participated: Assocarboni General Association of Coal Operators, Association des ONG de

¹ Official documents of the session are available at <http://documents.un.org/>. Unofficial room documents and presentations delivered at the meeting are available on the ECE website at: <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=51081>.

l'Environnement, Association of Donbass Mining Towns, Global Action for Sustainable Villages - iuventum, Methane Center, and the United States Energy Association (USEA).

8. The private sector was represented by experts from eighteen companies. Academia was also represented by experts from eleven universities and scientific institutes.

III. Adoption of the agenda (agenda item 1)

Documentation: ECE/ENERGY/GE.4/2019/1

9. The provisional agenda as contained in the document ECE/ENERGY/GE.4/2019/1 was adopted without amendment.

IV. Election of officers (agenda item 2)

10. The Group of Experts elected a new Bureau to serve for the 2020-2021 biennium. The new members are: Mr Raymond Pilcher (Raven Ridge Resources, Inc.) as Chair, and Mr Admir Softic (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Mr Pawel Pikus (Poland), Mr Jacek Skiba (Poland), Mr Sergey Shumkov (Russian Federation), Mr Milanko Savic (Serbia), Mr Hasan Erdogan (Turkey), Mr Igor Yashchenko (Ukraine), Mr Özgen Karacan (United States of America), Mr Zhixin Jin (International Centre of Excellence on CMM in China), Mr Lukasz Kroplewski (International Centre of Excellence on CMM in Poland), Mr Clemens Backhaus (A-TEC Anlagentechnik GmbH), Mr Clark Talkington (Advanced Resources International, Inc), Mr Yuriy Bobrov (Association of Donbass Mining Towns), Mr Neil Butler (HEL-EAST Ltd), and Mr David Creedy (Sindicatum Sustainable Resources) as Vice-Chairs.

V. Opening remarks (agenda item 3)

11. The Group of Experts noted with appreciation the work of the Bureau and its efforts to manage and direct the Group's work plan between annual sessions despite human and financial resource constraints.

12. In his opening remarks, the Chair thanked the members for their continued support. The Chair welcomed members of the Global Methane Initiative Coal Subcommittee, its co-chairs and secretariat. He also thanked the Global Methane Initiative and the United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) for the financial support that had made implementation of the ambitious work plan for 2018-2019 possible. He also thanked the Group's volunteer experts that had traveled to the sites at which 5 workshops and 5 seminars were held and made excellent and well-received presentations. The Chair described the need for the Group to consider that the world's energy economy and awareness of global climate change had evolved since the Group was formed in 2004. Since that time, concern over continued use of coal and other fossil fuels has increased to the extent that an open and honest discussion of emission reduction projects sited at coal mines is difficult. Financing and insuring methane emissions reduction projects has become even more challenging. Yet, methane emissions are not significantly decreasing and, in fact, in many countries they are still increasing as coal use continues and, in some cases, expands. Moreover, methane from closed mines will continue to find its way to the atmosphere for years to come. The Chair encouraged the Group to discuss actively the future of the Group, its role and approach to ensure that it remains relevant in reducing emissions and disseminating best practices for maintaining safe mines as the energy economy of the world undergoes dramatic changes.

13. The full text of the Chair's opening remarks is available on the session's website² under agenda item 3 - Opening remarks.

VI. Role of fossil fuels in decarbonizing energy systems (agenda item 4)

Documentation: ECE/ENERGY/2019/2 - Attaining carbon-neutrality in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region by 2050 – a discussion paper about the role of fossil fuels in sustainable energy.

14. The Group of Experts acknowledged the continuing and important role that fossil fuels will play in the global energy mix for years to come. Observing that 80 per cent of today's primary energy is fossil-based and that the majority of the world's population and national economies depend heavily on fossil energy, the Group recognized the need for modernization of the global energy sector with a special focus on carbon-intensive industries in order to ensure progress in the essential transition towards a green economy and low-carbon society. Noting the premises of a "just transition", the Group stressed that restructuring of sectors or regions to reduce the carbon footprint of the energy sector should be undertaken with foresight and social inclusion, and with the medium- and long-term needs of countries and people in mind.

15. Following a discussion held under item 4, the Group of Experts decided that going forwards it will use the words "achieving net carbon neutrality" rather than "decarbonization". It was noted that the latter term might be understood as a call for phasing out coal, while the former by focusing on the emissions' balance is technology and fuel neutral, and thus better represents the objectives of the Group.

16. The Group of Experts on Coal Mine Methane and the Group of Experts on Cleaner Electricity Systems committed to work together to explore opportunities, among their respective communities, for greater involvement of electricity producers in CMM projects.

17. At the request of the Committee on Sustainable Energy, the Group of Experts on Coal Mine Methane and the Group of Experts on Cleaner Electricity Systems discussed the draft paper titled "Attaining carbon-neutrality in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region by 2050 – a discussion paper about the role of fossil fuels in sustainable energy" (ECE/ENERGY/2019/2) and provided their feedback on the document.

18. The Group of Experts on Coal Mine Methane and the Group of Experts on Cleaner Electricity Systems decided to issue a joint statement to be signed by the Chairs of both Groups and to be addressed to the ECE Executive Secretary and the Secretary-General of the United Nations, underlining the importance of maintaining a debate on the social, environmental, and economic aspects of extraction and use of fossil fuels that is open, inclusive and fact-based. The Group of Experts called on all stakeholders to engage in the debate, avoid emotional statements, and not downplay the problems that need to be addressed in that context. The Groups of Experts requested the secretariat to coordinate the efforts of drafting and editing the document. The secretariat was also requested to disseminate the final document to the Permanent Missions of the ECE member States. The Groups of Experts invited member States to co-sign the statement.

² <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=51081>

VII. Ninth joint meeting of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Group of Experts on Coal Mine Methane and the Global Methane Initiative Coal Subcommittee (agenda item 5)

19. The Group of Experts thanked the Coal Subcommittee of the Global Methane Initiative (GMI) and its members for their continued support and collaboration.

20. The Group of Experts noted with appreciation the added value and success of events organized in cooperation with GMI within the framework of the extrabudgetary project “Dissemination of best practices in the abatement, recovery and use of methane, Phase II”, namely the seminars delivered at the Ninth International Forum on Energy for Sustainable Development, 15 November 2018, Kyiv, Ukraine, and at the XXVIII School of Underground Mining, 27 February 2019, Cracow, Poland, as well as capacity-building workshops on Best Practices in Coal Mine Methane Capture and Utilization, held in Ankara, Turkey (10 June 2019) and Dnipro, Ukraine (12-14 June 2019).

21. The Group of Experts expressed interest in continuing to develop joint projects with GMI and requested the secretariat to ensure, facilitate, and coordinate continued cooperation between the two entities.

22. The Group of Experts noted that the Global Methane Forum 2020, encompassing the fifteenth session of the Group of Experts and organized in cooperation with GMI, will take place in Geneva, 23-25 March 2020. The Group of Experts on Gas will meet 26-27 March. The Group of Experts on CMM requested the secretariat to ensure that the topics put forward by the Group are included in the event’s agenda.

VIII. Report on implementation of the work plan for 2018-2019 (agenda item 6)

23. The Group of Experts noted with appreciation that it has delivered successfully on its work plan for 2018–2019.

24. The Group of Experts noted with appreciation progress made in implementation of the extrabudgetary project “Dissemination of best practices in the abatement, recovery and use of methane, Phase II”, the duration of which was extended to 31 December 2020.

25. The Group of Experts noted with appreciation the number and quality of the capacity-building activities to disseminate and promote best practices in effective methane capture and use in coal mines delivered during 2018-2019 biennium and thanked the members for their active involvement in their planning and delivery.

26. The Group of Experts noted with appreciation completion of the work on the “Best Practice Guidance for Effective Methane Recovery and Use from Abandoned Coal Mines” (BPG AMM) (ECE/ENERGY/2019/13 and ECE Energy Series No. 64), and thanked the document’s authors, contributors, and the Editorial Review Group for their efforts in developing the publication

27. The Group of Experts requested the secretariat to assure timely publication of the BPG AMM and to start planning dissemination activities. The Group welcomed the opportunity to present the document at the XXIX School of Underground Mining, February 2020, Cracow, Poland, and at the Global Methane Forum 2020, March 2020, Geneva, Switzerland.

28. The Group of Experts noted with appreciation the updates provided on the status and activities of the International Centres of Excellence on CMM (ICE-CMM) in Poland and in China. The Group requested that the secretariat and the host entities ensure communication and coordination of their respective activities with each other and with the Group. The Group welcomed the commitment of both Centres of Excellence to provide extrabudgetary funds to the secretariat for assuring such coordination and necessary oversight of their activities.
29. The Group of Experts noted with appreciation the publication of Polish and Chinese versions of the second edition of the Best Practice Guidance for Effective Methane Drainage and Use in Coal Mines (BPG CMM) and thanked the ICE-CMMs in Poland and in China for their in-kind contributions. The Group of Experts also welcomed the publication of the BPG in Russian by ECE.
30. The Group of Experts approved the status report of ICE-CMM in Poland and endorsed its work plan for 2020.
31. The Group of Experts approved the status report of ICE-CMM in China and endorsed its work plan for 2020.
32. The Group of Experts congratulated the Russian Federation on its new developments in the field of CMM, in particular on establishing, within the structure of the Institute of Comprehensive Exploitation of Mineral Resources of the Russian Academy of Sciences, a national Centre dedicated to CMM. The Group requested the secretariat to engage with the relevant Russian Authorities to explore opportunities for integrating the newly created entity with the existing network of International Centres of Excellence operating under the auspices of the Group.
33. The Group of Experts welcomed the development of a risk management tool. It thanked Mr. David Creedy for leading the work on this task and the ICE-CMM in China for its support in preparing the tool and for promoting its use in coal mines in China.
34. The Group of Experts noted that, in accordance with the extended extrabudgetary project “Dissemination of best practices in the abatement, recovery and use of methane, Phase II”, a standard training module needs to be developed next year and asked the members to contribute to the work on this deliverable.
35. The Group of Experts underlined the importance and inevitability of the transition of the energy sector and invited member States and relevant organizations to cooperate with ECE on a “modernization” project that it is developing in this field. The Group of Experts welcomed a project proposal co-developed by Boston University and ECE and requested the secretariat to undertake the necessary steps to ensure continuation of that partnership and to obtain funds allowing for implementation of the project and further involvement of ECE in the topic.

IX. Cooperation and partnerships (agenda item 7)

36. The Group of Experts concluded that there is a need for further research in the field of CMM and its role in attaining the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It welcomed an opportunity to cooperate in that field with the European Commission’s Research Fund for Coal and Steel and requested the secretariat to explore opportunities for joint activities. The Group of Experts welcomed the presentation made by Mr Julien Moulin, President of Francaise de l’Energie. The Group appreciated his insights into the operation of an abandoned coal mine complex in Northern France that has emitted methane from mines that have been closed since 1978.

X. Work plan for 2020-2021 (agenda item 8)

37. The Group of Experts noted with appreciation that the Committee on Sustainable Energy at its twenty-eighth session endorsed the work plan for 2020-2021 and extended the Group's mandate to 31 December 2021. The Group noted that both will be presented to the ECE Executive Committee for approval at its 108th meeting on 16 December 2019.

38. Following a discussion on future activities, the Group of Experts recommended that it should remain involved in activities related to the role of coal and other fossil fuels in the transition to a low-carbon economy. The need for an open and inclusive dialogue based on facts was underlined and the Group invited other subsidiary bodies of the ECE Committee on Sustainable Energy to join the discussion and to develop a common position on the energy transition.

39. The secretariat was requested to prepare a paper summarizing a discussion on the future of the Group of Experts that took place under agenda item 8, addressing, among others, the issue of a potential change of the Group's name. The secretariat was further requested to distribute the draft paper to the Group for its review and comments.

XI. Gender issues in the coal mining industry (agenda item 9)

40. The Group of Experts requested that measures aimed at raising awareness on barriers to women's engagement and professional development in the mining and the energy sectors should be promoted at all activities organized by the Group to the extent possible. In light of its recent interest in abandoned mines, the Group discussed the problems and challenges faced by women as a result of the gradual phase-out of coal in many countries around the world. It discussed particularities of the situation of female employees and women in mining communities in the aftermath of mine closures and requested the Bureau and the secretariat to engage with the relevant stakeholders in order to identify actions that it could undertake to alleviate the identified problems.

XII. Preparations for the fifteenth session of the Group of Experts (agenda item 10)

41. The fifteenth session will be held in Geneva, 23-25 March 2020, as a part of the Global Methane Week organized jointly by ECE and GMI.

42. The Group of Experts recommended the following topics to be featured in the Global Methane Forum 2020's agenda: best practices for capturing, using and destroying methane throughout the coal mining lifecycle; promoting best practices for AMM production use or destruction, financing coal mine methane projects, adopting policy measures that lead to near zero methane emissions from coal mining activities, establishing the linkage between CMM emissions reductions and coal consuming industries, and the role of CMM in deep energy infrastructure transformation. The Group of Experts observed that the Forum should have a broad and cross-cutting scope, addressing methane emissions not only from coal mines, but from the extractive industries in general, as well as from other sources, such as agriculture, landfills, etc.

XIII. Any other business (agenda item 11)

43. The Group of Experts noted the need to expand its membership from both within and beyond the ECE region, and to secure additional extrabudgetary resources. Both are prerequisites to be able to deliver on the work plan for 2020-2021. The Group requested the

secretariat to work, in cooperation with the Bureau, to identify new members encompassing all aspects of diversity, as well as potential sources of funding.

XIV. Adoption of conclusions and recommendations (agenda item 12)

Documentation: CMM-14-2019-INF.1 - Unofficial room document: Draft Conclusions and Recommendations arising from the Group of Experts on Coal Mine Methane dated 4 September 2019.

44. The conclusions and recommendations were adopted and are included under the relevant agenda items highlighted in this report.

XV. Adoption of the report and close of the meeting (agenda item 13)

45. The report of the meeting was adopted, including the conclusions and recommendations, subject to any necessary editing and formatting.
