

Economic Commission for Europe
Committee on Environmental Policy
Nineteenth session
Geneva, 22–25 October 2013

Opening statement by the Executive Secretary of UNECE

Madam Chairperson,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to address you at the 19th Session of the Committee of Environmental Policy. Considering the busy agenda of the Session, I will only briefly outline few major issues that are relevant for the Committee discussions this week.

Environment represents a major and important part of ECE's agenda. At the last Session of the Commission, earlier this year, Member States decided on the review of the 2005 reform of ECE. In the decision and already throughout the prior consultation process the high appreciation of Member States for ECE's work on environment became obvious. The Commission highlighted that the ECE Environment subprogramme, the Committee of Environmental Policy (CEP) and its related subsidiary bodies work within current mandates in a very efficient way and that the results of its work are concrete and have a clear value added for the region and beyond. The outstanding achievements of the subprogramme Environment are largely based on the excellent work and guidance provided by the CEP over the last couple of years. I am very grateful for your engagement and commitment.

Forward looking, the Commission also decided that the subprogramme should - again under your wise leadership and subject to approval by EXCOM - implement relevant outcomes of the Rio+20 Conference. The Rio outcome document, "The Future We Want", adopted by the General Assembly in July 2012, emphasizes that regional and subregional organizations (including ECE) have a significant role to play in promoting a balanced integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in their respective regions. The General Assembly also underscored the need to support these institutions in the effective operationalization and implementation of sustainable development, and to facilitate institutional coherence and harmonization of relevant development policies, plans and programmes. In this regard, the General Assembly urged these institutions, among others us, the ECE, to prioritise sustainable development through more efficient and effective capacity-building, development and implementation of regional agreements, and exchange of information, best practices and lessons learned.

All these areas of work are indeed our main topics, where the subprogramme excelled in the past. I would like to welcome distinguished chairs and officials of the Multilateral Environmental Agreements at the Committee meeting, and laud their efforts to promote MEAs, including through the exchange of information and experience. We have to continue on our way, embracing new developments as needed. I could mention the great value added of the MEAs – some of them going global, and several of them serving as a model for other regions; I could mention the Environmental Performance Review, another flagship product of ECE, that is also asked for by countries in other regions, the work on Education for Sustainable Development, the huge area of monitoring and assessment, including our contribution to the Shared Environmental Information System, the engagement in the Environment & Health process, the pan-European programme on Transport, Health and Environment. As the recent survey has shown, there is a broad recognition of the accomplishments of the “Environment for Europe” process. I am convinced that the CEP will find best options to continue regional cooperation on the environment at the highest political level, to address existing as well as emerging challenges, e.g., on water management, greening the economy and the improved implementation of MEAs.

ECE is proud to have contributed to their achievements. At the same time, I have to mention that the success brings not only recognition but also substantial increase in the workload. It is enough to have a look at the list of documents of this meeting to understand the intensity of our work. I am grateful to the colleagues from ECE Environment subprogramme for their professionalism and commitment.

For all this work, we need the on-going support of Member States, including funding and in-kind contributions; we also need to continue our excellent cooperation with a broad range of partners from the UN family, other international organisations, regional organisations, and NGOs.

I wish you successful work during this busy week.

Thank you for attention.