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COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT POLICY

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FRAMEWORK FOR COOPERATION WITH THE CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS ON METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES OF ENVIRONMENTAL INDICATORS

Note by the secretariat

1. The Committee on Environmental Policy, at its fifteenth session in April 2008, after it had concluded its discussions on future directions of its environmental monitoring activities, invited the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) to consider cooperating with the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment (WGEMA) on methodological issues of environmental indicators (ECE/CEP/148, para.23).
2. At its October 2008 session, the Committee had an initial discussion of a proposal, supported by the WGEMA, to establish an intersectoral task force with CES on environmental indicators (ECE/CEP/AC.10.2008/2, annex II). The Secretary to the CES informed the Committee that the CES Bureau had recently emphasized the importance of harmonizing environment statistics in the UNECE region and had expressed its preparedness to consider, at the upcoming CES Bureau meeting, opportunities for cooperation between the CES and the WGEMA on environmental indicators to develop practical recommendations for national statistical offices. The Committee decided to continue, at its January 2009 meeting, the discussion on modalities of cooperating with CES. It requested the secretariat to inform the Committee on the decision taken by the CES Bureau concerning the possible joint intersectoral activity (ECE/CEP/150, para. 22).
3. The CES Bureau considered the proposal for establishing an intersectoral task force at its meeting held on 20-21 October 2008 in Washington. The CES Bureau approved the Terms of Reference for the proposed task force as a joint undertaking of the two UNECE subsidiary bodies to help the countries in Eastern Europe, Caucasus, Central Asia and South-Eastern Europe (SEE) to strengthen environmental data collection, produce environmental indicators and promote comparability of environmental statistics. In November 2008, the CES Chairperson introduced the proposal for joint work on environmental indicators to the UNECE Executive Committee (EXCOM) in the context of the CES annual report to the EXCOM. The EXCOM members expressed a general interest in the proposal.
4. The Committee on Environmental Policy is invited to approve the attached Terms of Reference for the joint task force. The Terms of Reference contain a clearly defined mandate for the period of 2 years, including the objectives, the composition and reporting procedure. The joint task force is expected to meet as follows:
 - On 27 April 2009 in Chisinau (Republic of Moldova) in connection with a Joint Meeting (training workshop) on Environmental Indicators to be organized by WGEMA, CES and the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) on 27-29 April 2009;
 - In September 2010 in Geneva back-to-back to the WGEMA annual meeting;
 - In spring 2010, subject to fundraising, in connection with a possible second joint workshop.

5. The joint intersectoral work would be supported by the staff of the two UNECE Divisions concerned. In the Environment, Housing and Land Management Division, the Secretary to WGEMA would be involved in the activity (3 man-months per year). The UNECE Statistical Division would provide secretariat support to the joint task force equivalent to 0.5 of professional staff per year as approved by the CES Bureau. In addition, some resources could be ensured through the budget of the Regional Advisor in the Statistical Division.
6. The travel of environmental experts from eligible countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia to the April 2009 meeting will be supported from a UNECE trust fund on environmental monitoring. USD 25,000.- are available for the purpose. In addition, the UNSD has earmarked some USD 40,000.- to support travel of environmental statisticians from countries in Eastern Europe, Caucasus, Central Asia and six SEE countries.
7. Some USD 17,300.- are available in UNECE trust funds on environmental monitoring to support travel of environmental experts to a second task force meeting in September 2010. Some USD 19,200.- would remain to be raised to support travel of statisticians from the target countries to the same meeting.
8. Some USD 65,000.- would be required for a possible second training workshop in Spring 2010.
9. Subject to approval by the CEP at its session in January 2009, the ToR of the joint task force would be submitted to the EXCOM, at its meeting in February 2009, for endorsement.

Annex

PROPOSAL FOR TERMS OF REFERENCE OF A JOINT INTERSECTORAL TASK FORCE ON ENVIRONMENTAL INDICATORS

I. BACKGROUND

1. The involvement of the countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus, Central Asia and South-Eastern Europe (SEE) in the preparation of the assessment reports for the Ministerial Conferences “Environment for Europe” triggered their interest in the development of a set of environmental indicators and practical recommendations on their application. The Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment (WGEMA) under the Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP) prepared *Guidelines for the application of environmental indicators in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia* (Indicator Guidelines)¹, that were endorsed at the Sixth Ministerial Conference “Environment for Europe” (Belgrade, 10–12 October 2007). The Guidelines cover 36 key indicators highlighting, for each indicator, the importance of the environmental issue for which it has been designed; international targets, where available; requirements for measurements and data collection; internationally agreed methodologies for the indicator development; and references to useful literature and Internet sites.
2. The Conference of European Statisticians (CES) was active in developing environmental statistics in the 1980s and early 1990s. It developed several environmental statistics classifications and a pan-European compendium of environmental statistics. At present, it is supporting a Joint UNECE/OECD/Eurostat Working Group on Statistics for Sustainable Development in its efforts to develop a broad conceptual framework for measuring sustainable development including some best practices to assist national governments and international organizations in the design of sustainable development indicator sets and in the development of official statistics in the area.
3. Further to initial discussions between the Environment, Housing and Land Management Division and the Statistics Division of UNECE, CEP, at fifteenth session in April 2008, invited CES to consider cooperating with WGEMA on methodological issues of environmental indicators (ECE/CEP/148).

II. OBJECTIVE

4. Against this background, a joint intersectoral task force on environmental indicators will be created. The purpose of the task force is to assist national statistical agencies and institutions responsible for the production of national state-of-the-environment reports in countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus, Central Asia and interested SEE to improve environmental data collection, further strengthen environmental reporting and promote comparability of environmental statistics and indicators in the region.
5. The joint intersectoral task force on environmental indicators will report to its parent bodies, CEP and CES, and to their Bureaux. The task force will work closely with WGEMA and inform it on progress made and on outcomes.
6. The joint intersectoral task force on environmental indicators will:

¹ Published as United Nations publication, Sales No. E 07.II.E.9.

(a) Review the indicators covered by the *Indicator Guidelines* to provide practical recommendations on the necessary adaptation of statistical classifications and data collection forms and procedures for the production of indicators;

(b) Propose additional environmental indicators that may be important but are currently not included in the *Indicator Guidelines* (e.g. environmental expenditure, environmental taxes and subsidies, production of and trade in environmental goods and services and hazardous substances, and resource productivity) and provide, and adapt to the needs of the countries concerned, relevance guidance materials available at the international level;

(c) Recommend modern presentation formats and tools for effective dissemination of environmental indicators including the use of modern information technologies;

(d) Assist in the organization of one or two, resources permitted, workshops on environmental indicators, to be jointly organized by UNECE and the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD). The workshops will be open to all interested countries to broaden the exchange of experiences and approaches. They will provide a forum for presenting the latest development on relevant methodologies and classifications available at the international level.

III. MEMBERSHIP

7. Members of the task force will be nominated by country focal points in CES and WGEMA. UNSD, Eurostat, the European Environment Agency, the United Nations Environment Programme, the World Health Organization European Centre for Environment and Health, the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States, will be invited to designate their representatives. The Statistical Division and the Environment, Housing and Land Management Division of UNECE will jointly service the task force.

IV. TIMETABLE

8. The mandate of the task force will cover the period from 2009 to September 2010.

V. OUTCOME

9. The joint intersectoral task force on environmental indicators will submit, through the WGEMA and CES Bureaux, a final report on its accomplishments and a proposal for follow-up, if any, to both UNECE Committees.
