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**STATISTICAL COMMISSION and ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE**

**CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS**

Forty-eighth plenary session

(Paris, 13-15 June 2000)

**Matters arising from the May 2000  
session of the Economic Commission for Europe**

Note by the secretariat

**SUMMARY**

The 2000 annual session of the Economic Commission for Europe was held in Geneva from 3-5 May 2000. This note provides an overview of the parts of the session which are relevant to the Conference of European Statisticians. Mr. Longva attended the session on behalf of the Conference.

Several issues of potential interest to the Conference were discussed at the session. The following were substantive agenda items of the session: the economic regeneration of South East Europe; possibilities of increasing regional cooperation within the ECE region, taking into account experiences in the transition process; re-thinking the strategy of operational activities; cross-sectoral and intersectoral concerns of the Commission and its Principal Subsidiary Bodies; contributing to global debates and events; and report of the Commission's Group of Experts on the Programme of Work.

The decisions and recommendations of the annual session of the ECE are not controversial, and they are consistent with the procedures and policies of the Conference. A draft decision of the Conference concerning the outcome of the Commission session with reference to the Conference is given in para. 22.

## **I. ISSUES DISCUSSED AT THE COMMISSION SESSION OF RELEVANCE TO THE CONFERENCE**

### **(a) The economic regeneration of South East Europe**

1. As called for in the Plan of Action, the secretariat organised a debate on a major economic theme. This year the theme chosen was the economic regeneration of South East Europe. The debate was divided into three sessions:
  - Regenerating the economies of south eastern Europe: do we need a new approach to the transition process?
  - Supporting the transition process in South East Europe: How should international financial and technical assistance be designed and organized, and what exactly should it support, to be really effective? Can regional cooperation help to overcome some of the key problems?
  - Can strategies for economic policy and regional cooperation ignore the political context? If not, how should they adapt?

### **(b) Possibilities of increasing regional cooperation within the ECE region, taking into account the experience of the transition process**

2. The Commission reaffirmed the value of coordination and cooperation among regional organizations. With regard to the ECE, OSCE and the Council of Europe, three actors in the region working on economic, social and security issues on a region-wide basis, it underlined the importance of their complementarity and existing division of labour. It encouraged further efforts to both intensify and enhance the scope of this collaboration.
3. The importance of the ECE and the EU partnership was stressed and the further strengthening of working relations, in particular with regard to the future development and application of norms and standards, important tools for European integration, was requested.
4. The Commission further confirmed the importance of subregional cooperation as a necessary step towards regional integration. It underlined the positive impact of subregional cooperation for economic growth, investment and trade, as well as peace and security.
5. The Commission encouraged an enhanced role of ECE in supporting subregional groupings and initiatives and noted that ECE could apply the experience gained from supporting existing initiatives/groupings to a new programme developed for the Caucasus subregion.

### **(c) Operational activities: re-thinking the strategy**

6. The Commission reviewed ECE's operational activities and considered how the secretariat could focus and organise its operational activities according to a better defined strategy. Under this

agenda item it also considered inter-regional technical cooperation initiatives in the Mediterranean region.

7. The Commission reaffirmed the importance of ECE's operational activities as a way to enhance the implementation of ECE conventions, protocols, norms and standards, promoting best practices and agreed policies and supporting European cooperation and integration and the transition process. It recognised that the Regional Advisers continue to play an important role in advising and helping the countries in transition apply ECE norms, standards and conventions.

8. The Commission agreed that priority should continue to be given to demands for assistance from the most vulnerable transition economies, particularly those from CIS and Balkan countries. It also agreed that the decisions on which operational activities are selected and given priority should take into account guidance from intergovernmental discussions and be based on actual ECE expertise, and reflecting on the recommendations of the external auditors. Finally, there was general agreement that ways to strengthen the Coordinating Unit for Operational Activities should be explored in order to facilitate its work in terms of selection, prioritisation and evaluation of its activities.

9. The secretariat was requested to conduct results oriented evaluations of operational projects in order to help it prioritise its work, where feasible. There was also general agreement for the need to develop inter-sectoral and multi-sectoral approaches to operational activities.

10. The Commission encouraged countries to include ECE on their lists of eligible institutions for the receipt of funding. At the same time, the secretariat was encouraged to renew its efforts to attract funds, both from public and private sources.

11. The Commission welcomed the secretariat's initiative with regard to developing joint projects with ECA and ESCWA for the Mediterranean region as well as with ESCAP. It requested the secretariat to pursue its discussions with ECA and ESCWA after holding consultations with member countries to determine the areas of cooperation with the other two regional commissions. Some countries specifically requested to be informed by the secretariat in detail and in advance concerning the secretariat's tentative proposals in this field.

**d) Cross-sectoral and intersectoral concerns: Update on development with the participation of the Chairpersons of the Principal Subsidiary Bodies**

12. The Commission supported the priority given to transport and environment by the Inland Transport Committee, the Committee on Environmental Policy and their respective Bureaux. It encouraged the Joint Meeting on Transport and the Environment to actively pursue the overall monitoring and implementation of the Programme of Joint Action. Support was also expressed for the continuing work on transport, environment and health, energy and the environment, as well as by the Intergovernmental Task Force in preparing for CSD-9.

13. The Commission agreed with the suggestions by the Chairpersons of the Principal Subsidiary Bodies (PSBs) that it was necessary to initiate, on a regular basis, debates and possible action on cross-sectoral concerns and intersectoral issues, an example of which was mitigating the effects of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. The PSBs were requested to report back to the Commission on progress made in this respect.

14. The Commission supported ECE's involvement with the business community and generally agreed that this cooperation continue along the lines suggested in document E/ECE/1377. It was decided that the Group of Experts on the Programme of Work (or a sub-committee thereof) take up the issues outlined in the paper and highlighted at the meeting, in particular the development of guidelines and the possible procedures for facilitating public/private partnership. The PSBs were requested to examine issues, such as the strengthening of SMEs involvement in ECE activities.

15. The secretariat was requested to provide regular information on the development of the participation of the business community in its different committees and working groups.

**e) Contributing to global debates and events**

16. The Commission reviewed ECE's contributions to global debates and events and strongly supported ECE's role as a regional arm of the United Nations called for in ECOSOC resolution 1998/46. It expressed its satisfaction with the ability of ECE to offer a region-wide forum on social and economic issues and to act as an interface between governments and NGOs.

17. The Commission expressed its full support for the conclusions agreed at the ECE Regional Preparatory Meeting for the 2000 Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, which constitutes the input of the ECE region to the global review process.

18. As a follow up to the International Year of Older Persons, the Commission decided to convene a ministerial conference on ageing under the aegis of ECE and accepted with appreciation the offer of the Government of Germany to host the conference in Berlin in September 2002. The ECE's Population Activities Unit is largely responsible for conducting the preparatory work for this meeting. The Commission further approved the preparatory process leading up to this conference as suggested in document E/ECE/1378. It also noted the willingness of the Government of Germany to make financial contributions to the preparatory process and urged other governments to support the process.

19. The Commission agreed that it would be necessary to look into the resource implications arising from ECE's contribution to global events and issues, including the possibility of strengthening the Office of the Executive Secretary. Taking into account the limited resources available to the ECE secretariat, the Commission agreed that any new mandate should be supported by the necessary additional budgetary resources coming from the body delivering the mandate.

**f) Report on the work of the Group of Experts on the Programme of Work**

20. The Chairman of the Group of Experts on the Programme of Work (GEPW) highlighted the work accomplished by the Group since the fifty-fourth session of the Commission and outlined some of its future tasks.

**g) Other business**

21. Under this item a Conference Room Paper entitled "Challenges to the region: elements for an ECE response" was distributed. During discussion, the Commission agreed with the proposal contained in Conference Room Paper that member countries and PSBs provide comments on the paper by 15 June and that a discussion on the paper be organized during the Commission's June 2000 Ad Hoc Informal Meeting to decide on further steps to be taken.

**II. DRAFT DECISION BY THE CONFERENCE**

22. The Conference may consider that its method of work and its operating procedures are already largely aligned with the ones which were called for in the discussion that took place at the Commission session. The Conference therefore may wish to:

- a) thank Eurostat for facilitating the participation of representatives of central and east European countries and of CIS countries in the annual plenary sessions of the Conference of European Statisticians and in selected other high priority meetings in the Conference's work programme, by permitting representatives of the statistical offices of these countries to use the European Commission's PHARE and TACIS funds to finance their participation in these meetings;
- b) agree that the ECE Statistical Division is already collaborating closely and in a partnership relationship with Eurostat, OECD, the UN Statistics Division and other international organizations in carrying out the Conference's programme of work and also, to a considerable extent, in the secretariats' collection of statistics from ECE member countries.

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