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STATISTICAL COMMISSION and ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Fifty-first plenary session
(Geneva, 10-12 June 2003)

**Matters arising from the March 2003
Session of the Economic Commission for Europe**

Note by the secretariat

SUMMARY

The 2003 annual session of the Economic Commission for Europe was held in Geneva from 4 to 6 March 2003. This note provides an overview of the main outcomes of the session, highlighting the implications and the follow-up, which are relevant to the Conference of European Statisticians and its program of work.

Several issues of interest to the Conference were discussed at the session. The following were the main substantive agenda items:

- a) Sustainable development in the ECE region;
- b) UNECE Reform;
- c) Major policy directions of UNECE's work;
- d) Preparation for and follow-up to World and Regional Conferences;
- e) Technical cooperation;
- f) Cooperation and coordination with other organisations.

The orientation and the priorities of work of the Conference are largely consistent with the decisions and recommendations of the annual session of the ECE. However, the outcome of the session requires some follow-up by the Conference.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The annual session of the ECE defines the priorities, strategic orientation and the utilisation of ECE resources, and gives direction to the activities of the Principle Subsidiary Bodies of the ECE, of which the Conference of European Statisticians is one.

II. ISSUES DISCUSSED AT THE COMMISSION SESSION OF RELEVANCE TO THE CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Sustainable development in the ECE region

2. This agenda item was concerned with two issues: (i) Progress in national strategies for sustainable development and (ii) Strategy implementation/The role of international cooperation.

3. During the discussion it emerged that progress in implementation of national sustainable strategies should be measured through the use of concrete indicators, with clearly identified targets and a set timetable. Furthermore, it was suggested that the ECE provide a framework of evaluation; support capacity building for monitoring progress and impact assessment; and exchange experiences on how to prioritize and ensure linkages with global programs and national plans. It was also pointed out that there is a need to develop a set of interrelated indicators on sustainable development, for providing a solid statistical basis for supporting national follow-up. In this context, the role of international institutions in developing sustainable development indicators and databases was stressed.

4. The Commission agreed in general with a role for UNECE in follow-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development, on the understanding that the specific format and modalities will be decided following the debate and possible decisions by the Commission on Sustainable development, and at an ad-hoc informal meeting of the Commission. However, during the discussion it was stressed that ECE has already done important work in the area of sustainable development even before the World Summit. Therefore, any follow-up should build upon the ECE's well-developed activities and the expertise already available in the field of sustainable development should be fully utilized.

Issues recommended to be followed by the Conference

5. Contribute to the work on developing a set of indicators on sustainable development. Ensure a balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development into all sectors of activities.

The UNECE reform

6. The Commission considered this agenda item on the basis of a document prepared by the ECE secretariat. The discussion on the UNECE reform began at the previous annual session of the Commission in May 2002 on the basis of a Secretariat paper on "Strengthening the Organization –

UNECE Secretariat Self-Assessment". During the discussion it was emphasized that the UNECE Reform should be a continuous process and should be part of the broader UN Reform. It was also noted that a continued and regular review of the intergovernmental structure should be carried out with the full participation of the Principal Subsidiary Bodies. The frequency of meetings and number of reports produced should be reviewed for efficiency and relevance. There is a need for streamlining and avoiding duplication in all activities. Intersectoral activities should be further strengthened.

Issues recommended to be followed by the Conference

7. The following conclusions of the Commission could be considered:

- Future streamlining of the work of the Conference to ensure its continued relevance and effectiveness;
- Review of the frequency of meetings and number and length of reports produced.

Major policy directions of UNECE's work

7. During the discussion on this topic it was noted that new activities should be introduced through adjustments of the work programme in a way that does not require additional budgetary resources. With regard to post-enlargement of Europe, ECE should continue to play its role in supporting regional cooperation between the EU and the non-acceding countries and among the acceding countries.

Issues recommended to be followed by the Conference

8. The following conclusions of the Commission could be considered:

- Regularly review the strategic directions and priorities of the PSBs. In particular, during the budget submission year, future directions for the programme of work should be discussed in preparation for the next programme budget and medium-term plan cycles;
- Make a regular review of forthcoming activities in order to consider what might be dropped and replaced with new activities;
- Further develop the intersectoral cooperation and activities;
- Further incorporate cross-sectoral concerns into the work of all sub-programmes: gender, security and ITC, in addition to sustainable development already mentioned above.

Preparation for and follow-up to World and Regional Conferences

9. Discussion on this topic focused on two issues: (i) Pan-European Regional Ministerial Conference held in preparation for the World Summit on Information Society (Bucharest, November 2002) and (ii) proposals for UNECE follow-up to the Ministerial Conference on Ageing held in Berlin, September 2002. In summing up the discussion, the Chairman of the Commission recognized the overall appreciation of delegations of the input of ECE into the work of the two conferences. The follow-up work to the Ministerial Conference on Ageing should be regarded as work in progress that needs

further discussion with member countries, staying within the mandate and expertise of UNECE.

Technical cooperation

10. The Commission gave a positive assessment of the work done by ECE in technical cooperation and providing assistance to its less advanced member countries. It welcomed the formation of a new Technical Cooperation Unit and supported the idea of setting up a joint committee in the secretariat to improve the overall coordination of technical IT cooperation activities.

Issues recommended to be followed by the Conference

11. Technical cooperation activities need to be reviewed and streamlined with the involvement of the Principal Subsidiary Bodies. In this review, particular attention should be paid to the following conclusions of the Commission:

- The priority setting mechanism for technical cooperation activities needs to be strengthened to ensure that technical assistance projects are carried out in response to real needs of member countries and that they are within the ECE expertise and do not overlap with the work of other organizations;
- Technical cooperation should focus on the adjustment of transition economies of non-acceding countries, with emphasis given to less advanced, low-income countries with economies in transition;
- Technical cooperation activities in relation to Central Asia, Southeast Europe and the Caucasus should be strengthened;
- Financial assistance should be made available to low-income countries with economies in transition to enable them to participate in ECE activities such as workshops and seminars;
- Evaluation of technical activities, though recognized as being difficult and complex and requiring resources, is important and necessary.

Cooperation and coordination with other international organizations

12. The Commission expressed satisfaction with the way ECE cooperates with other organizations active in the same area of work and encouraged the secretariat to further strengthen this cooperation.

Draft decision by the Conference

13. The method of work of the Conference and its operating procedures are already largely aligned with those recommended by the annual session of the Economic Commission for Europe. However, the outcome of the session requires some follow-up by the Conference. Therefore, it is proposed that the Conference:

- Take note of the matters arising from the March 2003 Session and specified in this paper under “Issues recommended for follow-up by the Conference”;
- Agree that the Bureau of the Conference, the Conference itself and the secretariat of the Statistical Division should continue to work actively towards contributing positively to strengthening the ECE

as an Organization;

- Ask the Bureau of the Conference to continue to review forthcoming activities in the programme of work of the Conference and to report on the outcome of the review to the annual plenary sessions;
- Ask the Bureau to continue to consider what contributions the CES can make to further incorporate cross-sectoral concerns into the work of all sub-programmes, such as sustainable development, gender, security and ITC;
- Agree that the ECE Statistical Division should continue to be closely involved in operational activities addressing the issue of economies in transition through the Regional Adviser Programme and the involvement in the UNDP financed project aiming at statistical capacity building for social reporting, and agrees that the Statistical Division should seek ways of increasing its technical assistance through the Conference's regular meeting programme and its current regular budget and extra-budgetary resources;
- Thank Eurostat for facilitating the participation of representatives of Central and Eastern 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.