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STATISTICAL COMMISSION and ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

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

**SUMMARY REPORT OF THE 34TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
STATISTICAL COMMISSION**

Note prepared by the ECE secretariat

1. The United Nations Statistical Commission is one of the two parent bodies of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES). Consequently, the CES has always paid attention to the deliberations and concerns of this important forum in the global statistical system. It is customary, therefore, that at the plenary session of the CES a summary report of the annual session of the Statistical Commission is provided to the Conference in order to inform it of the main outcome of the most recent session of the Commission.
2. The 34th session of the Statistical Commission was held in New York from 4-7 March 2003. The report of this session is publicly available on the UN Statistics Division website. This report contains all details about participating Member States and organisations, and the conclusions of the discussions on each item of the agenda.
3. In many instances, the conclusions of the 34th session of the Statistical Commission give additional or revised mandates for further work to either UN Statistics Division (UNSD), UN organisations other than ECE, or the various expert, intersecretariat and city groups. This note does not list decisions of this type. The Bureau of the Conference and the Secretariat, in their ongoing work of updating and reviewing the various elements of the Integrated Presentation of the International Statistical Work, take due account of the work of the various expert groups, and that any activities and outcome relevant for the ECE region be reflected in the Integrated Presentation. The regular participation of the Director of UNSD in the meetings of the Bureau ensures that a maximum degree of coordination takes place regarding all activities under the responsibility of UNSD.

4. The present note is limited to those items on the agenda of the Statistical Commission, where decisions reached at the 34th session may directly affect the future work of the Conference and its Bureau, or where new groups were created, the work of which will have to be taken into account by the Conference and its Bureau. Five items on the agenda of the Statistical Commission fall into these two categories: Health Statistics, Agricultural Statistics, International Comparison Programme, International Economic and Social Classifications, and Environment Statistics.
5. Item 3 (b) of the Agenda, Health Statistics: In order to improve the co-ordination between the work of the international organisations and to ensure a better integration of their activities aimed at data collection at national level with national statistical systems, a “Friends of the Chair” (FoC) group was established by the Statistical Commission. This group will be chaired by Svein Longva (Norway). Six additional Member States of the UN, of which two Member States of the ECE (United States and Canada), are members of this group; a number of international organisations, among which all UN regional commissions as well as EUROSTAT, are observers. UNSD acts as Secretariat.
6. The issue of health statistics was discussed in some detail by the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians at its February 2003 meeting, that is, shortly before the discussion that took place at the Statistical Commission. At this meeting, the Bureau expressed its concern with regard to the lack of coordination of the work in the area of health statistics in the ECE region. In its future periodical review of the area of health statistics, the Bureau will have to take into full consideration the findings of the FoC group and any conclusions the Statistical Commission may draw from them.
7. Item 4 (c) of the Agenda: Agricultural Statistics: In addition to the already existing Intersecretariat Group on Agricultural Statistics (IWG.AGRI), the Commission agreed to create an advisory panel composed of countries’ representatives. At the time of writing of this note, the composition of the group had not been decided.
8. Item 4 (e) of the Agenda: International Comparison Programme: The Commission reviewed the progress made in the preparatory work for the new round of the International Comparison Programme (ICP) and endorsed the composition of the newly established Executive Board. The Commission encouraged additional funding and in-kind support for the programme both at the regional and global levels. In this context, the work carried out by the ECE secretariat jointly with Eurostat, OECD and CIS-STAT on the European Comparison Programme should be mentioned. The new round of ICP will affect the time schedule of the next round of comparisons in the ECE region. The Bureau will review at a future meeting the continuation of this joint work, also in view of the new global round of comparisons.
9. Item 5: Environment statistics: The Commission agreed that an inter-agency working group on environment statistics be set up, with special focus on the development and harmonisation of methods, concepts and standards, and coordination of data collection and training, so as to advance the work in this area to a similar level of outcome as that already achieved for environmental accounting. It also took note that EUROSTAT, OECD and ECE will propose the setting up of a steering group on sustainable development (composed of international organisations and countries’ representatives). The Bureau of the Conference will consider the proposal on the basis of terms of reference for the work of the steering

group at one of its future meetings. Furthermore, the Commission emphasised the need for co-ordination between the work on environment statistics and accounting, and the work on the environmental dimension of sustainable development.

10. Item 6 (a): International Economic and Social Classifications: Regional Commissions are expected to play a major role in the consultation process of countries with respect to the 2007 revision of ISIC and CPC. In Europe, EUROSTAT and OECD are more directly involved in the conceptual work around these revisions than is the ECE Secretariat. For reasons of efficiency, the work of these organisations should be used, to the extent possible, for the consultation process within the ECE region. In this context, it is essential to ensure that the ECE member countries that are not present or candidate members of the EU, and countries that are not members of OECD, are included from the beginning in the consultation process. Possible instruments for this purpose, to be reviewed in detail by the Bureau, could be joint meetings between ECE and EUROSTAT/OECD; ECE conducting written consultations with the relevant member countries using a joint questionnaire; and/or consultation meetings specifically targeted for the relevant sub-regions of ECE.

11. Recommended Action by the CES: The Conference is asked to note the above conclusions and to consider whether any other item not specifically mentioned above should have any implications for the programme of work of the Conference of European Statisticians on which it would like the Bureau to follow-up.