

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
115th Meeting
Geneva, 17 March 2021

EXCOM/CONCLU/115

CHAIR'S CONCLUSIONS

FORMAL SEGMENT

Item 1 – Adoption of the agenda.

1. The provisional draft agenda for the 115th meeting was adopted.

Item 2 – Chair’s conclusions from the last meeting.

2. The conclusions from the 114th meeting of EXCOM (EXCOM/CONCLU/114) were adopted.

Item 3 - Update on Special Procedures during COVID-19 period - Extension of Special Procedures during COVID-19 period.

3. The Chair recalled that EXCOM had adopted special procedures in April 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure business continuity, including, inter alia, the submission of decisions taken at informal meetings to a silence procedure for adoption. Given the continuing restrictions on travel and meeting servicing related to the pandemic, he suggested that the special procedures be extended until 31 May 2020, including for various subsidiary bodies of UNECE as proposed in ECE/EX/2021/L.4.

4. The Secretary of the Commission informed that, since the last meeting of EXCOM, two silent procedures had been concluded related to formal meetings with remote participation, namely the 83rd session of the Inland Transport Committee (ITC) and the 58th session of the Working Party on the Standardization of Technical and Safety Requirements on Inland Navigation. The silence had not been broken for either of these procedures. Full details were available on the UNECE website.

5. The representative of the European Union and its member States found the experience with the special procedures positive and appreciated that progress could continue in all UNECE subprogrammes despite the ongoing pandemic-related restrictions. She did not object to the proposed extension.

6. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the decision on extension until 31 May 2021 of special procedures during the COVID-19 period, as contained in ECE/EX/2021/L.4.

Item 4 - Matters relating to the Committee on Sustainable Energy:

(a) Meeting with the Chair of the Committee on Sustainable Energy:

7. The Chair of the Committee on Sustainable Energy (CSE), Mr. Jürgen Keinhorst, made a presentation to EXCOM on the achievements of CSE over the past year and its plans for the future. He invited EXCOM to approve the Programme of Work of the Sustainable Energy subprogramme for 2021, and to transmit the draft energy-related Commission decisions tabled under Item 7 to the Commission for consideration at its upcoming 69th session.

8. The representative of the United States appreciated the work of the CSE, and thought that the technology-agnostic view taken by the Pathways Project was a good example of the Committee’s integrated systems framing and approach to deep de-carbonization in line with

the SDGs. He also supported the work on critical materials and on gases such as carbon dioxide and methane, which promoted concrete, measurable progress towards the goals of the Paris Agreement. The United States looked forward to continued collaboration as Vice-Chair of the Committee and as Chair of two of its subsidiary expert groups.

9. The representative of the European Union and its member States appreciated the promotion by the Committee of sustainable energy of de-carbonization in the region. She looked forward to the approval of the strategic review of the subprogramme at the next session of the Committee and to reaching agreement on the concept note of the second phase of the Pathways Project, which would then be submitted to EXCOM for approval to provide context for further funding proposals.

10. The representative of the United Kingdom supported the decisions tabled for EXCOM's approval. She said that developing global best practice for resource management was more important than ever in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and that utilising the UN Framework of Classification of Resources in this area would help inform policy decisions and mark an important step towards a more circular economy. She looked forward to further collaboration on this topic at the 69th Commission session.

11. The representative of the Russian Federation attached great importance to the work of the Committee. He said UNECE's work on energy should take into account the needs of different countries in the context of achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement. He thought that the Committee and its subsidiaries should not refuse to examine issues relating to rational use of extractive fuel sources given the prevailing energy mix in the countries of the region, and said that a balanced approach to the future activities of the Committee would be desirable. He supported the decisions tabled for EXCOM's approval.

12. In response to the Russian Federation, Mr. Keinhorst said that the Committee was working on a just transition of energy systems in the hopes of finding a win-win situation for all countries.

13. The Chair concluded that EXCOM thanks the Chair of the Committee on Sustainable Energy for the comprehensive report. EXCOM appreciates being informed about the activities and achievements of the Committee and being kept aware of future directions of its work.

(b) Decisions on matters relating to the Committee on Sustainable Energy;

14. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the Programme of Work of the Sustainable Energy subprogramme for 2021, as contained in document ECE/ENERGY/2020/2.

Item 5 - Matters relating to the Standing Working Group on Ageing:

(a) Meeting with the Chair of the Standing Working Group on Ageing;

15. The Chair of the Standing Working Group on Ageing (SWGA), Mr. Edmundo Martinho, made a presentation to EXCOM on the achievements of SWGA over the past year and its plans for the future. He invited EXCOM to approve the Programme of Work of the Population component of the subprogramme on Housing, Land Management and Population for 2021 and welcome the SWGA's efforts to align its activities with the 2030 Agenda and other population-related international frameworks.

16. The representative of the European Union and its member States welcomed the approval by ECOSOC of the transformation of the Working Group on Ageing into the SWGA and its revised terms of reference. She also welcomed the offer of Italy to host the 4th UNECE Ministerial Conference of Ageing in Rome in 2022 and noted with appreciation the initiative of Portugal and the task force under the SWGA for coordinated elaboration of guidelines for mainstreaming ageing and demographic challenges in all policy fields.

17. The representative of the United States appreciated the facilitating of the exchange of experience by the SWGA, such as the policy seminar on lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. He also found the SWGA's coordinating role in the development of relevant policy briefs valuable, as this work laid the ground for the exchange and adoption of good practices.

18. The representative of the Russian Federation noted the important coordinating role of SWGA in the preparation of the fourth review of the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and its Regional Implementation Strategy, and the Rome Ministerial Conference. He supported the decisions tabled for EXCOM's approval.

19. The representative of Belarus appreciated the expert and technical assistance provided to Belarus by the SWGA on the preparation of national documents on ageing.

20. The Chair concluded that EXCOM thanks the Chair of the Standing Working Group on Ageing for the comprehensive report. EXCOM appreciates being informed about the activities and achievements of the Standing Working Group and being kept aware of future directions of its work.

(b) Decisions on matters relating to the Standing Working Group on Ageing:

21. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the Programme of Work of the Population component of the subprogramme on Housing, Land Management and Population for 2021 as contained in the document ECE/WG.1/2020/5. EXCOM welcomes the efforts of the Standing Working Group on Ageing to align its activities with the regional/national follow-up on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other population-related international frameworks, including the United Nations Decade of the Healthy Ageing, 2021–2030.

Item 6 - Decisions relating to the Inland Transport Committee.

22. The Chair of the ITC, Mr. Kristof Schockaert, introduced documents ECE/EX/2021/L.7 and L.8, containing draft decisions relating to approval of the programme of work of the Transport subprogramme for 2021, as well as the renewal of the mandates and establishment of various expert groups under the ITC. The ITC session had taken place the preceding week and the decisions had undergone the special procedures for formal meetings with remote participation, encountering no objections. He noted that these decisions would normally be tabled for EXCOM approval at the 116th meeting when he would report on the activities of the ITC in the past year. However, due to the timing of the ITC session and that of the current and following EXCOM meetings, this would have led to an interruption in the mandate of the Committee. He hoped EXCOM could fast-track this approval to avoid such an interruption and facilitate the planning of activities.

23. The representative of France supported the draft decisions. She was pleased that the ITC session had taken place despite the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and said

the approval of the decisions would allow for continuity in the implementation of the work programme.

24. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the Programme of Work of the Transport subprogramme for 2021, as contained in ECE/TRANS/2021/8. EXCOM approves the renewal of the mandates of:

- (a) Group of Experts on Road Signs and Signals until 31 December 2022, as contained in ECE/TRANS/2021/L.1,
- (b) the Group of Experts on the European Agreement concerning the work of crews of vehicles engaged in international road transport until the end of June 2023, as contained in ECE/TRANS/2021/L.1, and
- (c) the Group of Experts on Benchmarking Transport Infrastructure Construction Costs until 2022, as contained in ECE/TRANS/2021/L.1;

EXCOM approves the establishment of:

- (a) Group of Experts tasked with drafting a new legal instrument on international rail passenger hubs until 2023, on the basis of the Terms of Reference contained in annex II of ECE/TRANS/2021/6 as contained in ECE/TRANS/2021/L.1 and
- (b) the Group of Experts tasked with drafting a new legal instrument on the use of automated vehicles in road traffic until 2023 on the basis of the Terms of Reference included in annex III of ECE/TRANS/2021/6, as contained in ECE/TRANS/2021/L.1/Add.1.

INFORMAL SEGMENT

Item 7 – Preparations for the sixty-ninth session of the Economic Commission for Europe

25. The Chair informed EXCOM that, for the 2021-2023 biennium, Austria had submitted its candidacy to chair the Commission. Switzerland and Turkmenistan had submitted candidacies to vice-chair. The United Kingdom had indicated its readiness to serve as rapporteur for the sixty-ninth session.

26. The Executive Secretary said that various draft decisions for the consideration of the Commission were contained in an advance copy of E/ECE/1500 and hoped EXCOM would agree to transmit them to the 69th session. She updated EXCOM on the state of the preparations for the session and encouraged delegations to submit voluntary commitments related to the theme of the session.

27. The representative of Belarus said that the Belarussian Minister of Foreign Affairs would participate at the sixty-ninth session and would announce a voluntary commitment.

28. The representative of the European Union and its member States supported the transmission of the draft decisions to the Commission session, looked forward to the voluntary initiatives that would be presented, and welcomed the candidacies for the Commission Bureau.

29. The representative of the Russian Federation expressed satisfaction with the state of the preparations. The Russian Federation planned to present various national initiatives at the event, pertaining to boosting energy efficiency, enhancing air quality, sustainable use of resources and waste processing. Relevant information had been transmitted to the secretariat.

The Russian Federation attached great importance to Commission sessions and traditionally participated at ministerial level. He did not object to the transmission of the draft decisions to the session.

30. The representative of Switzerland said an official communication would be sent to the secretariat concerning Switzerland's intent to present at the Commission session the status of its commitments made at the 8th Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference in Batumi. He did not object to the transmission of the draft decisions to the session. He assured the membership that, if elected, Switzerland would do its utmost to support the work of UNECE as Vice-Chair of the Commission. He welcomed the other candidacies for the Commission Bureau.

31. The representative of Germany said that the German Deputy Minister for Economic Affairs and Energy would present the German Lightweight Construction initiative at the Commission session. Lightweight construction combined the economic, ecological and social aspects of sustainability in an ideal way and was of great importance for a number of industries such as automotive construction and transportation, mechanical engineering, construction, and production technology sectors. With this offer Germany hoped to contribute for the economic development and integration of the UNECE region, while promoting its commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

32. The representative of Austria said Austria was honoured to present its candidacy to chair the Commission. Having joined the organization in 1955 and participated actively in its work over the years, Austria attached great importance to promoting sustainable development and economic prosperity and integration at the regional level through norms, standards and legal instruments. She welcomed the candidacies for the position of the two Vice Chairs.

33. The representative of Turkmenistan said his country was committed to the development of cooperation with UNECE, in particular on strengthening the transit and transport potential of the region; expanding trade, economic ties and integration; energy efficiency; and maintaining environmental safety. Turkmenistan supported UNECE's work on setting standards, developing best practices and promoting economic cooperation and integration within the areas its mandate. UNECE had proven to be an important platform to deal with economic, social and environmental challenges and made strong contributions to economic development. If elected, Turkmenistan as Vice Chair would be guided by principles of neutrality and impartiality, take into account the interests of all UNECE member States, and serve in a manner that respected the mandates of the organization. He welcomed the other candidacies for the Commission Bureau.

34. The Chair concluded that thanks the secretariat for the update and looks forward to the 69th Commission session. EXCOM decides to transmit the draft decisions as contained in an advance copy of E/ECE/1500 to the sixty-ninth Commission session for consideration.¹

Item 8 – Preparations for the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development 2021

35. The Executive Secretary provided an update on the preparations for the 2021 Regional

¹ Subsequent to the meeting, the secretariat informed the membership of a technical error that had been detected in the draft decisions on energy issues to be transmitted to the Commission during the translation process. Subsequently, in informal consultations, delegations further reviewed the text and reached agreement on some clarifying revisions. The revised text has since been issued as E/ECE/1500/Add.1 for consideration by the sixty-ninth session. Any inconvenience is regretted.

Forum.

Item 9 – Sequential review of the proposed programmes of work of subprogrammes of the Economic Commission for Europe

36. The Executive Secretary recalled that discussion had taken place at the 112th meeting of the EXCOM on the preparation of the draft Programmes of Work (PoWs) at the sectoral committees. Member States had then requested to ensure that, when considering their draft PoWs for the next year, sectoral governing bodies could also provide recommendations on key elements of their future PoWs. That way, these recommendations could be reflected in the draft UNECE proposed programme plan presented to the EXCOM in December of the current year. The secretariat had held informal consultations with member States on 4 February 2021, which had led to the proposals outlined in informal document 2021/8. She hoped that these addressed the request by member States and invited EXCOM to approve them.

37. The representative of the European Union and its member States thanked the secretariat for its quick response to the request of EXCOM. She welcomed the opportunity to provide guidance and recommendations for the future PoWs within individual sectoral committees and other subsidiary bodies reporting directly to EXCOM thanks to this new process.

38. The representative of the Russian Federation likewise thanked the secretariat for the quick action. He appreciated the opportunity to discuss the different components of the PoWs for the upcoming periods on the basis of documents prepared by the secretariat and supported the timelines outlined in informal document 2021/8.

39. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the procedure for the review of the programmes of work of UNECE subprogrammes as contained in informal document 2021/8.

Item 10 – Extrabudgetary projects (for approval).

40. The Chair introduced the extrabudgetary project contained in informal document 2020/44/Rev.1, which was presented to EXCOM for approval. He recalled that a previous version of this project had been tabled at the 111th meeting of EXCOM. Based on the feedback received from member States at the time, the secretariat had revised the project to address the comments made. He informed that, if EXCOM approved the project, the secretariat would seek the approval of these revisions by the Steering Committee of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Sub-Fund of the UN Peace and Development Trust Fund, which was the donor of the project.

41. The representative of the United States appreciated the principles of the UNECE work on People-first Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), including transparency, rule of law, debt sustainability and the inclusion of local communities in decision-making. He admired UNECE's stewardship of its regular budget and the seeking of donors for extrabudgetary projects. He appreciated UNECE's efforts to work with member States and other relevant partners to ensure that the project remained focused on building capacity to better uphold the above-mentioned principles, rather than advance or promote the signature global foreign policy platform of a single Member State. He requested the following assurances as to the project's implementation: First, the project should not be used to promote the Belt and Road

Initiative (BRI) or demonstrate UNECE support for the latter. Second, the BRI should not be referenced in any project documents. Third, consultants must be hired through transparent means, should be supervised directly by UNECE staff, and should not use their positions to promote the foreign policy platform of any single country to the governments involved in the project. He also requested that the secretariat make available its submission to the UN Peace and Development Trust Fund. He would approve the project if the secretariat could provide these assurances and looked forward to being informed about the response of the Trust Fund.

42. The representative of the European Union and its member States said the revisions addressed the concerns previously raised. She expressed confidence that the project would ensure compliance with established international standards for environmental protection, social protection and transparency, and would ensure a level playing field. She was ready to work with the project team on implementation, in particular on the practical questions related to the Euro-Asian Connectivity Strategy. She thought an appropriate European Union representative should be in regular contact with the project team on this matter and included in the relevant discussions. Similarly, a focal point from the Euro-Asian Transport Links project should be involved in implementation. She also requested that there be no references to the BRI in the project documents, and that consultants should be monitored to ensure that they did not express support to the BRI in their dialogue with beneficiary governments. She wished to consult the revised project documents once updated by the secretariat for submission to the Trust Fund for its final decision. She also stressed that the delegates of the Working Party on PPPs, in particular the members of its bureau and the consultants participating in the development of its standards and norms, may not benefit from the project funding. The EU and its member States were ready to approve the project.

43. The representative of the United Kingdom noted that it would not be appropriate for UN documents to endorse national foreign policy initiatives. The United Kingdom encouraged selection of capacity building projects based on transparent criteria and support geared towards the national needs and objectives of the beneficiaries. She was pleased to see the links to the Euro-Asian Connectivity Strategy and welcomed UNECE's approach to considering PPPs through the lens of their contribution to the SDGs by putting people at the centre of infrastructure projects. She supported the approval of the project.

44. The Executive Secretary welcomed the support expressed for the project. In response to the issues raised, she recalled that, in line with Commission decision A(65) and informal document 2014/41/Rev.1 on "Transparency, accountability and approval of extrabudgetary funding", documentation pertaining to all extrabudgetary projects was published on the "Open UNECE" section of the UNECE website. She assured EXCOM that this approach would naturally be followed for this project as well and that delegates would be able to consult the final project document approved by DESA on the UNECE website. She welcomed the call for cross-sectoral cooperation across UNECE divisions in the context of this project, and confirmed that this was indeed foreseen and in keeping with the spirit of nexus team collaboration approach. She also reiterated her personal and UNECE's institutional commitment to due process and avoidance of any conflict of interest. Accordingly, and as with all UNECE projects, the engagement of the consultants hired for the project would be managed in compliance with all relevant UN rules and regulations as outlined in ST/AI/2013/4. She agreed that experts engaged in UNECE's work, including the consultants and bureau members linked to the Working Party on PPPs, should not benefit from project funding. With these assurances, she hoped, EXCOM would be in a position to approve the project.

45. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the extrabudgetary project contained in informal document 2020/44/Rev.1 and requests the secretariat to provide an update once the revisions have been further considered by the Steering Committee of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Sub-Fund of the UN Peace and Development Trust Fund.

Item 11 - Briefing by the Executive Secretary: Important new developments and key upcoming events.

46. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM that the new Deputy Executive Secretary of UNECE, Mr. Dimitry Mariyasin, had taken up his duties on 1 March 2021.

47. Mr. Mariyasin thanked delegations for their warm welcome and said he hoped to support the effectiveness of the secretariat in regular and streamlined engagement with member States, including by working more closely with the UN Country Teams. He had extensive experience in the UN working at the national, regional and global levels and would leverage this experience for the benefit of UNECE and its member States.

48. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) under preparation with the Norman Foster Foundation, located in Madrid, Spain. Its objective was to establish a Centre of Excellence for the implementation of the Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing. The Centre of Excellence would provide best practices, research, support, and/or training in the area of work around sustainable cities and sustainable housing. A focus of activity of this Centre would be to support the organization of the Second Forum of Mayors, planned to be held on 4 and 5 April 2022.

49. As this would be the last EXCOM meeting to be chaired by the current Chair, the representatives of Greece, the European Union and its member States, France, Switzerland and the Russian Federation, as well as the Executive Secretary, expressed their appreciation for the leadership of the Chair over the past biennium. They looked forward to his chairmanship during the sixty-ninth Commission session.

Item 12 – Any other business

50. The Chair informed EXCOM that its next meeting would take place on 17 May 2021 at 16:00.
