

Economic Commission for Europe

Executive Body for the Convention on Long-range
Transboundary Air Pollution

Bureau of the Executive Body

Meeting

16 February 2020, via videoconference

Report of the meeting

I. Attendance

Bureau members: Ms. Anna Engleryd (Sweden, Chair), Mr. Sergey Vasiliev (Russian Federation), Mr. Richard Ballaman (Switzerland), Ms. Elizabeth Nichols (United States of America), Ms. Jennifer Kerr (Chair of the Working Group on Strategies and Review), Ms. Laurence Rouil (Chair of the EMEP Steering Body), Ms. Isaura Rabago (Chair of the Working Group on Effects) and Mr. Manfred Ritter (Chair of the Implementation Committee).

Observer: Ms. Susanne Lindahl (European Union).

II. Outcomes of the fifty-eighth session of the Working Group on Strategies and Review and the fortieth session of the Executive Body

The Chairs of the Executive Body and the Working Group on Strategies and Review and the secretariat shared their experience of holding the meetings in a virtual mode. The Chairs noted the cooperative spirit of the meeting participants that facilitated the positive outcome of the sessions.

The Bureau member from the United States of America brought the example of the United Nations Environmental Programme following the recommendation of the World Health Organization against holding large multilateral meetings in 2021. The secretariat noted that the ECE was continuing to hold its meetings remotely.

The Bureau noted the lack of participation by EECCA countries. The Bureau member from the Russian Federation suggested that it might have been caused by technical problems the EECCA delegates were facing and by the difficulty to follow virtual meetings. He noted that one should not expect active participation of EECCA countries in virtual meetings in general, and especially if the sessions were to be held partly without interpretation, which he deemed inappropriate. He suggested that in addition to official reports, one-page summaries of the sessions be prepared for delegations that had not managed to attend them.

The secretariat suggested to brainstorm together with the Chairs on more efficient distribution of interpretation time (for example, not to spend it for making editorial

changes of the session conclusions on the screen). The Chair of the WGSR expressed her readiness to brainstorm noting that besides editorial review there were often negotiations involved during the text revision process.

III. Organization of meetings in May 2021

The secretariat informed the Bureau of the progress in obtaining confirmation from the UNOG Conference Services of the assigned meeting slots for May 2021 and shared the proposed distribution of slots with interpretation and without interpretation for the WGSR session's agenda items. In view of remaining constraints related to the liquidity crisis and the pandemic and in line with the guidance of the ECE management, it was proposed that session segments without interpretation be part of the official session. This implied that the technical support would also be provided during the sessions without interpretation.

The Bureau member from the United States of America and the observer from the European Union expressed their concern about the limited number of sessions with interpretation available and saw it as a problem for equal access by all Parties and a limitation on the amount of work that can be done during the session. They expressed their readiness to bring up the issue at a higher level, if needed. The secretariat encouraged the Bureau to be mindful of the Convention's reliance on the UN regular budget and of the current extraordinary circumstances including the pandemic and the UN liquidity crisis, which were forcing all other bodies to also cut their meeting time.

The Bureau discussed the possibility and need to organize an extraordinary session of the Executive Body in May 2021 or later, which potentially could take decision on: (a) the methodology for a technical adjustment of values of the European Union under the amended Gothenburg Protocol to account for changes in its membership; and (b) the forum for international cooperation on air pollution. The Bureau voiced clear disappointment on the fact that an extraordinary session of the Executive Body had not so far been secured. In case holding an additional Executive Body was not feasible, an option would be for the European Union to provide in advance of the WGSR session a translated explanatory note, which would serve as a basis for discussion by the Working Group on Strategies and Review. The Working Group in its turn could prepare a recommendation for the Executive Body to facilitate smooth adoption of a respective decision in December 2021. The Bureau agreed that the secretariat should explore the possibility of holding an extraordinary session of the Executive Body in May or June, by any means possible, and that another Bureau meeting would be organized to discuss the way forward.

IV. Election of officers in 2021

The Bureau noted the need for a tight contact with candidate Parties to encourage new nominations and for a better information flow between the secretariat and the Bureau on election related communication with Parties. The Bureau in particular requested the secretariat to consult the Bureau before initiating any related correspondence with Parties and, when acknowledging receipt of nomination letters, not to draw Parties' attention to the number of terms completed. The Bureau further noted that an explanation should be provided to Parties on each vacant role.

V. Date and time for the next meeting

The Chair noted that the suggested date of the next meeting would be communicated soon.

VI. Other business

The Chair of the Executive Body informed the Bureau that the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland had confirmed its willingness to co-chair the forum for international cooperation on air pollution. In the meantime, another Party was also considering co-chairmanship. Upon official confirmation, the Co-Chairs would submit draft terms of reference of the forum as a task force under the Convention for consideration by the Executive Body. The Chair further informed that Argentina was maintaining its commitment to hold the first meeting of the forum as soon as the pandemic crisis was over.

The observer from the European Union noted that 2021 would be a special year in terms of reporting for the European Union, as it had an obligation to report the annual totals for 2019, when the United Kingdom was a member State, but did not have a right to do so following Brexit. She noted that the European Union would be willing to help compile a courtesy consolidation of the annual data received from the EU and the United Kingdom for compliance checking purposes in this one year where these circumstances apply.

The Bureau discussed the status of the ad-hoc group of legal experts under the Convention. It concluded that a roster type membership should be maintained, and the role of a spokesperson/rapporteur of the group could be assigned on a rotational basis for each case. This should facilitate Parties' nomination of experts. The Bureau also noted that Parties had to be reminded about the functioning of the group.

The Bureau inquired about the final version of the reports of its last three meetings. The secretariat informed that it would re-circulate the latest version of the reports, and, should there be no further comments, they could be uploaded on the website.