

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
116th Meeting
Geneva, 17 May 2021

EXCOM/CONCLU/116

CHAIR'S CONCLUSIONS

FORMAL SEGMENT

The meeting welcomed Ambassador Tichy-Fisslberger of Austria as new Chair of the Commission.

Item 1 – Adoption of the agenda.

1. The provisional draft agenda for the 116th meeting was adopted.

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

2. The conclusions from the 115th meeting of EXCOM (EXCOM/CONCLU/115) 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, she suggested that the special procedures be extended until 31 July 2020, including for various subsidiary bodies of UNECE as proposed in ECE/EX/2021/L.9.

4. The Secretary of the Commission informed that, since the last meeting of EXCOM, eight silent procedures had been concluded related to formal meetings with remote participation, namely the 183rd session of the World Forum for Harmonization of Vehicle Regulations, the 82nd session of Global Forum for Road Traffic Safety, the 42nd session of Joint UNECE/FAO Working Party on Forest Statistics, Economics and Management, the Joint Meeting of the RID Committee of Experts and the Working Party on the Transport of Dangerous Goods, the 121st session of the Working Party for General Safety Provisions, the 27th session of the UN/CEFACT Plenary, the 84th session of the Working Party on Lighting and Light-Signalling, and the 23rd session of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment. The silence had not been broken for either of these procedures. Two silent procedures were ongoing for the 109th session of the Working Party on the Transport of Dangerous Goods and the 16th meeting of the UNECE Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development. Full details were available on the UNECE website.

5. The representative of the Russian Federation supported the extension of the special procedures.

6. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the decision on extension until 31 July 2021 of special procedures during the COVID-19 period, as contained in ECE/EX/2021/L.9.

Item 4 - Matters relating to the Inland Transport Committee: Meeting with the Chair of the Inland Transport Committee.

7. The Chair of the Inland Transport Committee (ITC), Mr. Kristof Schockaert, made a presentation to EXCOM on the achievements of ITC over the past year and its plans for the future.

8. The representative of the European Union and its member States said the work of ITC had been crucial for maintaining inland transport in the region despite the restrictions and border closures arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. The lessons learned would help build resilience to future crises in the region. She welcomed the establishment of two Groups of Experts tasked with drafting new legal instruments on international rail passenger hubs and on the use of automated vehicles in road traffic and looked forward to a speedy start of deliberations. She appreciated overall progress on the implementation of the ITC Strategy 2030 and looked forward to further cooperation on digitalization, greening transport and road safety.

9. The representative of Switzerland appreciated the regional and global importance of the work of ITC on Global Technical Regulations. Swiss industry appreciated the work on vehicle technologies, dangerous goods and facilitating border crossings. He congratulated ITC and its subsidiary bodies on extending cooperation with other UN agencies and Regional Commissions. The ITC had a key role to play in road safety, especially in the context of the launch of the 2nd Decade of Action for Road Safety. Switzerland supported ITC efforts to strengthen sustainable transport, increasing digitalization by regularizing vehicle automation. Switzerland also appreciated intersectoral cooperation, as seen in the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme (THE PEP).

10. The representative of the United States appreciated the significant accomplishments of the ITC over the challenging past year and expressed satisfaction with the progress on important road and vehicle safety issues, electric and hydrogen vehicles, automated vehicles and the transport of hazardous materials.

11. The representative of the Russian Federation expressed satisfaction with the outcomes of the last annual ITC session and welcomed the adoption of the ministerial resolution on enhancing resilient inland transport and the resolution of strengthening intermodal transport. He supported further strengthening cooperation between UNECE and ESCAP and looked forward to the joint consultations between member States on sustainable connectivity. He appreciated the contributions of the ITC to multilateral cooperation on road safety, including via a round table at the ITC session. He expressed readiness to engage in constructive dialogue to facilitate multilateral efforts to achieve the SDGs and the ITC Strategy 2030.

12. The Chair concluded that EXCOM thanks the Chair of the Inland Transport Committee 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.

INFORMAL SEGMENT

Item 5 – Follow-up of the sixty-ninth session of the Economic Commission for Europe

13. The Executive Secretary recalled the high-level of participation at the 69th Commission session and thanked delegations for their active engagement. The secretariat had started the process to operationalize the decisions taken and would liaise with the chairs of the UNECE sectoral committees to ensure that those decisions would be reflected in their future activities

as appropriate. She noted that the opportunities far exceeded what UNECE was capable of doing with its existing resources and invited member States to consider providing additional resources for this work in order to maximize the beneficial impact of UNECE instruments in the region and support progress towards the SDGs. The secretariat would carry out a post-session lessons learned survey as requested by member States at the 109th meeting of EXCOM and present a review note to the next meeting of EXCOM based on the results of the survey as well as other information such as media response, participation statistics etc. This would allow member States to consider a possible new theme for the high-level segment of the 70th Commission session, should member States wish to continue the practice of designating such a theme, with a view to adopting a decision on the matter by the end of the year.

14. The representative of the European Union and its member States expressed satisfaction with the outcomes of the 69th session and the high level of participation made possible by the combination of the theme of the high-level segment and the option to participate remotely. The high level statement and decision B (69) adopted by the session would provide an excellent opportunity to showcase the ability of UNECE to furnish practical solutions to drive sustainable development in the region and beyond. She looked forward to the results of the survey. She hoped the survey could be inspired by those carried out after the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, which she had found very useful for evaluating that event. She said the chairs of those UNECE sectoral committees that had contributed to the preparations for the session should also be included in the survey and invited to relevant informal consultations and EXCOM meetings.

15. The representative of Switzerland congratulated the secretariat on organizing a successful session with high levels of participation. He believed the session had contributed to the cross-cutting nexus approach and would further strengthen work in the sectoral committees related to the high-level theme. He would be pleased to complete the survey and take part in informal consultations to define its parameters.

16. The representative of the Russian Federation also welcomed the outcomes, the successful side events and the high level of participation at the session. He was confident that the decisions taken would contribute to sustainable use of natural resources and mainstreaming of circular economy principles. The Russian Federation would support UNECE in Geneva and in New York. He likewise expressed readiness to complete the survey and engage in relevant informal consultations.

17. The representative of Belarus said that the high-level theme had been very relevant at the national level and had been raised to the presidency of the country, with a number of national steps being formulated, drawing also on technical cooperation with UNECE. He highlighted the importance of early designation of a theme for the high-level segment of the 70th session and expressed readiness to engage in relevant informal consultations, as well as consider any suggested themes at the next meeting of EXCOM. He supported the idea voiced by previous delegations to include the sectoral committees in these discussions.

18. The Chair concluded that EXCOM thanks the secretariat for the information on the follow-up to the sixty-ninth session of the Commission, and encourages all delegations to actively engage in the implementation of the decisions adopted at the session. EXCOM looks forward to the post-session lessons learned survey to be carried out by the secretariat and to discussions on the possible designation of a high-level theme for the seventieth session of the Commission.

Item 6 – Annual report on evaluations 2020.

19. The Executive Secretary presented the 2020 Annual Evaluation Report to EXCOM for its information. The report was prepared pursuant to a request made by EXCOM at its 91st meeting. She recalled that all evaluation reports, management responses and progress reports were available at the Open UNECE section of the UNECE website. She also noted that a survey intended to inform a programme level evaluation of UNECE engagement with the private sector had recently been circulated. She encouraged delegations to complete the survey and to contact the secretariat if they wished to schedule an interview with the external evaluator.

20. The representative of the European Union its member States appreciated the report and noted the importance of regular internal and external evaluations and Results-Based Management in line with standing UN practices.

21. The representative of the United States welcomed the proactive approach demonstrated in the report and the risk register for transparency and accountability. He recognized the efforts to exceed the criteria of the UN System-wide Action Plan 2.0 on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in evaluations conducted in 2020. He supported the recommendation for further cooperation with Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams and expressed interest to learn more about UNECE's plans in that context.

22. The representative of the Russian Federation said regular presentation of evaluations of technical assistance work improved transparency. The grouping of recommendations by themes highlighted areas where the work of UNECE could be improved. He supported the inclusion of more experts and representatives of the private sector in the technical assistance.

23. The representative of Switzerland said evaluations were key instruments for learning and development and recalled that Switzerland and the secretariat had organized a joint event in 2016 to strengthen the evaluation function in UNECE. He appreciated the section on lessons learned.

24. The Chair concluded that EXCOM takes note with appreciation of the annual report on evaluations 2020 as contained in informal document 2021/10.

Item 7 – Technical Cooperation Strategy of the Economic Commission for Europe.

25. The Executive Secretary presented the revised Technical Cooperation Strategy of UNECE to EXCOM for adoption. The revisions introduced the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the SDGs, and the outcomes of the reform of the UN Development System. The revised strategy also took into consideration a recommendation made by the Office of Internal Oversight Services, in the context of a 2018 audit of the management of trust funds at UNECE, to update policies and procedures relating to management of extrabudgetary resources with the requirement to mainstream SDGs in their activities.

26. The representative of the European Union and its member States noted that a lot of relevant cooperation under the UNECE legal instruments also happened at the bilateral level. She welcomed the mainstreaming of SDGs into the strategy and the focus on demand-driven projects. While she welcomed the strengthening of relations with international financial institutions (IFIs), she said such cooperation should not be detrimental to UNECE

intergovernmental processes. It should be clearly defined and should not lead to ownership of UNECE products by the IFIs, for example. She commended the cooperation with Resident Coordinators and welcomed the good practice of collaboration between the latter and relevant EU missions, including EU delegations in a number of countries. She invited the secretariat to continue exploring such cooperation in the future. She appreciated the established practice of sharing information on the long-term funding plan with member States, which provided transparency and allowed for identification of funding opportunities. Noting that the majority of technical cooperation activities had been funded by extrabudgetary resources in 2019, she inquired as to how the secretariat aimed to align these extrabudgetary funded projects with the broader technical cooperation strategy. She also inquired which areas of technical cooperation were directed at non-UNECE countries.

27. The representative of the Russian Federation supported the strategy, including the incorporation of the outcomes of the reform of the UN Development System and the strengthening of links with the Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams. He welcomed the provision foreseeing full extrabudgetary financing for projects targeting countries outside the region.

28. The representative of Belarus supported the strategy. Belarus had benefitted from technical cooperation and hoped donors would continue strengthening UNECE to enable it to continue these activities.

29. The representative of Switzerland appreciated the incorporation of the SDGs and the outcomes of the reform of the UN Development System in the revised strategy. This would ensure even better collaboration on major issues in the region.

30. In response to the question of the delegation of the European Union and its member States, the Executive Secretary explained that UNECE activities in non-UNECE countries primarily occurred in the following areas:

- (a) Environment, particularly the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers, the Espoo and Water Conventions;
- (b) Transport, under the UN legal instruments hosted by the ITC, and,
- (c) Energy, particularly the UN Framework Classification for Resources and UN Resource Management System.

31. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the Technical Cooperation Strategy of UNECE as contained in informal document 2021/11.

Item 8 – Extrabudgetary projects (for approval).

32. Regarding the extrabudgetary project contained in informal document 2021/12, the representative of the European Union and its member States noted the importance of sustainable management of forests for the climate, biodiversity and the SDGs. She suggested linking the project to the ongoing project “Strengthening policy framework on forest landscape restoration in selected UNECE countries to achieve SDG 15”.

33. The representative of the United States said that capacity building in Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Caucasus was a major activity of the ECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section. He took note of the publications on forest resources, appreciating the difficulties caused by scarce resources for data collection and analysis, and said that this work appeared to

have enhanced contributions to the Bonn Challenge. As a member of the Team of Specialists on Boreal Forests, the United States appreciated the allocation of resources to this Team and supported the project.

34. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the extrabudgetary project contained in informal document 2021/12.

Item 9 - Briefing by the Executive Secretary: Important new developments and key upcoming events.

35. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM that the secretariat was currently developing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the European Investment Bank to further deepen cooperation. The document would address cooperation across a broad variety of environmental sectors, covering air pollution, environmental impact assessment, industrial accidents, transboundary waters, water and health, and public participation, as well transport infrastructure development, sustainable and innovative transport, and road safety. She also informed EXCOM that Eurostat and UNECE were currently working on an arrangement to set out a plan to facilitate cooperation on statistics-related matters of common interest. Similar cooperation arrangements already existed with the Statistical Committee of the CIS countries and with the Eurasian Economic Commission. She promised to provide further details as the document was finalized.

36. The representative of the European Union and its member States welcomed the MoU with EIB, which would provide for capacity building and raising awareness of the UNECE multilateral environmental agreements.

37. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM about the following upcoming events:

- 17-18 May, Vienna: 5th High-level Meeting on Transport, Health and Environment
- 31 May-1 June, Geneva: 12th session of the Working Party on Land Administration
- 2-4 June, Geneva: 14th session of the Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships
- 21-22 June, Geneva: 6th session of the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards
- 23-25 June, Geneva: 69th plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians

38. The Executive Secretary recalled that the capacity of UNOG to service meetings of Geneva-based entities had been severely limited since August 2020, due to a combination of COVID-19 response measures and financial constraints triggered by the liquidity crisis. This had forced the secretariat to reprioritize its official calendar of meetings significantly. UNECE had recently been informed that the limitations would continue through the third quarter of 2021 and was revising its calendar of scheduled meetings accordingly, prioritizing meetings of intergovernmental bodies over expert groups and taking into account also the importance of facilitating deliberations on issues with particular relevance to the pandemic response and the health and well-being of people in the region. An additional room could be made available should UNECE staff take on the technical moderation role. However, the Executive Secretary stressed that this would place additional burden on already understaffed teams and could neither be a precedent nor a permanent solution. The responsibility for servicing UNECE meetings fell squarely to UNOG and the Department of General Assembly and Conference Management (DGACM). The current restrictions had led to several negative impacts, such as meetings being shortened, postponed or cancelled entirely; lack of interpretation for non-business critical issues, additional stress for meeting chairs and secretaries arising from the

necessity to moderate the online platforms, limited interaction between member States etc. The secretariat would circulate a note with more detailed examples (*also available for reference in the EXCOM webpage*). UNECE hoped member States would consider providing supplementary funding for conference servicing to assist in holding a greater number of fully interpreted meetings with remote participation. She also encouraged member States to voice their views on the matter, so that this feedback could be conveyed to both UNOG and to the financial bodies in New York who manage the allocation of RB funds during the liquidity crisis.

Item 10 – Any other business

39. The representative of the European Union and its member States expressed readiness to engage with the survey on UNECE engagement with the private sector. As this was a complex matter and the UNECE subsidiary bodies were very diverse, she thought that informal discussions among key interested parties could facilitate the work of the secretariat.

40. The representative of Ukraine expressed dismay that UNECE had invited a speaker to the 5th UNECE International Public-Private Partnership Forum in April 2021 who was heading an institution under sanctions by his country.

41. The representative of the European Union and its member States also expressed deep disappointment at the invitation, recalling that the organization was subject to sanctions by the European Union as well. She proposed that, going forward, the secretariat scrutinize speakers to avoid possible contention in the future.

42. The representative of the Russian Federation strongly objected to the above comments. UNECE is a technical, non-political forum for expert dialogue. The extraterritorial application of national sanctions should not be a criterion for selecting participants in UNECE events.

43. The Executive Secretary assured EXCOM that UNECE respected A/RES/68/262 on the Territorial Integrity of Ukraine. She noted that the mandate of UNECE was technical in nature and sought to improve the lives of people. She encouraged continued depoliticized dialogue that had served the organization well through more than seventy years of its history.

44. The Chair informed EXCOM that its next meeting would take place on 8 July 2021 at 15:00.
