

**ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE**  
**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**  
117<sup>th</sup> Meeting  
Geneva, 8 July 2021

**EXCOM/CONCLU/117**

**CHAIR'S CONCLUSIONS**

## **FORMAL SEGMENT**

### Item 1 – Adoption of the agenda

1. The provisional draft agenda for the 117<sup>th</sup> meeting was adopted.

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

2. The conclusions from the 116<sup>th</sup> meeting of EXCOM (EXCOM/CONCLU/116) were adopted.

### Item 3 - Update on Special Procedures during the 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 October 2020, including for various subsidiary bodies of UNECE as proposed in ECE/EX/2021/L.10.

4. The Secretary of the Commission informed that, since the last meeting of EXCOM, six silent procedures had been concluded related to formal meetings with remote participation, namely the 83<sup>rd</sup> session of the Working Party on Pollution and Energy, the 157<sup>th</sup> session of the Working Party on Customs Questions affecting Transport, the 14<sup>th</sup> session of the Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships, the 72<sup>nd</sup> session of the Working Party on Transport Statistics, the 59<sup>th</sup> session of the Working Party on the Standardization of Technical and Safety Requirements in Inland Navigation, and the 184<sup>th</sup> session of the World Forum for Harmonization of Vehicle Regulations. The silence had not been broken for either of these procedures. Two silent procedures were ongoing for the 6<sup>th</sup> session of the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards and the 69<sup>th</sup> session of the Conference of European Statisticians. Full details were available on the UNECE website.

5. The representative of the European Union and its member States said the experience with the special procedures had been positive and allowed for progress in all subprogrammes. Noting that some of the extended procedures did not fully cover upcoming events and decisions, she proposed that they be extended until 31 December rather than 31 October 2021.

6. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the extension until 31 December 2021 of special procedures during the COVID-19 period, as contained in ECE/EX/2021/L.10/Rev.1.

### Item 4 - Matters relating to the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic

Business (UN/CEFACT):

a) Meeting with the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT)

7. The Chair of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT), Ms. Sue Probert, made a presentation to EXCOM on the achievements of UN/CEFACT over the past year and its plans for the future. She invited EXCOM to approve the programme of work of UN/CEFACT for 2021-2022 and the mandate and terms of reference of the Team of Specialists on Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Traceability of Sustainable Value Chains in the Circular Economy.

8. The representative of the European Union and its member States said the work of UN/CEFACT was especially relevant in light of the burden on global supply chains caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Noting that the UN/CEFACT Advisory Group on Advanced Technologies had a relatively broad mandate, she said it should focus on supporting the work of UN/CEFACT bodies in particular and look for appropriate use cases and technological solutions. In light of the European Green Deal and the adoption of circular economy as a key priority by the Commission, she proposed that the Advisory Group focus in particular on technological solutions supporting circularity. She appreciated the work of UN/CEFACT on traceability, including the project on traceability in garment value chains supported by the EU, and the activities of the Team of Specialists on Sustainable Fisheries, including on UN/FLUX. She looked forward to future work on ESG traceability in sustainable value chains.

9. The representative of the Russian Federation appreciated the outcomes of the recent UN/CEFACT plenary and welcomed Recommendation 38 on Trade Information Portals. The Russian Federation planned to use this instrument in updating the All-Russia Portal for overseas economic activity and when developing the mobile application for participants in external economic activity. He noted the successful work on Recommendation 47 and welcomed activities on enhanced traceability and transparency of sustainable value chains in garment and footwear. Monitoring traceability was an important issue for many countries in the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). He thus thought this work should be expanded. The UNECE pilot project to promote standards for electronic data exchange had been well-received by the Russian business community. The Russian Federation was rapidly building capacity in transboundary e-business and developing its own platforms for logistics and platforms, leading to a growing need for international standards for electronic communication. He called on the secretariat to actively promote the search for new standards and to renew existing standards. He saw a need to work on standards for B2G exchanges, possibly together with relevant organizations such as the World Customs Organization. He hoped for further cooperation between UN/CEFACT and the EEU and thought it important to have joint measures and to develop channels for information exchange. He supported the decisions tabled for EXCOM approval.

10. The representative of the United Kingdom said streamlining, facilitating and digitizing trade processes was vital in the context of the global recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and commended UN/CEFACT activities supporting this effort, including training. In the use of UN/CEFACT standards and the establishment of best practice and standards in areas such as Single Window and blockchain. The United Kingdom would develop its own single trade window by 2025 and would refer to relevant UN/CEFACT recommendations in that process. She appreciated the capacity-building provided to support the timely implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) and encouraged continued coordination and the

exploration of synergies with other organizations and donors in this context, with each partner focusing on their respective strengths and the sharing of best practice. She hoped UNECE would contribute to the first 4-year review of the implementation of the WTO TFA its ideas on how different stakeholders can work together. She also welcomed UN/CEFACT efforts on circular economy, including in the garment and footwear industry. The United Kingdom had recently launched consultations on a new draft waste prevention programme for England, which included textiles as one of 7 key sectors for action, and announced the development of Extended Producer Responsibility for textiles, supported by measures to encourage better design and information. The government likewise aimed to promote industry action through the voluntary agreement “Textiles 2030” which set targets for reducing the environmental footprint of the sector. She supported the decisions tabled for EXCOM approval.

11. The representative of Switzerland expressed satisfaction with the work of UN/CEFACT in the past year and recognized the importance of trade facilitation and the streamlining of procedures in the context of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. He supported the decisions tabled for EXCOM approval.

12. The Chair concluded that EXCOM thanks the Chair of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business 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 United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business

13. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the programme of work of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business as contained in document ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2021/17, for the period 2021–2022. EXCOM also approves the mandate and terms of reference of the Team of Specialists on Environmental, Social and Governance Traceability of Sustainable Value Chains in the Circular Economy of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business(UN/CEFACT), as contained in document ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2021/23/Rev.1, for the period mid–2021 mid–2023.

## **INFORMAL SEGMENT**

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

14. Further to a request by the membership made at the 109<sup>th</sup> meeting of EXCOM, the Executive Secretary presented the report of the review of the 69<sup>th</sup> Commission session carried out by the secretariat (informal document 2021/15). The review showed that the chosen theme of the high-level segment had been viewed positively and that both the participants and the UNECE sectoral committees had found it highly relevant and most useful. The theme as well as the increased participation possibilities provided by the hybrid meeting format had led to a significant rise in the number of participants as well as their level, and raised the visibility of UNECE in capitals. The secretariat had formulated recommendations for the preparation of the next Commission session based on the review results, which had been further refined by member States at an informal consultation earlier in the week and were presented to EXCOM for adoption (informal document 2021/16/Rev.1).

15. Having participated in the above-mentioned informal consultation, the representative of

the European Union and its member States expressed support for the draft decision and said she had no further comments.

16. The representative of the United Kingdom praised the Commission session, its impact and the way it had embraced the hybrid meeting format. She welcomed follow-up work related to the decisions taken at the session and supported the decision tabled for EXCOM approval. She appreciated the role of the theme in promoting synergies and collaboration across work streams. Noting that it was important not to lose the excellent momentum established on the topic of circular economy, she would welcome the selection of a complementary theme for the 70<sup>th</sup> session to build on the related work. She supported the involvement of UNECE subsidiary bodies in follow-up to the previous theme and the designation and preparations for the new theme.

17. The representative of the Russian Federation noted with satisfaction that the session and its high-level theme had been appreciated by participants. He said it would be important to designate the theme of the next session in a timely manner and supported the involvement of the bureaux of UNECE subsidiary bodies and member States in this designation. He supported the decision tabled for EXCOM approval.

18. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the draft decision on the preparation of the next Commission session as contained in informal document 2021/16/Rev.1.

#### Item 6 – Annual report on technical cooperation activities, 2020

19. The Executive Secretary presented the 2020 Annual Report on Technical Cooperation Activities to EXCOM for its information, noting that the report also contained revised resource mobilization plans for 2020-2022, pursuant to the approval of the revised Resource Mobilization Strategy by EXCOM on 29 May 2020. Overall extrabudgetary contributions had decreased by about 1 per cent in 2020 to USD 19.9 million, with 52 per cent being provided by member States and 19 per cent by the European Commission.

20. The representative of the European Union its member States noted that environment and transport, which were two important priorities for the EU, had received the largest shares of funding in 2020. The EU and its member States continued to provide about half of extrabudgetary funding. She requested a more detailed overview of the amount of funding received at the country level.

21. The representative of the Russian Federation appreciated project activities. The Russian Federation was ready to continue its financial support, in particular in the CIS region with particular attention paid to the countries of Central Asia.

22. The representative of the United States welcomed the report and said its preparation was a good practice that should be continued.

23. In response to the representative of the European Union its member States, the Secretary of the Commission explained that providing more detailed information at the country level would substantial manual computing work at the moment, but would become possible following an upcoming extension of UMOJA.

24. The Chair concluded that EXCOM takes note with appreciation of the annual report on

technical cooperation activities 2020 as contained in informal document 2021/17.

#### Item 7 – 2022 Evaluation plan (update)

25. The Executive Secretary presented an updated version of the UNECE Evaluation Workplan for 2022 to EXCOM for approval. The update reflected the evaluation of the Forum of Mayors 2022 that EXCOM had tasked the secretariat to carry out at its 112th meeting. She also sought the agreement of EXCOM to postpone the previously planned 2022 self-evaluation on the Country Profiles on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management and the smart sustainable city profiles to the next subprogramme-level evaluation of subprogramme 8, and replace it in the 2022 workplan with the evaluation of the Forum of Mayors.

26. The representative of the European Union and its member States appreciated the transparency provided on the topic and stressed the importance of evaluations and learning from past experience.

27. The representative of the Russian Federation had no objection to the proposed decision. He found the Forum of Mayors a promising platform for interaction with and between mayors and hoped that the evaluation would help improve the Forum even further.

28. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the 2022 Evaluation Plan of UNECE as contained in informal document 2020/55/Rev.1.

#### Item 8 – Extrabudgetary projects (for approval)

29. Regarding the extrabudgetary project contained in informal document 2021/19, the representative of the United States inquired what unique value the UNECE Regional Collaborative Platform (RCP) would deliver that could not be provided by New York-based coordination offices such as the UN Development Coordination Office (DCO). He also asked why UNECE had decided to use ESCWA standards for information dissemination and knowledge management.

30. The Executive Secretary explained that the RCPs were established in all UN regions to coordinate between all UN agencies active in each region. They were chaired by the Deputy-Secretary-General and vice chaired by the relevant regional director of UNDP and Regional Commission Executive Secretary. In the UNECE region, more than 25 regional UN entities participated in the RCP. The DCO, meanwhile, managed the Resident Coordinators. In response to the second question, she recalled that the regional knowledge management hub had been established pursuant to one of the recommendations in the report of the Secretary-General on the reform of the UN Development System. Each region was establishing its own hub based on its own circumstances. As UNECE did not have substantial resources to dedicate to this activity, it had chosen to use technology developed and provided free of charge by ESCWA. UNECE would still incur additional costs for uploading documents and adding Russian versions.

31. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the extrabudgetary projects contained in informal documents 2021/18, 2021/19, 2021/20 and 2021/21.

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

32. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM that the secretariat had recently joined an informal briefing of ECOSOC and presented the outcomes of the 69th Commission session, including the two decisions calling for action by ECOSOC. She hoped ECOSOC would endorse the products mentioned in these decisions and recommend their application worldwide. The secretariat had also presented to ECOSOC further clarifications on the revised Terms of Reference for the Inland Transport Committee (ITC) as endorsed by the 68th Commission session. ECOSOC had deferred consideration of this item to this year. The secretariat had clarified the global nature of the UN Transport Conventions and ITC's role in administering them, and explained that the intent of the revised Terms of Reference was to ensure that all signatories of the legal instruments had an equal opportunity to engage in related discussions at the ITC, even if they were not UNECE member States. Following these well-received explanations, she hoped for a positive consideration of these items at the ECOSOC management segment on 21-22 July. She encouraged all delegations to liaise with their counterparts in New York to request their active support during the ECOSOC deliberations.

33. 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 of the regular budget. Reduced meeting servicing support would likely continue throughout the remainder of 2021. For the third quarter of 2021, one conference room equipped for interpretation would be fully serviced by UNOG for UNECE, and another room would be made available with technical moderation carried out by UNECE staff. UNECE had rearranged its calendar of scheduled meetings accordingly for that quarter. For the fourth quarter of 2021, Conference Services would examine the UNECE request for a third meeting room with UNECE-moderated interpretation towards the end of August. UNOG had recently announced that no provisions had been made in the global Conference Management Budget for 2022 to support the additional technical requirements of hybrid meetings. This concerned the Executive Secretary as she doubted that the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic would have entirely lifted by 2022. Noting that the reduced meeting servicing impaired the delivery of UNECE mandates, she 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.

34. Regarding cooperation with other organizations, the Executive Secretary informed EXCOM that a Memorandum of Understanding with FIA was under preparation. The objective was to revitalize and digitalize the 1956 Customs Convention on the temporary importation of commercial road vehicles and the 1954 Customs Convention on the temporary importation of private road vehicles. To this end, the Parties planned to work together towards the digitalization of the "carnet de passages en douane" which both Conventions stipulated.

35. The Executive Secretary presented informal document 2021/22 on the status of the implementation by UNECE of the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy. She noted that for the 2020 reporting cycle, UNECE had been able to strengthen performance in 6 of the 10 applicable indicators. Within two years of the launch of the strategy, UNECE "met requirements" in seven categories. Further, UNECE "exceeded requirements" in its programmatic activities, thanks to the focus on inclusiveness aspects in the normative work of many subprogrammes. UNECE would continue its efforts in line with the 2021 UNECE Action Plan. The organization is also in close discussions with Conference Management and other UNOG teams to strengthen disability inclusion in all meeting planning and servicing arrangements.

36. The Chair concluded that EXCOM takes note of UNECE efforts to implement the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy as outlined in informal document 2021/22.

37. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM about the following upcoming events:
- 13-16 July, New York: High-level Political Forum
  - 22-24 September, Geneva (hybrid): 30th Session of the Committee on Sustainable Energy
  - 29 September - 01 October 2021, Geneva (hybrid): 9th session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention
  - 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

Item 10 – Any other business

38. The Chair informed EXCOM that its next meeting would take place on 15 October 2021.

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