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## Economic Commission for Europe

### Committee on Environmental Policy

#### Twenty-seventh session

Geneva, 3–5 November 2021

Item 2 of the provisional agenda

#### Outcomes of the work of the Bureau

## Outcomes of the work of the Bureau for the period January–June 2021

### Report by the Bureau of the Committee on Environmental Policy

#### *Summary*

At its twenty-sixth session (Geneva and online, 9 and 10 November 2020), the Committee on Environmental Policy requested its Bureau and the secretariat to follow up on the Committee's decisions, including by preparing the documents and reports necessary for the Committee's work at its next session in November 2021<sup>a</sup>. The present document outlines the outcomes of the Bureau's work during the period January–June 2021, with a view to supporting the Committee's work at its twenty-seventh session (Geneva, 3–5 November 2021).

<sup>a</sup> See ECE/CEP/2020/2, para. 77. Available at <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/twenty-sixth-session-committee-environmental-policy>



## Introduction

1. At its twenty-sixth session (Geneva and online, 9 and 10 November 2020), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Committee on Environmental Policy mandated its Bureau, with support from the secretariat and in cooperation with relevant stakeholders, to proceed with the necessary organization of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, including preparing, for the next session of the Committee, the following: the first drafts of the two background thematic documents; a first draft of the provisional annotated agenda for the Conference; and a new document regarding organizational issues for the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference. The Bureau was also mandated to carry out a number of activities, including to: (a) prepare the Committee's twenty-seventh session; and (b) prepare revised criteria for providing financial support for participation in meetings and events.<sup>1</sup>

2. During the intersessional period, due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the Bureau worked by means of electronic consultations, including an online meeting on 2 June 2021.

3. The Bureau of the Committee on Environmental Policy comprises the Chair, from Portugal, and Vice-Chairs, from Belarus, Belgium, Estonia, Georgia, Germany, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Switzerland and the United States of America.

## I. Provisional agenda for the Committee's twenty-seventh session

4. During its online meeting in June 2021, the Bureau considered for approval the draft provisional annotated agenda for the Committee's twenty-seventh session (ECE/CEP/2021/1) and the provisional time frame for the meeting (information paper No.1).

5. Under different agenda items of the Committee's twenty-seventh session, the Bureau took note of the information provided by the secretariat on:

- The outcomes of the twenty-third session of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment (Geneva, 4 and 5 May 2021).
- Environmental performance review activities since the twenty-sixth session of the Committee.
- Further steps in the preparation of a document detailing the recent developments, plans for the future and expected decisions by the Committee with regard to cross-sectoral activities under the auspices of the ECE Environment subprogramme (ECE/CEP/2021/4).
- The outcomes of the Fifth High-level Meeting on Transport, Health and Environment (17 and 18 May 2021).

## II. Preparation of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference

6. At its twenty-sixth session, the Committee decided to reschedule the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, including the Third High-level Meeting of Education and Environment Ministries (Nicosia), for 5–7 October 2022.<sup>2</sup>

7. In accordance with the Reform of the "Environment for Europe" process: reform plan, a decision on the agenda of the Conference should be taken at the regular meeting of the

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<sup>1</sup> See ECE/CEP/2020/2, paras. 22, 26 (c), 29, 57 and 77. Available at <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/twenty-sixth-session-committee-environmental-policy>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., para. 19 (a).

Committee approximately 12 months prior to the Conference, and further preparatory work should then commence.<sup>3</sup>

8. At its twenty-sixth session, the Committee mandated the Bureau, with support from the secretariat and in cooperation with relevant stakeholders, to prepare a first draft of the provisional annotated agenda for the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference. The Bureau at its virtual meeting on 2 June 2021 discussed the first outline of the annotated provisional agenda, invited the Bureau members to submit their written comments/proposals on the outline by Monday 14 June 2021, and agreed that, based on the inputs received from the Bureau members, the secretariat would finalize the draft and submit it as an official document of the twenty-seventh session of the Committee.

9. At its twenty-sixth session, the Committee considered draft outlines of two background thematic documents on the themes for the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference and asked:

- The Committee members to make concrete suggestions and proposals on draft outlines of two background thematic documents on the themes for the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference and send them to the secretariat by the end of 2020.
- The Bureau, with support from the secretariat and in cooperation with relevant stakeholders, to continue working to prepare, for the next regular session of the Committee, the first drafts of the two background thematic documents.<sup>4</sup>

10. The consultant contracted by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) prepared (in cooperation with the partners – ECE, UNEP and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)) an information note on the current key principles, policies and approaches of green and circular economy in the two thematic areas – sustainable infrastructure and sustainable tourism – with a view to contributing to the elaboration of the background thematic documents. The consultant presented to the Bureau, at its virtual meeting on 2 June 2021, the main contents of the information note, highlights of the opportunities available for the region and region-specific examples of challenges, as well as an identification of the next steps in further developing the information base contributing to the preparation of the thematic background papers for the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference. The Bureau discussed the information note and, in particular, provided the following comments:

- At the time of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, the COVID-19 pandemic recovery context as presented to the Bureau at its 2 June 2021 meeting might be less relevant. Infrastructures in the context of pandemic response measures (characterized by very high volumes of investment, many of which were aimed precisely at infrastructure) could be viewed more or less optimistically: if there was indeed a large investment in sustainable infrastructure, the results would be generally positive and, in the medium term, the issue of COVID-19 would become less relevant to be addressed at the Conference; if there was a massive investment in infrastructure without taking into account sustainability aspects, addressing that issue at the Conference might prove to be an added value.
- It was not negligible that the recovery and resilience plans (within the European Union) had not been subject to strategic environmental assessment.
- The focus of the paper should be more on how to make existing or planned (brown) infrastructure more sustainable (greener), and less on promoting sustainable infrastructure.

<sup>3</sup> See ECE/CEP/S/152, annex I, para. 12 (a).

<sup>4</sup> See ECE/CEP/2020/2, para. 26 (b) and (c).

- To add more information on the United Nations Environment Assembly of the United Nations Environment Programme resolution 4/5 on sustainable infrastructure and link it to the regional context.<sup>5</sup>
- To add relevant indicators on sustainable infrastructure.
- A proposal regarding a COVID-19 recovery pan-European action plan for sustainable infrastructure and road map did not look realistic.
- Introducing new tools or mechanisms (for example, a new ministerial task force) would have more disadvantages than advantages under the Environment for Europe process and was not envisaged at the current stage. Instead of establishing new machinery, it would be better to build upon the existing processes and mechanisms and explore options other than the task force.
- The use of the approach based on the theory of change was not consensual, at least as a single methodology to be used in a study or evaluation, and it was advisable to envisage hybrid or mixed approaches, that was to say, also using other methodologies, such as counterfactual methodology, in the sustainable tourism part to better reflect the 10 Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns, integrated coastal zone management, best practices on sustainable tourism and other existing processes and mechanisms.

11. The Bureau agreed on the next steps:

- The Bureau members might submit (by Monday 14 June 2021) their more detailed comments/proposals on the information note in writing if they so wished.
- Based on the inputs received, the UNEP consultant would further revise/develop the paper (by 30 June 2021).

12. At its twenty-fifth session (Geneva, 13–15 November 2019), the Committee requested the secretariat and UNEP, working in close cooperation with the European Environment Agency, to prepare a limited indicator-based and thematic assessment,<sup>6</sup> subject to the availability of resources. At its twenty-sixth session, the Committee requested the secretariat to continue to inform the Bureau of progress made.<sup>7</sup> The Bureau at its virtual meeting on 2 June 2021 took note of the information provided on progress in preparation of a limited indicator-based and thematic pan-European environmental assessment.

13. At its twenty-fifth session, the Committee considered the document regarding organizational issues for the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (ECE/CEP/2019/19) and recommended reducing the maximum size of delegations for the Conference by 20 per cent.<sup>8</sup> At its twenty-sixth session, the Committee asked the Bureau, with support from the secretariat, to prepare for the next session of the Committee a new document regarding organizational issues for the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference taking into account the new dates of the Conference (5–7 October 2022).<sup>9</sup> The Bureau at its virtual meeting on 2 June 2021 took note of the draft document prepared by the secretariat regarding organizational issues for the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (ECE/CEP/2021/7) and agreed to submit it as an official document of the twenty-seventh session of the Committee with no further revision.

14. The Bureau at its virtual meeting on 2 June 2021 took note of the preliminary list of documents and materials for the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference compiled by the secretariat and agreed on the next steps:

- The secretariat would prepare a zero draft of the ministerial declaration and circulate it among the Bureau members at the beginning of September.

<sup>5</sup> See UNEP/EA.4/Res.5, available at <https://www.unep.org/environmentassembly/proceedings-report-ministerial-declaration-resolutions-and-decisions-unea-4>.

<sup>6</sup> See ECE/CEP/2019/15, para. 37 (k) (ii).

<sup>7</sup> See ECE/CEP/2020/2, para. 38 (f).

<sup>8</sup> See ECE/CEP/2019/15, para. 27 (d).

<sup>9</sup> See ECE/CEP/2020/2, paras. 28 and 29.

- The Bureau would discuss the draft at its next virtual meeting, to be held in the week of 20 September.
- Based on the inputs received from the Bureau, the secretariat would finalize the draft and submit it as an information document of the twenty-seventh session of the Committee.

15. The Bureau at its virtual meeting on 2 June 2021 took note of the information provided on the ongoing preparations for the hosting of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, discussed the different formats of the Conference (A. Fully in-person, B. Hybrid (limited number of high-level delegates in-person plus others connected virtually), C. Fully virtual) and agreed to aim for plan A, while continually monitoring the situation regarding the development of the pandemic in Cyprus and, if needed, to provide plan B to the Special Session of the Committee (10–12 May 2022) (if needed, the Committee at its twenty-seventh session could take such a decision formally).

### **III. Criteria for financial support for participation in meetings and events**

16. At its twenty-sixth session, the Committee decided to continue using the criteria for financial support for participation in meetings and events approved at its twenty-fifth session for another year, and requested the Bureau, with support from the secretariat, to periodically verify the availability of data for 2019 and, if available for all countries with economies in transition, to prepare revised criteria for financial support for approval by the Committee at its next session.<sup>10</sup> The Bureau asked the secretariat to verify the availability of data for 2019 and to report to the Bureau on the matter at its next virtual meeting in September 2021.

### **IV. Annual programme of work of the Environment subprogramme for 2022 and outline of key components of the programme of work of the Environment subprogramme for 2023**

17. At its twenty-sixth session, the Committee requested the Bureau to address the issue of timing in the definition of the programme of work and to oversee the appropriate balance with regard to its activities.<sup>11</sup>

18. The ECE Executive Committee at its 112th meeting (Geneva, 14 December 2020) discussed preparation of the draft programmes of work at the sectoral committees. Member States then requested that steps be taken to ensure that, when considering their draft programmes of work for the next year, sectoral governing bodies could also provide recommendations on key elements of their future programmes of work. That way, those recommendations could be reflected in the draft ECE proposed programme plan to be presented to the Executive Committee in December of 2021.<sup>12</sup> As a follow-up to that request, the ECE secretariat developed a document entitled “Sequential review of the proposed programmes of work of ECE subprogrammes” (informal document 2021/8),<sup>13</sup> which was approved by the Executive Committee at its 115th meeting on 5 March 2021.<sup>14</sup>

19. In line with the sequential review procedure, the Committee will be invited to adopt the draft annual programme of work of the Environment subprogramme for 2022 (ECE/CEP/2021/5) and to consider the “Outline of key components of the programme of

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., para. 57.

<sup>11</sup> See ECE/CEP/2020/2, para. 60.

<sup>12</sup> Chair’s conclusions, 115th meeting of the Executive Committee of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (EXCOM/CONCLU/115), para. 36. Available at <https://unece.org/116th-excom-meeting-17-may-2021>.

<sup>13</sup> Available at <https://unece.org/115th-excom-meeting-5-march-2021>.

<sup>14</sup> Chair’s conclusions, 115th meeting of the Executive Committee of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (EXCOM/CONCLU/115), para. 39.

work of the Environment subprogramme for 2023” (Information paper No. 9) and to provide recommendations on those components, as necessary. Those recommendations agreed by the Committee and included in its decisions will be reflected in the proposed programme of work of the Environment subprogramme for 2023.

20. The Bureau at its virtual meeting on 2 June 2021 took note of the draft annual programme of work of the Environment subprogramme for 2022 (ECE/CEP/2021/5) and agreed to submit it as an official document of the twenty-seventh session of the Committee with no further revision. The Bureau also took note of the information provided on further steps in the preparation of the outline of key components of the programme of work of the Environment subprogramme for 2023.

## **V. Calendar of meetings**

21. The Bureau agreed to have its next virtual meeting in the week of 20 September 2021. The secretariat will check the availability of Bureau members through Doodle poll to select the exact date.

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