

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
118th Meeting
Geneva, 15 October 2021

EXCOM/CONCLU/118

CHAIR'S CONCLUSIONS

FORMAL SEGMENT

Item 1 – Adoption of the agenda.

1. The provisional draft agenda for the 118th meeting was adopted.

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

2. The conclusions from the 117th meeting of EXCOM (EXCOM/CONCLU/117) 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, and also that these procedures had been extended until 31 December 2021 at the last meeting of EXCOM.

4. The Secretary of the Commission informed that, since the last meeting of EXCOM, nine silent procedures had been concluded related to formal meetings with remote participation, namely the 6th session of the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards and the 69th session of the Conference of European Statisticians, 38th session of the ADN Safety Committee, the 1st session of the Group of Experts on drafting new legal instruments on the use of automated vehicles in traffic, the 74th session of the Working Party on Noise and Tyres, the 34th annual session of the Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics, the 83rd session of the Global Forum for Road Traffic Safety, the 11th session of the Working Party on Automated/Autonomous and Connected Vehicles, and the 82nd session of the Committee on Housing, Urban Development and Land Management. The silence had not been broken for any of these procedures. Full details were available on the UNECE website.

5. The representative of the European Union and its member States appreciated the special procedures and their implementation by the secretariat, which had allowed for continuous progress. Noting that that the budget for 2022 might not include funding for hybrid meetings as a general norm, she proposed that an informal consultation be held in November with the participation of relevant colleagues from Conference Services to allow for a more detailed assessment of the situation and possible contingency planning. The Chair proposed to discuss the matter under AOB (*see also para 60-62*)

Item 4 - Matters relating to the Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships:

a) Meeting with the Chair of the Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships.

6. The Chair of the Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships (CICPPP), Mr. Stefano Firpo, made a presentation to EXCOM on the

achievements of CICPPP over the past year and its plans for the future. He invited EXCOM to approve the programme of work of the Economic Cooperation and Integration (ECI) Subprogramme for 2021, the programme of work of the ECI Subprogramme for 2022 and the renewal of the mandate of the Team of Specialists on Innovation and Competitive Policies.

7. The representative of Kyrgyzstan appreciated the contributions of UNECE to the sustainable development of public-private partnership (PPP) mechanisms in Kyrgyzstan. The country was implementing the guiding principles for People-first PPPs and considered creating value for the population as an obligatory component of PPPs. With UNECE support, Kyrgyzstan had developed methodological documents for PPP preparation and was working on an IT platform to provide access to these tools for various stakeholders. He appreciated that Kyrgyzstan had been chosen for the implementation of the People-first PPP Evaluation Methodology and expressed the interest of Kyrgyzstan in continuing collaboration and in learning from the experience of other countries.

8. The representative of the Republic of Moldova said her country had benefited from the national and subregional UNECE reviews of innovation policy. She noted that assessment of innovation performance was important as it helped identify mismatches and embrace a more visionary and sustainable structural transformation, and underlined the importance of having the necessary extrabudgetary funding to ensure the implementation of the recommendations from the UNECE innovation reviews. She agreed with Mr. Firpo on the importance of cross-sectoral cooperation as well as cooperation with relevant partners such as WIPO.

9. The representative of the Russian Federation appreciated the outcomes of the 14th session of the CICPPP. He took note of the national and subregional innovation reviews carried out during the reporting period as well as of the work on PPPs, including the International Forum on PPPs. He supported the decisions tabled for EXCOM approval. He had a number of comments on the draft Rules of Procedure submitted for approval to the forthcoming session of and proposed that the secretariat organize informal consultations ahead of that session to discuss these comments with interested delegations.

10. The representative of the European Union and its member States appreciated the emphasis on circularity and sustainability across the ECI subprogramme and encouraged pursuit of further areas of cooperation in this context. She expressed interest in seeing closer collaboration between the Team of Specialists on Innovation and Competitiveness Policies and the Working Party on PPPs, especially in areas of convergence such as green procurement and PPPs for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Regarding the above-mentioned draft Rules of Procedure, she highlighted that the Bureau of the Working Party on PPPs was not mandated to take decisions on behalf of the Working Party. Some of the proposals in the draft document seemed unprecedented. She therefore requested that the draft Rules of Procedure be submitted to the Office of Legal Affairs for a legal opinion. She requested an update on the extrabudgetary project approved by EXCOM in March 2021 called “Strengthening national capacities of the UNECE member States to design and implement People-first sustainable Public Private Partnerships (PPP) in infrastructure along the Euro-Asian Connectivity Strategy.”

11. The representative of Georgia appreciated the national innovation review of Georgia as well as the Sub-regional Innovation Policy Outlook. Georgia had already started the implementation of the recommendations from the national review on innovation procurement, with UNECE support. Georgia was ready to collaborate further on innovation and to share its experience with other countries.

12. The representative of Belarus expressed satisfaction with the work of the Committee in the past year and noted the usefulness of its practical outcomes such as the Sub-regional Innovation Policy Outlook and the guidelines on People-first PPPs. He thought the International Forum on PPPs was a good practice that should be continued. He supported the decisions tabled for EXCOM approval.

13. The representative of Uzbekistan said that Uzbekistan prioritized innovation and science as main drivers of sustainable economic and social growth. National reforms had led to the adoption of various documents including a national strategy for innovative development. Under the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA), Uzbekistan supported the work on strengthening connectivity, resilience, and a more integrated approach towards structural economic transformation to accelerate SDG implementation, as well as the SPECA Innovation Strategy. He appreciated the work carried out by UNECE on the national innovation review of Uzbekistan and hoped that, once completed, donor countries would provide financial support for the implementation of the recommendations to be contained therein.

14. The representative of Switzerland expressed satisfaction with the work of the Committee in the past year as well as its focus on sustainability and circular economy. Regarding the draft Rules of Procedure, he thought it important to ensure coherence with other regulations across the organization.

15. The representative of Greece aligned himself with the position expressed by the representative of the European Union and its member States. Regarding the draft Rules of Procedure, he supported the proposal by the representative of the Russian Federation for an informal consultation and said that good governance in all UNECE bodies was paramount. He hoped that the concession model law would be one of the outcomes of the upcoming session of the Working Party on PPPs, in line with the intersessional implementation plan. He appreciated the holistic focus on circular economy across the ECI subprogramme and the inclusion of a session dedicated to circular economy at the meeting of the Working Party on PPPs.

16. The Chair said the secretariat would follow up on the requests for an informal consultation among member States as well as advice from the Office of Legal Affairs regarding the draft Rules of Procedure. She concluded that EXCOM thanks the Chair of the Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships 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 Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships:

17. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the programme of work of the Economic Cooperation and Integration subprogramme for 2021 as contained in ECE/EX/2021/L.13, and for 2022 as contained in ECE/CECI/2021/9. EXCOM also approves the renewal of the mandate of the Team of Specialists on Innovation and Competitive Policies, as contained in document ECE/CECI/2021/2, for 2022–2023.

Item 5 - Matters relating to the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards:

a) Meeting with the Chair of the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards.

18. The Chair of the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards (SCTCS), Ms. Damegul Kabiyeva, made a presentation to EXCOM on the achievements of SCTCS over the past two years, noting that no reporting had taken place in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as on the Steering Committee's plans for the future. She invited EXCOM to approve the programme of work for 2022 of the Trade subprogramme as well as the programmes of work for 2021 of the Working Parties on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies and on Agricultural Quality Standards.

19. The representative of the European Union and its member States appreciated the cooperation on the Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative. She hoped for closer cooperation between SCTCS and the UN Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT). A number of areas could benefit from cross-cutting discussions and collaboration, and perhaps these bodies could organize some sessions back-to-back. She underlined that cross-sectoral collaboration in UNECE should focus on existing work and not put additional pressure on areas where the secretariat had only limited human resources.

20. The representative of Uzbekistan said his government attached great importance to the implementation of international standards to improve the quality of products and services, ensure safety, and enter international markets. Thanks to the implementation of the standards for dried melon, investments in modern drying equipment in Uzbekistan and consequently, related exports and employment opportunities, had increased. In 2021, a study on regulatory and procedural barriers to trade in Uzbekistan had been initiated together with UNECE. He believed this would improve the legal framework for trade and increase trade volumes, including among the SPECA countries.

21. The representative of the Russian Federation supported the work the SCTCS, including the study on regulatory and procedural barriers to trade in Serbia and the assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on trade and structural reforms in Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Serbia. He believed the work of the Steering Committee would contribute to the implementation of the outcomes of the 69th session of UNECE and supported the decisions tabled for EXCOM approval.

22. The representative of Germany aligned himself with the position expressed by the representative of the European Union and its member States. He appreciated the work carried out by the SCTCS and the excellent outcomes of Working Party 7, with the support of the Secretariat, which he was confident would prevail also in the future. He noted that cross-cutting initiatives should focus on existing work and foster cross-sectoral collaboration. He supported the decision of the 69th Commission session to involve all relevant UNECE subsidiary bodies in such collaboration. He emphasized that the subordinate bodies should decide whether their core mandate and sector specific work would not be impaired from cross-programme collaboration. Such collaboration should take place within existing resources.

23. The representative of the United Kingdom supported the decisions tabled for EXCOM approval. She expressed satisfaction with the contributions of SCTCS to the follow up on the high-level theme of the 69th session, such as the work on reducing food loss and waste and regulatory and procedural barriers to trade. Noting that the rapid development of technologies and industries presented new challenges in the use of standards to achieve policy goals, the Working Party's focus on promoting an agile, inclusive, and open system of standards and regulations, with strong public-private collaboration, was timely. The United Kingdom fully supported the Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative, which was a good example of where

Working Party 6 can play leading role in collaboration with standards development organisations and other stakeholders to promote standards as a tool for SDGs and gender equality.

24. The representative of Belarus appreciated satisfaction with the work of the SCTCS. He commended the work of Working Party 6 on risk assessment and gender equality. He also appreciated the work carried out in Belarus by the SCTCS on the impact of COVID-19, the collaboration with the UN Environment Programme and other UN organizations on circular economy, and the focus of UN/CEFACT on paperless trade procedures.

25. The representative of Georgia appreciated the UNECE study on regulatory and procedural barriers to trade in Georgia and appreciated the action-oriented recommendations contained therein. Georgia was currently working on data relating to non-tariff measures (NTMs), the integration of this data into UNCTAD global databases, and developing national expert capacity.

26. The Chair concluded that EXCOM thanks the Chair of the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards 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 Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards:

27. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the programme of work of subprogramme 6 on Trade for 2022 as contained in document ECE/CTCS/2021/7; the programme of work of the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies for 2021 as contained in document ECE/CTCS/WP.6/2020/10; and the programme of work of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards for 2021 as contained in document ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2020/3.

INFORMAL SEGMENT

Item 6 – Preparations for the seventieth session of the Economic Commission for Europe

28. The Chair presented informal document 2021/25//Rev.1 and its two addenda, containing proposals for the cross-cutting theme of the high-level segment of the 70th Commission session which the Bureau had gathered pursuant to a request made by EXCOM at its previous meeting. She noted that the majority of the proposals fell under four thematic clusters (digital transformation, climate action/green transition/ carbon neutrality, sustainable infrastructure, connectivity/mobility). These themes were relevant to the mandates of broad groups of UNECE subsidiary bodies, had substantive cross-cutting aspects, and matched other considerations noted by member States, such as linkages with the previous theme of circular economy and sustainable use of natural resources, the importance of data, and the need to consider sustainable development in the region even beyond the scope of Agenda 2030. The Bureau encouraged EXCOM to deliberate on the basis of the four clusters. The Chair recalled that an informal consultation had taken place on this topic the previous week.

29. The Secretary of the Commission briefed EXCOM about the outcomes of this informal

consultation. Member States had expressed a wish for the Bureau to formulate the next round of consolidated proposals, to be discussed at an informal consultation, with a view to adopt a theme at the EXCOM meeting on 16 December 2021. She recalled that the secretariat had circulated the proposal of the representative of the European Union and its member States following the informal consultation.

30. The representative of the Russian Federation said the chosen theme should be relevant for the region, correspond to the capacity and instruments of UNECE and not duplicate efforts undertaken other multilateral platforms. He thought that the proposal by Slovenia (“Closing the digital gap in the UNECE region to promote pan European economic integration”) corresponded to these criteria. He was ready to participate in further informal consultations with a view to adopting a theme at the next meeting of EXCOM.

31. The representative of Belarus said that the chosen theme should correspond to the mandate of UNECE, strengthen intersectoral cooperation within the organization and with other relevant partners, and link to the previous theme on circular economy. As several delegations had expressed interest in both the digital transformation and the climate action/green transition clusters during the informal consultations, he thought that a consolidated proposal based on these could be formulated.

32. The representative of Slovakia supported the proposal to create a consolidated proposal incorporating digital economy and green transition. This would allow for follow-up to the previous theme of circular economy and connect to the Forum of Mayors, namely to its focus on smart technologies.

33. The representative of the European Union and its member States recalled that their proposal had been circulated following the informal consultations. She looked forward to further constructive informal consultations.

34. The Executive Secretary said she was glad to see EXCOM maintain a focus on cross-sectoral issues. The proposals submitted so far could allow for rich discussions and were compatible enough to allow for the formulation of a composite theme. Highlighting the digital transformation cluster, she recalled that the Secretary-General had launched his Roadmap for Digital Cooperation in 2020 and said that UNECE could contribute a lot to the implementation of this Roadmap, especially on the “Inclusive Digital Economy and Society” prong. Should member States pick a theme that related to digitalization, UNECE would be happy to intensify its work in support of this global document.

35. The Chair concluded that EXCOM thanks the secretariat for the information on the preparations for 70th Commission session and welcomes the comprehensive and inclusive process undertaken to solicit proposals for a theme of the high-level segment. In particular, it thanks delegations and Chairs of the sectoral Committees and subsidiary bodies reporting directly to EXCOM for their contributions. EXCOM affirms its intention to designate a cross-cutting theme for the high-level segment of the 70th session of UNECE at its next meeting.

Item 7 - Preparations for the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, 2022

36. The Executive Secretary presented informal document 2021/26 on the preparations for the Regional Forum 2022 (RFSD). She highlighted that extrabudgetary resources would be needed to backstop the meeting, including possible remote access formats, and encouraged governments to submit their pledges in November 2021 in order to allow for a project proposal

to be tabled in the next EXCOM. In order to discuss the different scenarios presented and start shaping the agenda for the substantive discussions of the Forum, she proposed that the secretariat could convene informal consultations on 22 October. She also encouraged delegations to consult with their capital on providing a chairperson for the Regional Forum.

37. The representative of the European Union its member States appreciated the well-organized participatory process for the preparation of the RFSD in the previous years and expressed her readiness to engage in further consultations. She hoped the 2022 session would have at least some portions with physical attendance, with additional options to connect virtually.

38. The representative of the Russian Federation said it was important to continue aligning the RFSD with the High-level Political Forum. He said the most realistic format was most likely a hybrid plenary session and virtual peer-learning roundtables. He was ready to participate in further consultations.

39. The representative of Switzerland said his government attached great importance to the event, as also witnessed by its previous financial contributions. He noted that the epidemiological situation might necessitate a hybrid format. Regarding the additional financial requirements this would cause, he said he would consult with his capital on a possible contribution.

40. The Chair concluded that EXCOM thanks the secretariat for the information on the preparations for the 2022 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development and looks forward to further updates. EXCOM requests the secretariat to launch a process of informal consultations with the aim to develop the format and the provisional agenda of the 2022 Regional Forum, to be submitted to its 119th meeting.

Item 8 – Preparations for the Forum of Mayors.

41. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM about the status of preparations for the 2022 Forum of Mayors, to be held back-to-back with the 2022 RFSD to link local and national actions supporting SDG implementation. The secretariat would invite a mayor from each member State and had circulated a draft list of mayors to delegations, with invitations to be sent shortly.

42. The Director of the Forest, Land and Housing Division provided further information on the logistics of the Forum of Mayors. She highlighted that all UNECE divisions were contributing to the Steering Committee for the event. Other Regional Commissions had expressed interest in possibly reproducing the Forum of Mayors in their regions and each would be sending two mayors from their regions to the event.

43. The representative of the European Union and its member States appreciated the alignment of the themes of the RFSD and the Forum of Mayors and the possibility to explore further synergies.

44. The Chair concluded that EXCOM thanks the secretariat for the information on the preparations for the 2022 Forum of Mayors.

Item 9 – Extrabudgetary projects (for approval).

45. Regarding the extrabudgetary project on hydrogen contained in informal document 2021/27, the representative of Slovakia informed EXCOM about a conference on hydrogen technologies in transport (Bratislava, 9-10 December 2021). The event would be co-organized by the Slovak National Office for Intellectual Property and WIPO and would examine the nexus between intellectual property and new technologies.

46. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the extrabudgetary projects contained in informal documents 2021/27 and 2021/28.

Item 10 - Briefing by the Executive Secretary: Important new developments and key upcoming events.

47. Regarding cooperation with other organizations, the Executive Secretary informed EXCOM of Memoranda of Understanding under preparation: With the Geneva Cities Hub to facilitate the organization of the 2022 Forum of Mayors and the Annual SDG 11 Day; with the International Road Union (long-standing partner of UNECE for the operationalization of the TIR Convention) to implement the Annex 11 of the TIR Convention, which establishes the eTIR procedure; and with the following twelve partners to establish Centers of Excellence on High Performance Buildings and improve energy efficiency in buildings in the UNECE region in line with decisions taken at the 69th Commission session:

- i. Construction Scotland Innovation Centre (Scotland)
- ii. High Performance Building Alliance (Ireland)
- iii. High Performance Buildings Initiative Secretariat (Ireland)
- iv. South West College Innotech Center (Northern Ireland/UK)
- v. Passive House Institute (Germany)
- vi. Hellenic Passive House Institute (Greece)
- vii. ZEPHIR Passivhaus Italia (Italy)
- viii. Building Innovation Hub (United States)
- ix. Onion Flats HPB Strategy (United States)
- x. EnEffect (Bulgaria)
- xi. Passivhaus Canada (Canada)
- xii. Passivhaus Trust (UK)

48. The Executive Secretary recalled that the 68th Commission session had approved Terms of Reference for the Inland Transport Committee (ITC) which had been sent to ECOSOC for consideration. ECOSOC had repeatedly deferred consideration of this item, including at its latest session in July 2021. This time, however, there was a timeline included in the decision that foresaw consideration of the item before the end of the year. She highlighted that strong support from UNECE delegations in New York could help to open direct discussions, and possibly negotiations on language revisions. She proposed the formation of a virtual core group to deliberate on the way forward, composed jointly of Geneva- and New York-based delegations, with the participation of the Chair and Bureau of the ITC. A documentation package with key reference materials was available on the EXCOM webpage. A first step to engage further with New York could be for UNECE member States to propose that an ECOSOC Bureau meeting be convened at the working level with invitation of a “UNECE contact group”. As plenary meetings of all ECOSOC members had yielded limited success thus far, smaller scale discussions, e. g. with each regional group, could be a subsequent step to

open negotiations on the way forward. To that end, she encouraged delegations to actively engage with their counterparts in New York, and possibly participate virtually in the process.

49. The representative of the European Union and its member States expressed her disappointment that ECOSOC had not endorsed the ITC Terms of Reference over its past three cycles. She proposed an informal exchange of views among the UNECE membership as soon as possible and before the expected consultations in New York. Furthermore, as the ECOSOC Bureau could not meet until a vice chair from the eastern European region had been nominated, she hoped the Bureau would be completed rather soon.

50. In her capacity as vice-chair of the ITC, the representative of France noted that there was a lack of understanding at ECOSOC as to the practical implications of the revised Terms of Reference. She expressed her readiness to engage in Geneva and to liaise with her counterparts in New York in the hopes of finding a pragmatic solution.

51. The representative of Switzerland attached great importance to this issue and supported the way forward proposed by the Executive Secretary. He noted that it would be important to show flexibility to bridge the gap.

52. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM about the following recent events:

- 14-16 July, Tashkent: mission to Uzbekistan to launch the 3rd Environmental Performance Review of Uzbekistan and for the International Conference “Central and South Asia: Regional Connectivity. Challenges and Opportunities”
- 22-24 September, Geneva: 30th Session of the Committee on Sustainable Energy
- 29 September - 01 October 2021, Geneva): 9th session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention
- 6-8 October, Geneva: UNECE Ministerial Meeting on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management and the 82nd session of the Committee on Housing, Urban Development and Land Management
- 12 October, Geneva: Ministerial Meeting on Forest Landscape Restoration and the ECCA30/Bonn Challenge in Eastern and South-East Europe
- 12-13 October, Moscow: Mission to Moscow for the Russian Energy Week

53. Regarding the 9th session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention, the Executive Secretary highlighted an extrabudgetary activity of the Protocol on Water and Health that was part of UNECE’s COVID response activities. She had approved the project “Improving water, sanitation, hygiene and health through implementation of the programme of work of the Protocol on Water and Health”, funded by the Russian Federation for the period 1 October 2021 – 31 December 2023. It was compliant with the Programme of Work of the Protocol on Water and Health for 2020-2022. The main objective of the project was to strengthen capacity of Central Asia, Eastern Europe and the Caucasus to set and/or implement water, sanitation and health targets under the Protocol on Water and Health, with a view to strengthening resilience against COVID-19 and other infectious diseases.

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

- 18-22 October, Geneva: Seventh session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention and fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on PRTRs
- 1-12 November, Glasgow: COP 26, including a UNECE side event on high performance buildings
- 3-5 November, Geneva: 27th session of the Committee on Environmental Policy

- 22-25 November, Rome: Foresta2021 - Joint Session of the ECE Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry and the FAO European Forestry Commission
- 20-22 February 2022, 75th anniversary session of the Inland Transport Committee

55. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM that the Office of Internal Oversight Services had concluded in October an audit of mainstreaming of the SDGs and COVID-19 response into the programme of work of the UNECE. The final report would be made public in the coming days. OIOS had concluded that UNECE had taken steps to address the COVID-19 response as provided for in its framework to help member States achieve sustainable recovery. Further details about accepted recommendations would be provided during the next meeting of EXCOM.

56. The Chair concluded that EXCOM thanks the secretariat for the updates on the most recent decisions of ECOSOC related to the work of UNECE. In order to facilitate further consideration by ECOSOC of the revised draft Terms of Reference of the Inland Transport Committee at its 2022 session, EXCOM encourages interested delegations to form a contact group, composed jointly of Geneva- and NY-based representatives, and with the participation of the ITC Bureau. EXCOM requests the UNECE secretariat to engage with the ECOSOC Bureau to ascertain next steps planned on the item and to convey the readiness of the contact group to engage directly.

Item 11 – Any other business

57. The representative of Italy recalled that Italy would host the UNECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing in 2022 and invited all member States to a briefing on the event on 25 October 2021, to be co-chaired by the Permanent Representative of Italy.

58. The representative of the European Union and its member States recalled previous EXCOM conclusions on consultation and possible harmonization on potential conflicts of interest, and requested an update on the topic.

59. The Executive Secretary responded that the evaluation “Review of United Nations Economic Commission for Europe engagement with the private sector” had been completed. It would soon be published on the UNECE website and she would brief EXCOM at an upcoming meeting on the document and the management response. The evaluation addressed the aspect of “conflict of interest”. She looked forward to joint consideration of the evaluation to plan additional steps, as appropriate.

60. Regarding conference servicing, the Chair recalled the Note Verbale of 4 October 2021 issued by the Director General of UNOG to Geneva-based delegations. She noted with concern that the meeting servicing capacity would again be reduced, with hybrid meetings being limited to 2 hours if remote participation exceeded 30 minutes. There were currently no provisions in the regular budget to fund technical support of hybrid meetings. Due to the depletion of the global market for freelance interpreters, effective 1 November 2021, the duration of hybrid and virtual meetings with interpretation would revert to two hours whenever active remote participation exceeded 30 minutes. She said that the constraints in UNOG conference servicing support had led to significant service shortfalls for UNECE and triggered a high volume of additional workload for staff. The situation was further exacerbated by the renovation work under the Strategic Heritage Plan. She requested the Executive Secretary and delegations to share views on the way forward. She was willing to hold informal consultations on this matter.

With regard to the upcoming EXCOM meetings, she encouraged delegations to participate in person as much as possible to retain the three hours of interpretation.

61. The Executive Secretary expressed concern regarding the impact on programme delivery of the continuous reprogramming of meetings necessitated by the changing conference servicing limitations, the lack of contingency planning for early 2022, and the lack of funding beyond 2021 of hybrid/virtual meeting components serviced by UNOG. She urged member States to strongly make their views known on this matter at the relevant discussions in New York and suggested an informal consultation between interested delegations and UNOG. This would help member States to provide feedback on their views and strongly signal the need for resumption of the full service envelope that is mandated and required for UNECE.

62. The representative of the Netherlands suggested to first hold informal consultations among the UNECE membership only, as he had several technical questions he wished answered before engaging with UNOG and New York.

63. The Chair agreed that this was a useful suggestion and said that the informal consultations would be organized accordingly.

64. The Chair informed EXCOM that its next meeting would take place on 16 December 2021.
