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## Economic Commission for Europe

### Committee on Environmental Policy

#### Special session

Geneva, 9–12 May 2022

Item 3 (g) of the provisional agenda

#### **Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference: proposed Conference outcomes**

## **Draft Ministerial Declaration of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference\***

### **Note by the Bureau of the Committee with support from the secretariat**

#### *Summary*

The Reform Plan of the “Environment for Europe” process (ECE/CEP/S/152, annex I, and Corr.1) adopted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Committee on Environmental Policy in 2009, and subsequently endorsed by ECE, mandated the Committee to act as the convening body for the preparatory processes for the Environment for Europe ministerial conferences.

The Reform Plan states that the Conference outcomes might include an agreed outcome of two pages on follow-up and further actions strictly limited, in terms of scope, to the themes of the Conference.

At its twenty-sixth session, (Geneva (hybrid), 9 and 10 November 2020), 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>a</sup>.

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 and asked the secretariat to prepare a zero draft of the ministerial declaration and circulate it among the Bureau members.

The Bureau, at its virtual meeting on 20 September 2021, took note of the zero draft of the ministerial declaration prepared by the secretariat and agreed on the next steps:

- The Bureau members might submit (by 8 October 2021) their written comments/proposals on the draft.
- Based on the inputs received from the Bureau members, the secretariat would finalize the draft and submit it as an information paper of the twenty-seventh session of the Committee (Geneva (hybrid), 3–5 November 2021).

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\* This document was submitted late owing to additional time required for its finalization.

At its twenty-seventh session, the Committee approved the general framework and structure of the proposed elements for the draft ministerial declaration, as contained in information paper No. 12<sup>b</sup>, and invited the Bureau, with support from the secretariat, to further develop the draft of the ministerial declaration, based on comments and revisions to the draft in track changes received by 31 December 2021 from Committee members and observers, and to submit it as an official document to the Committee at its special session in May 2022.

As at 3 February 2022, comments had been received from nine member States (Belarus, Cyprus, Czechia, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, the Republic of Moldova and Sweden) and the joint Bureau of the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context and the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment.

The Bureau, at its online meeting on 3 February 2022, took note of the comments and revisions received by the secretariat on the first draft of the ministerial declaration and agreed on the next steps:

- The secretariat would ensure that all comments and revisions received by the time of the Bureau meeting were included in the draft text and send it to the Chair (by 4 February 2022).
- The Chair would work on the text and send the second draft of the declaration to the secretariat (by 10 February 2022).
- The secretariat, under the guidance of the Chair, would finalize the second draft and submit it for editing and formatting (by 21 February 2022) and then for processing (including translation) as an official document (ECE/CEP/S/2022/4) of the special session of the Committee (by 28 February 2022).

The present document was prepared in accordance with the above mandate. The Committee will be invited to work on the draft ministerial declaration with a view to submitting it to the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference for adoption.

<sup>a</sup> ECE/CEP/2020/2, para. 19 (a).

<sup>b</sup> Available at <https://unece.org/environmental-policy/events/27th-session-committee-environmental-policy> under “Information documents” tab.

## Draft Ministerial Declaration

1. We, the ministers and heads of delegation from [number] countries of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region and the representative of the European Commission meeting in Nicosia from 5 to 7 October 2022 in the framework of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, make the following declaration.
2. We fully recognize the seriousness of the challenges facing our planet and our region, also in the light of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, and we stress that the task of finding successful solutions to these grave challenges calls for a joint and coordinated response that can only be achieved through close international cooperation, including through the use of existing international cooperation platforms, such as the “Environment for Europe” process.
3. We reaffirm our commitment to improving environmental protection and advancing sustainable development in the ECE region, contributing to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We recognize that greening the economy is critical for the achievement of all Sustainable Development Goals and reconfirm our commitments made in Batumi, Georgia. In this regard, infrastructure development and tourism are among the major sectors concerned and it is therefore critical to ensure that environmental, social and health concerns are fully considered and addressed within them, and disaster risks identified and mitigated.
4. We confirm the value of the “Environment for Europe” process as a unique pan-European platform for addressing environmental challenges, improving environmental governance, promoting environmental and cross-sectoral cooperation and information-sharing among countries, and as a pillar of sustainable development in the region with a 31-year-long proven track record of important and tangible achievements the result of cooperation among all stakeholders. It has shown itself to be capable of driving progress in overcoming known challenges and of welcoming measures to support countries to face new challenges, transforming itself according to the needs of the region.
5. We recognize the important role that sustainable infrastructure plays in the green economy transition. We underline that sustainable infrastructure should be at the core of green economy policies and commitments, also playing a central role in COVID-19 pandemic recovery plans. A systemic, inclusive and resilient approach is required for different types of infrastructure planning and management. We will explore the way forward for the pan-European region, including through innovation and nature-based solutions and working with the private sector. The future region-wide approach to sustainable infrastructure should provide the basis for common goals, targets and criteria for policymaking, performance monitoring and replicability of practices that best suit domestic and transboundary needs. We will promote effective, safe and inclusive public participation as an essential prerequisite for good governance of infrastructure development and building a sustainable future for present and subsequent generations, using proven tools such as environmental impact assessment and strategic environmental assessment. We also recognize the need for a common understanding of sustainable and safe infrastructure and of how to quantify progress across countries, together with the need to strengthen transboundary cooperation to address technological and environmental risks and prevent adverse impacts
6. We also recognize that applying principles of circular economy to sustainable tourism through multi-stakeholder cooperation and effective public participation is critical for building back better the tourism sector – one of the sectors most affected by the pandemic in the pan-European region. We will promote the transformation of the tourism sector by implementing programmes and projects oriented to applying circular models in the tourism value chain, including more sustainable consumption and production. We will support efforts to reduce energy use and greenhouse gas emissions from tourism, improve water, sanitation and waste management in the tourism sector, prioritize domestic tourism and apply circular economy principles across the tourism value chain. We appreciate the commitment expressed by the member States of the Economic Commission for Europe at its sixty-ninth session to step up their efforts to promote circular economy approaches and the sustainable use of natural resources, in particular through the voluntary commitments made as a part of the

“Environment for Europe” process. We commit to supporting and promoting these decisions by fully exploiting the potential of the “Environment for Europe” process and, in particular, the Batumi Initiative on Green Economy, for mobilizing voluntary commitments and sharing positive experience. More broadly, we will foster a circular economy, favour a life cycle approach and support waste prevention in production and consumption, through repair, refurbishment and remanufacturing, and using financial incentives.

7. We reaffirm our commitment to the implementation of the voluntary Pan-European Strategic Framework for Greening the Economy adopted at the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference. We welcome the positive progress in the implementation of the voluntary commitments of the Batumi Initiative on Green Economy to operationalize the Strategic Framework and call upon the countries and other stakeholders to continue reporting on the existing voluntary commitments under the Batumi Initiative and consider taking on new commitments, including in the areas of sustainable infrastructure and sustainable tourism. We support further promotion of the Batumi Initiative through existing knowledge-sharing platforms, such as the Green Growth Knowledge Platform. We further invite ECE, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the United Nations Environment Programme, in close cooperation with each other and with other relevant international organizations, to support countries in their efforts to green their economies and achieve sustainable development.

8. We appreciate the progress achieved in the pan-European region over the past four decades in decreasing emissions of the main air-polluting substances and their impacts. We also note that air pollution, both outdoor and indoor, remains a major concern in the region and globally, causing significant threats to human health and the environment. We will accelerate the reduction of air pollution and the phasing out of hydrochlorofluorocarbons, including their contribution to global warming. In this regard, we remain committed to ensuring adequate monitoring of and public access to relevant information on air pollution, in particular ground-level monitoring. We also welcome the final progress report of the voluntary Batumi Action for Cleaner Air, noting with appreciation the implementation of initiatives launched by interested countries and other stakeholders aimed at improving air quality and protecting public health and ecosystems. We also welcome close cooperation with the ECE Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution in achieving progress under the Batumi Action and the possibility of continuing to promote the Batumi Action measures.

9. We recognize the crucial importance of reliable, up-to-date, quality data and statistics for facing both current and emerging needs and challenges. We reaffirm our commitment to partnering with and supporting national statistical offices and systems to produce data and statistics for monitoring progress in environmental protection, having access to diverse information sources and using modern tools and techniques.

10. We acknowledge the importance of regular, indicator-based environmental assessments and confirm our commitment to keep the pan-European region under regular review in support of sustainable development and the transition to a circular and green economy. We take note of the key findings of the seventh pan-European assessment, produced by ECE and the United Nations Environment Programme, and the urgent need in particular to:

- Pursue integrated water resources management and transboundary water cooperation.
- Mainstream biodiversity conservation across sectors and policies.
- Reverse the degradation of coastal waters, marine ecosystems and seas, and enhance efforts to achieve the target of conservation of 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas across the region.
- Reduce land take further and consistently, avoid degradation of habitat quality due to biodiversity-unfriendly agricultural practices, and increase efforts for soil conservation.
- Establish a resource-oriented, pan-European e-waste management partnership, and increase broad access to reliable, detailed information on chemicals and waste to achieve their sound management.

- Devote additional resources to achieving the institutional and technical capacity necessary for the planning, design, execution, operation and decommissioning of sustainable infrastructure projects.
- Develop and implement appropriate and standardized pan-European methods and systems for monitoring and information management, employ the revised ECE Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators, and adopt indicators to cover important emerging policymaking themes.
- Select key-impact tourism indicators to be included in ECE statistical databases.

11. We appreciate progress achieved under the ECE multilateral environmental agreements and recognize their important role in supporting countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. We commend the tangible results achieved with the implementation of the ECE multilateral environmental agreements, both in enhancing environmental protection and in improving social and economic aspects of people's lives across the pan-European region and beyond. We commit to strengthening the participation of civil society and the private sector in the implementation of those agreements. We invite interested countries to ratify and implement these treaties and provide adequate resources for their implementation.

12. We reaffirm the importance of further strengthening and scaling up education for sustainable development to advance environmental governance and strengthen environmental democracy.

13. We commend the ECE Environmental Performance Review Programme as an effective and practical policy tool with a proven track record stretching back over more than a quarter of a century and recognize the role it plays in supporting the achievement and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals in the pan-European region. We endorse the fourth cycle of environmental performance reviews, invite ECE to conduct it and encourage countries to benefit from the Environmental Performance Review Programme by undertaking further reviews.

14. We also commend the general establishment of a Shared Environmental Information System across the region to support a regular process of environmental assessment and invite countries to continue their efforts to implement all pillars of the Shared Environmental Information System, address any remaining gaps and make environmental information publicly available and accessible in support of sustainable development and the transition to a circular and green economy.

15. We welcome the work of the Green Economy and Environment Action Programme Task Force, and we invite the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development to continue its activities in cooperation with relevant partners.

16. We acknowledge the role of regional initiatives in support of Agenda 2030 and recognize the important contributions of the United Nations system, multilateral development banks and other international and inter-State organizations.

17. We also acknowledge the role that Regional Environmental Centres continue to play in implementing initiatives to assist in overcoming environmental challenges and improving environmental governance.

18. We reaffirm the essential role that civil society participation plays in enhancing decision-making to improve the environment and promote sustainable development and commit ourselves to further developing partnerships with civil society organizations, and to creating conditions for their operation. We also welcome the contribution of the European ECO-Forum to the "Environment for Europe" process.

19. We invite the Committee on Environmental Policy to convene a mid-term review in 2025 to assess progress in the implementation of the main outcomes of this Conference.

20. We decide to hold the tenth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference in five years to assess the progress in our joint work and devise new directions, and we invite expressions of interest from Governments wishing to host it.

21. We express our gratitude to the Government of Cyprus for hosting this Conference, and for having addressed exceptionally and with great determination the impact of the pandemic on the organization of this event, and we wish to thank both the Government and the people of Cyprus for their warm hospitality.

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