

# 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**

Information paper No. 12

29 April 2022

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

### **Note by the **Chair** 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).

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. As advised by the Bureau the secretariat ensured that all comments and revisions received by the time of the Bureau meeting were included in the draft text. The Chair further worked on the text and prepared the second draft of the declaration, which was submitted for processing (including translation) as an official document (ECE/CEP/S/2022/4) of the special session of the Committee.

Following the guidance from the Bureau, the secretariat circulated the second draft of the declaration to the Committee members and observers for another round of written comments/proposals on the document by Friday 25 March 2022. During this round comments had been received from the EU and its member States, Norway, the Russian Federation, the European ECO Forum, the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

The present document was prepared by the Chair in consultation with the Bureau members who attended the meeting in Lisbon on 11-12 April. The draft shows the proposed revisions of and amendments to the document ECE/CEP/S/2022/4 in track changes and is aimed to support discussions at the special session of the Committee in May 2022.

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.

1.bis We Recall that the "Environment for Europe" process was launched in 1991, at Dobris Castle in the then Czechoslovakia, with the overarching goal of strengthening cooperation to protect and improve the environment, aiming at peace, stability and sustainable development while acknowledging that cooperation towards convergence of environmental quality and policies in Europe represents a strong integrating force and provides one of the corner stones for the construction of the new Europe.

1bis bis We profoundly regret that the path traced in Dobris towards a more sustainable pan-European region has been violently interrupted in February 2022. We recall the UN General Assembly resolution titled "Aggression against Ukraine" supported by 141 states at the 11th emergency session. We strongly condemn the unprovoked and unjustified invasion of Ukraine by armed forces of the Russian Federation, which violates international law and the UN Charter, undermines international security, stability and has a devastating effect on human lives and the environment. We also condemn the involvement of Belarus in this aggression against Ukraine.

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, notably on biodiversity, climate change and overall pollution, calls for a joint and coordinated response that can only be achieved through close international cooperation – and we recall that peace is a prerequisite for 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 of critical importance 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. We consider that it should play a central role in the inclusive and sustainable recovery of the pan-European region, in its green and just transition and in building a sustainable future based on deepening cooperation and the advent of peace.

5. We recognize the important role that sustainable infrastructure plays in the green economy transition and in the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals. We underline that sustainable and resilient infrastructure investment should be at the core of green economy policies and commitments, also playing a central role in COVID-19 pandemic recovery plans. We highlight the UN Environment Assembly Resolution (UNEP/EA.5/L.15) adopted by Member States and reaffirm the important role that infrastructure plays in the green economy transition. We acknowledge the important role of the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on PRTRs in this context in order to ensure transparent, effective, safe and inclusive public participation in decision-making. We also acknowledge that the Espoo Convention and the

Protocol on the Strategic Environmental Assessment provide framework and guidance for assessing and reducing environmental impact both in greening infrastructure and industry.also.

5.bis We affirm that Aa systemic, inclusive and resilient approach, as outlined in the International Good Practice Principles for Sustainable Infrastructure, is required for different types of infrastructure planning and management. New sustainable and resilient infrastructure should promote resource efficient use to reduce long term environmental impacts. We will explore the way forward for the pan-European region, including through innovation ~~and~~ nature-based solutions and ~~working with~~engagement of the private sector. The future region-wide approach to sustainable infrastructure should provide the basis for common goals, targets and criteria for policymaking, financing, 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 incentives and support programmes and regulations~~ 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.~~ Moreover, we will build knowledge based on existing circular tools and initiatives, with a view of enabling further dissemination and outreach across relevant UNECE Member States. We encourage member States and other stakeholders in a position to do so to consider joining and committing actions to the Global Tourism Plastics Initiative that unites the tourism sector behind a common vision of circular economy of plastics and the Glasgow Declaration: a commitment to a Decade of Tourism Climate Action

6.bis We will support efforts to reduce water and energy use and greenhouse gas emissions from tourism particularly high-impact sub-sectors (including cruise lines, aviation and accommodation), as well as to improve efficiency in the use of other resources such as water. We also commit to improve sanitation wastewater treatment and waste management, including food waste and plastic, in the tourism sector, ~~prioritize promote~~ 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~~Partnership and the One Planet Network. 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 remain committed to will-accelerating the reduction of air pollution, safeguarding human health 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 and sustainable 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 all relevant sectors and policies.
- Halt biodiversity loss and, where possible, restore ecosystems to a healthy state.
- Reverse the degradation of coastal waters, marine ecosystems and seas, and enhance efforts to achieve the global targets of conservation of [13+0] per cent of terrestrial and of coastal and marine areas across the region by 2030.
- Prevent pollution to air, water and soil to drive towards a pollution-free planet.
- Reduce land take further and consistently, avoid further degradation of habitat quality due to biodiversity-unfriendly agricultural and land management 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-common 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, also in view of improving the availability of quality data for the Sustainable Development Goal indicators.

<sup>1</sup> Pending decision of CBD.

- 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, industrial safety and in improving social, ~~and~~ economic and health 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-encourage~~ 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 and empower learners of all ages with the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to address the interconnected global challenges we are facing, including climate change, environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity, poverty and inequality.

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 and considering elaborating roadmaps to implement their recommendations.

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 - Content, Infrastructure and Services, Networking -, address any remaining gaps, We also recommend countries to-~~and~~ make environmental information publicly available-, discoverable and accessible - and to encourage reuse of data, collection of local and indigenous knowledge, citizen science, and crowdsourced data. We also encourage countries in developing digitalization of environmental information systems, relying on Open Data, big data and state of the art digital technologies to improve data availability, transparency and public involvement in decision-making 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 the necessary conditions for their operation, including effective access to environmental information, participation, and access to justice in environmental matters. 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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