

**ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE**  
**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**  
124<sup>th</sup> Meeting  
Geneva, 30 September 2022

**EXCOM/CONCLU/124**

**CHAIR'S CONCLUSIONS**

## FORMAL SEGMENT

The Executive Secretary of UNECE congratulated the incoming Chair on her new role and looked forward to good collaboration. Other delegations joined the Executive Secretary in welcoming the Chair to her new responsibilities and wishing her success in this important function.

### Item 1 – Adoption of the agenda

1. The provisional draft agenda for the 124<sup>th</sup> meeting was adopted.

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

2. The conclusions from the 123<sup>rd</sup> meeting of EXCOM (EXCOM/CONCLU/123) were adopted.

### Item 3 - Update on Special Procedures during the COVID-19 period and meeting servicing arrangements

3. The Secretary of the Commission informed that, since the last meeting of EXCOM, six silence procedures had been concluded related to formal meetings with remote participation, namely the 73<sup>rd</sup> session of the Working Party on Transport Statistics, the 61<sup>st</sup> session of the Working Party on the Standardization of Technical and Safety Requirements in Inland Navigation, the 40<sup>th</sup> session of the Joint Meeting of Experts on the Regulations annexed to the European Agreement concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Inland Waterways (ADN Safety Committee), the 4<sup>th</sup> session of the Group of Experts on LIAV, the 35<sup>th</sup> session of the Working Party on Transport Trends and Economics and the 76<sup>th</sup> session of the Working Party on Noise and Tyres (GRBP). The silence had not been broken for these procedures and their respective decisions were thus considered adopted. Full details were available on the UNECE website.

### Item 4 - 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

4. The Chair invited the Director of the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division, Ms. Elisabeth Türk, to introduce the report of the Chair of the Steering Committee, on behalf of the Chair, Mrs. Damegul Kabiyeva, who was unavailable to join the proceedings. The Permanent Representative of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the UN Office and other organizations in Geneva, H.E. Mr. Yerlan Alimbayev, also relayed some messages from the Chair of the Committee.

5. The representative of Serbia appreciated the UNECE capacity building and analytical support. Serbia had held the first national policy dialogue on the circular economy in the agri-food sector and is part of the UN Development Account project on accelerating the transition towards the circular economy in the UNECE region. On trade-related issues, his country had

benefited from the UNECE assessment of regulatory and procedural barriers to trade, which constitutes an important element in Serbia's process of the World Trade Organization accession.

6. The representative of Azerbaijan informed that her country had requested UNECE to conduct a study on regulatory and procedural barriers to trade for the SPECA region with a digitalization dimension, subject to available extrabudgetary funding. Further, Azerbaijan has been exploring specific measures to accelerate international cargo transportation through the Trans Caspian Middle Corridor. An agreement had been reached between Azerbaijan and Georgia for the construction of a new joint controlled border crossing point of the two countries. She took this opportunity to request the Commission to consider supporting these regional efforts with financial, technical and other in-kind support.

7. The representative of Canada noted that the Gender responsive Standards had been instrumental in drawing attention to the issue in her country and had led to the development of a gender action plan in the Standards Council of Canada. She emphasized the importance of the term "responsive", rather than "sensitive", in this regard, as Canadian research had found that currently standards are not protecting the health and safety of women as well as that of men.

8. The representative of European Union and its members thanked the Chair for her report and noted that the topic of trade, standardization and regulatory cooperation in the agricultural and other sectors was key to their economy.

9. The representative of Moldova recalled her delegation's statement made during the Steering Committee meeting in June 2022, when her country had requested in-kind assistance to cover capacity building needs. She thanked the UNECE Secretariat for the useful support shown to date, in particular related to a potential assessment of the implementation by the Republic of Moldova of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement and the remaining gaps that needed to be covered.

10. The representative of Kyrgyzstan thanked UNECE for the rendered assistance in trade and economic issues. One area where his country sought UNECE support was related to the Kyrgyz Export Academy project. He also requested UNECE support for producers of some agricultural items to help them promote and export their goods to the European market.

11. The representative of the United Kingdom recalled the UNECE public session in June with the United Kingdom Ambassador as Chair of the WTO Committee on Trade and Environment and the wider international trade community. He noted that his government explored gender responsive standards through the British Standards Institute and its flex standard for the improving of the availability of inclusive knowledge and data within the standards development process.

12. The representative of the Russian Federation noted the UNECE evaluation study on normative and procedural barriers to trade in Uzbekistan, containing a preparatory study for the innovation review towards the Sustainable Development Goals in Uzbekistan carried out with a voluntary Russian contribution.

13. The representative of Turkmenistan recalled that his country had been accepted as an active observer to the WTO and wished to work with UNECE to conduct a study on regulatory and procedural barriers to trade. He called on interested parties to provide UNECE with extra

budgetary funding to address this request.

14. 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

15. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the programme of work of the Trade subprogramme for 2023 as contained in the document ECE/CTCS/2022/8. EXCOM approves the programme of work of the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies for 2022 as contained in the document ECE/CTCS/WP.6/2021/10; the programme of work of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards for 2022 as contained in the document ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2021/27/Rev.1; and the mandate and terms of reference of the Team of Specialists on Gender-Responsive Standards, as contained in document ECE/CTCS/WP.6/2021/10/Add.1, until 2024.

Item 5 - 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

16. The Chair welcomed the Chair of the Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships, Mr. Stefano Firpo (Italy), who 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 subprogramme and the renewal of the mandate of a Working Party.

17. The representative of the European Union and its members thanked the Chair for his report and stated that innovation, competitiveness and public private partnerships were absolutely key to delivering the green and digital transitions in an effective and just manner. He stated that discussions are ongoing on the PPP Model Law and hoped solutions can be found ahead of the Working Party meeting.

18. The representative of Azerbaijan appreciated the extensive cooperation between Azerbaijan and UNECE on the Innovation Policy Outlook that had assessed innovation policies, laws and institutions of Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. She also requested UNECE support to conduct an in-depth Innovation for Sustainable Development Review to address Azerbaijan's needs in the areas of innovation and renewable energy, digitalization and other opportunities.

19. The representative of Belarus reaffirmed her country's interest in taking part in technical assistance project through this committee aimed at strengthening the capacity of UNECE member States and introducing sustainable PPPs to achieve the SDGs.

20. The representative of Moldova informed that her country had endorsed the key recommendations from the National Review carried out on innovation for sustainable development. The Review has already served as impetus for policy reform, such as the

introduction of innovation vouchers, projects to support young researchers, and improvements of the national innovation infrastructure. As a follow up to this review, she requested UNECE to provide capacity building to support the implementation of the recommendations.

21. The representative of Greece informed that his country had just launched a new series of PPPs in northern Greece valued more than €3 billion euros.

22. The representative of Italy expressed appreciation for the work of Mr. Stefano Firpo as chair of the Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public Private Partnerships.

23. The representative of Germany informed about the UNECE Network on Transformative Innovation, a joint initiative by UNECE and the German Federal Agency for Disruptive Innovation. The objective of the project is to build the capacities of the UNECE member States to play a productive role in building innovation ecosystems that can harness innovation and digital technologies for sustainable development. She called on all the Member states to join the network.

24. The representative of Turkmenistan detailed the steps taken by the government for the development of digital education. He highlighted the readiness of his country to carry out a national review of innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals. He called on to interested parties to provide the necessary funding to UNECE for carrying out of this program.

25. The representative of Armenia expressed appreciation for recent cooperation activities between his country and UNECE, in particular the Innovation Policy Outlook as well as the second Innovation Performance Review, and looked forward to the visit of UNECE experts to Armenia in this regard.

26. The representative of Spain underlined the exemplary collaboration effort that had led to the 6th International Forum on PPP held in Barcelona. He stressed the importance of cooperation between public administrations, public and private entities, and other gap bridging actors.

27. The representative of Russian Federation welcomed the preparation of innovation reviews for Moldova and Uzbekistan and the work of the UNECE Network on Transformative Innovation. She thanked the Secretariat for preparing a draft Model Law on PPPs and observed that delays in its adoption were not in the interest of UNECE member States and hampered efforts to include the private sector in the implementation of the 2030 agenda. She expressed the hope that related work would be finalized by the end of the year. Her delegation supported the adoption of the programme of work for the Economic Cooperation and integration subprogram for 2023 and the renewed mandate of the working party on PPPs for 2023-2027.

28. The representative of Türkiye highly valued the evaluation methodology produced by the Working Group, which was a useful tool to design and assess infrastructure projects, including PPPs, and their compliance with the SDG principles.

29. The Chair 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

30. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the Programme of Work of the Economic Cooperation and Integration subprogramme for 2023, as contained in document ECE/CECI/2022/5. EXCOM approves the renewal of the mandate of the Working Party on Public-Private Partnerships for 2023–2027.

#### Item 6 - Latest developments in the region of the Economic Commission for Europe

31. The Chair recalled that at its last meeting on 8 July, EXCOM had adopted decision ECE/EX/2022/L.12/Rev.1. *Inter alia*, it stipulated that member States would “revisit at the 124th meeting of EXCOM the extra-budgetary project ECE-E390, “Strengthening capacities of selected UNECE member States in sustainable and harmonious management of natural resources”. She noted that, as requested, the secretariat had provided supplementary information on the project and an updated overview of projects, initially submitted on 31 March 2022. The Chair noted that it was her understanding that consideration of next steps regarding this extra-budgetary project was still ongoing.

32. The representative of the European Union and its Member States reiterated their unwavering support to Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity and their condemnation of Russia's unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine in line with General Assembly resolution ES/11/1. He urged Russia to immediately stop its indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure, and to immediately and unconditionally withdraw all its troops and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. The European Union representative condemned in the strongest possible terms the illegal sham referenda conducted in parts of the Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporijia regions of Ukraine currently and partially occupied by Russia. Regarding today's developments in Moscow, he said the European Union and its Member States firmly condemn and unequivocally reject the illegal annexations and referred to the statement of the UN Secretary General saying that “Any decision to proceed with the annexation of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions of Ukraine would have no legal value and deserves to be condemned” and “It must not be accepted”. He stated that Russia's attacks had far reaching consequences on transport, energy, environment, industry, trade and other important areas dealt with in UNECE, both in Ukraine and abroad, and undermined the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

33. The representative of the United States of America wished to echo the statement of the European Union representative regarding Russia's purported annexation of Ukrainian territory, which represented a direct assault on the UN Charter and the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity that underpin global security and stability. He indicated that the United States of America, alongside their allies and partners, would never recognize the sham referenda and any attempts to seize Ukrainian sovereign territory by unlawful use of force. He added that his country intended to impose steep costs on those responsible for organizing and implementing related illegal actions.

34. The representative of Ukraine informed Members states on the current situation in Ukraine caused by the ongoing Russian military aggression. After more than six months of Russian war, the GDP of Ukraine had dropped by 37.2%, while inflation had increased by 23.8%. The cost of Ukrainian reconstructions and recovery needs due to Russia's war of aggression are estimated at more than 349 billion U.S. dollars. He deplored the human losses. Russia's ongoing attack on Ukraine was also causing extensive environment damage and

infrastructure destruction. There was deep concern related to nuclear threats and radioactive pollution. He stated that the Russian war on Ukraine had become one of the main causes of global food crisis and noted that, despite the horrors of the war, Ukraine was committed to fundamental international rules and was doing its best to maintain a stable supply to the international agriculture markets, as demonstrated with the Black Sea Grain Initiative under the auspices of the United Nations. Ukraine was grateful to EXCOM for the decision taken at the last meeting, which provided guidance to all committees and subsidiary bodies to take into account the ongoing Russian aggression and gross violation of international law.

35. The representative of Canada strongly condemned Russia's unjustifiable and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, whose consequences had already extended well beyond Ukraine's borders. She called on Russia to abandon this path of war and return to good faith. Diplomacy represented the best means of addressing what was not only an urgent humanitarian emergency in Ukraine, but also a continuing global food security challenge and a threat to the very core of international rules-based institutions.

36. The representative of the Russian Federation strongly rejected the accusations leveled against the referenda in the people's republics of Donetsk and Luhansk, as well as the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia provinces, which had been carried out in accordance with the norms and principles of international law. She added that the people of Donbass and the South of Ukraine exercised their right to self-determination, in accordance with the UN Charter, the International Covenants on Human Rights, the Helsinki Final Act and the International Court of Justice's advisory opinion on Kosovo, which had affirmed that unilateral declarations of independence of part of a state do not violate any norms of international law. She stated that her country had signed agreements on accepting into the Russian Federation these new republics and provinces. She stated that international experts increasingly considered systemic errors and miscalculations in the macroeconomic, energy and food policies of major Western countries as the root causes of the food inflation. Climate disasters, the pandemic and unilateral anti-Russian sanctions had exacerbated these negative trends. She called on the Ukrainian side to stop shelling the Zaporozhye nuclear power plant in order to reduce risks of radioactive pollution. She stated that her country honored its obligations and that increasing deliveries of food products was in the interests first and foremost of the least developed countries with insufficient import solvency and low food self-sufficiency. She stated that these considerations had led her country to conclude the so-called Istanbul agreements on unimpeded export of Ukrainian grain and of Russian agricultural products and fertilizer.

37. The representative of the United States appreciated the information provided by the secretariat related to project E 390. He noted with concern that the donor entity essentially did not exist prior to the project and apparently did not have any other activities. He stated that this raised significant questions regarding the governance and flow of money associated with the project,

- such as:
- What is the legal relationship between UNECE and this center of excellence?
  - What oversight arrangements does UNECE envision for the center?
  - How does the relationship of this centre compare to the collaboration arrangements between UNECE and other international centers of excellence?
  - To what extent will UNECE and its experts be involved in the implementation of the project?

He wondered if in the current situation experts from beneficiary countries would be able to travel to Moscow for technical exchanges.

38. The representative of the European Union and its Member States thanked the secretariat

for the additional information provided. He stated that the new data was still insufficient to comply with the required assessment referred to in paragraph 1 of L.6 as well as L.12. He encouraged the secretariat to explore, in consultation between the secretariat and the UNECE membership, different scenarios for this workstream in order to allow for an informed discussion at a later stage. He stated that the questions mentioned by the US are indeed good examples of issues to look at in more detail and that it was important to ensure that this project would not lead to potential reputational damage for the organization and its neutrality.

39. The Executive Secretary recalled the chronology of the project and its goals, mainly to support the food-water-energy nexus-based, balanced, integrated and sustainable management of natural resource endowments and progress towards a circular economy by applying the United Nations Framework Classification for Resources (UNFC) and the United Nations Resource Management System (UNRMS). She explained that the project donor, the autonomous non-commercial organization International Centre of Excellence on Sustainable Resource Management (ANCO ICE-SRM), was completely independent from UNECE and should not be confused with Centres of Excellence established under some UNECE partnership agreements. Suitable oversight arrangements, as existed for other high-value extrabudgetary projects, could be considered, as appropriate. The Executive Secretary reiterated the importance of the subject matter addressed by the project and assured the membership of UNECE's continuous commitment to adhering to the highest standards in conducting its business. She welcomed the opportunity to discuss further questions with interested delegations in informal consultations.

40. The Chair concluded that EXCOM wishes to defer further consideration of this item and encouraged delegations to proactively communicate their questions to the secretariat to seek clarification on outstanding issues.

## **INFORMAL SEGMENT**

### Item 7 - Report on partnerships of the Economic Commission for Europe (for information)

41. The Executive Secretary presented the first report on partnerships of the Economic Commission for Europe to EXCOM for information. She invited EXCOM to take note of the document and to request that the next partnership report be prepared in 2024.

42. The Chair concluded that EXCOM takes note with appreciation of the report on partnerships of the Economic Commission for Europe as contained in informal document 2022/28.

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

43. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the extrabudgetary projects contained in informal documents 2022/29, 30 and 23 (as amended and circulated the previous day).

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

44. Regarding cooperation with other organizations, the Executive Secretary informed EXCOM of a Memorandum of Understanding under preparation with the Columbia City



Diplomacy Lab, France. The objective was to provide high quality training to city planners as well as mayors on topical issues that have a direct bearing on urban development and the achievement of the SDGs in the UNECE region.

45. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM that on 16-19 August 2022, she had visited the Alesund region, a Norwegian region which is the first in the world to have evaluated all municipalities with the U4SSC KPIs. She also informed EXCOM that she had chaired the 76th meeting of the Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee on 13-16 September in Geneva and the 31st Session of the Committee on Sustainable Energy on 21-23 September. She explained that the Committee exchanged views on how to build resilient energy systems in the ECE region while supporting implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement.

46. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM about the following upcoming meetings:

- 1-4 October, San Marino: 83rd session of the UNECE Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management
- 5-7 October, Nicosia: 9th ministerial conference “Environment for Europe”
- 17 October, Geneva: UNECE Forum on Regional cooperation (preparatory event leading up to COP27)
- 24-28 October, New York: UNGA Second Committee Dialogue with the Regional Commissions
- 7-18 November, Sharm-el-Sheikh: UNFCCC COP27
- 16-19 November, Almaty: SPECA Forum
- 16-19 November 2022, Geneva: 6th session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Water and Health.

#### Item 10 – Any other business

47. The Chair informed EXCOM that its next meeting would take place on 30 November in the morning.

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