



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
5 January 2023

Original: English

Economic Commission for Europe

Committee on Environmental Policy

Special session

Nicosia, 3–4 October 2022

Report of the Committee on Environmental Policy on its special session

I. Introduction

1. The Committee on Environmental Policy held its special session in Nicosia, from 3 to 4 October 2022. The present report is based on a summary of the session's outcomes and the decisions taken, as adopted on 4 October 2022.¹

A. Attendance

2. Delegations from the following 36 member States of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) attended the meeting: Armenia; Austria; Azerbaijan; Belgium; Croatia; Cyprus; Czechia; Estonia; Finland; France; Georgia; Germany; Greece; Hungary; Italy; Kyrgyzstan; Latvia; Lithuania; Luxembourg; Malta; Netherlands; North Macedonia; Poland; Portugal; Republic of Moldova; Russian Federation; Slovakia; Slovenia; Spain; Sweden; Switzerland; Tajikistan; Ukraine; United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; United States of America; and Uzbekistan.

3. Representatives of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Europe Office were also present.

4. Other national, regional and international organizations and bodies were represented at the meeting, including: the European Union, represented by the European Commission, and the European Environment Agency; the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development; and the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia.

5. Representatives of the following civil society organizations, academia and media participated in the session: the Centre for Environment and Sustainable Development "Eco-Accord" (Russian Federation); the European ECO-Forum; "Meros" Public Charitable Foundation (Uzbekistan); Tripla Difesa Onlus Guardie - Sicurezza Sociale ed Ecozoofila (Italy); and Zoï Environment Network.

B. Opening of the session and organizational matters

6. The Chair of the Committee on Environmental Policy welcomed participants and recalled the main objectives of the session.

¹ See https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-11/CEP-SS_October_2022_decisions.unedited.e.pdf.

7. The Committee adopted the agenda of its special session (ECE/CEP/S/2022/5), taking into account the provisional time schedule as presented in information paper No. 14.

II. Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference

8. The representative of Cyprus updated the Committee about the latest practical arrangements of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Nicosia, 5–7 October 2022) and answered questions from the delegates.

A. Conference outcomes

9. The Chair recalled that the Committee, at its previous special session (Geneva, 9–12 May 2022), had invited its Bureau, with support from the secretariat, to further develop the draft of the Ministerial Declaration, based on follow-up comments and revisions to the draft in track changes received by 30 June 2022 from Committee members and observers, and to submit it as an official document to the Committee at its special session in October 2022.²

10. The Chair informed the Committee that, as at 5 July 2022, comments had been received from Armenia, the European Union and its member States, Switzerland, Ukraine, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the World Health Organization and the Regional Environmental Centre for the Caucasus.

11. The Chair also informed the Committee that, in order to fulfil its mandate, the Bureau had held an in-person meeting on 5 July 2022 in Lisbon. The work had resulted in the preparation of the draft of the Ministerial Declaration of the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, which had been submitted as an official document (ECE/CEP/S/2022/7) of the current special session of the Committee.

12. The Chair further informed the Committee that minor adjustments to the draft had been received from the European Union and its member States and from Switzerland. Representatives of the European Union and its member States and Switzerland presented their proposals, which were considered by the Committee, and the draft was amended accordingly.

13. A representative of the Russian Federation emphasized the great importance of the Environment for Europe process, which for thirty years had remained a key international platform for constructive non-politicized cooperation, exchange of experience, and agreement on collective approaches to solving urgent problems in the field of environmental protection in the interests of the sustainable development of the European region. At the same time, the speaker expressed regret at the fact that the Russian Federation had not been invited to participate in the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference in Nicosia. Furthermore, the speaker described the current situation as one of flagrant discrimination on national grounds and an unacceptable attempt to limit the rights of the Russia Federation as a member State of ECE, and associated the failure to extend an invitation, among other things, with the anti-Russian and openly Russophobic position of the European Union and the United States of America. In connection with the above, the speaker declared that the Russian Federation disagreed with the content of the draft Ministerial Declaration, did not intend to recognize the decisions and outcome documents adopted during the Ninth Ministerial Conference and would oppose their implementation under the auspices of the United Nations and other international organizations of which the Russian Federation was a member State.

14. Given the above-mentioned position of the Russian Federation, the Chair called for a vote on the draft Ministerial Declaration. The Chair informed the Committee that credentials (notes verbales) had been received from 35 member States. The secretariat further explained the format and procedure of the vote, which took place as a show of hands, with the following result: 26 in favour; 1 against; and 1 abstention.

² ECE/CEP/S/2022/2, para. 44.

15. Based on the result of the vote, the Committee decided to transmit the draft Ministerial Declaration, as amended during the session (ECE/CEP/S/2022/7/Rev.1), to the Nicosia Conference for adoption.

B. Conference agenda

16. The Chair informed the Committee that the agenda subitem was meant to allow the Committee to consider any last-minute organizational issues related to the Conference agenda and the organization of work that might arise.

17. In view of the absence of any such issues, the annotated provisional agenda for the Conference (ECE/NICOSIA.CONF/2022/1) remained unchanged.

III. Environmental performance reviews

18. The Committee proceeded with the peer review of the Second Environmental Performance Review of Armenia. The Review's 18 chapters and associated recommendations (information paper No. 15) had earlier been examined by the ECE Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews together with Armenian experts at a meeting held in Tbilisi from 12 to 13 September 2022.

19. The Head of the International Cooperation Department of the Ministry of Environment of Armenia presented key achievements and main challenges in advancing the environmental agenda for the sustainable development of the country within the substantive framework of the Second Review.

20. The Chair of the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews (Estonia), in his capacity as rapporteur designated by the Expert Group, shared key findings in selected areas (soil conservation; and agriculture and the environment) of the Second Review and the steps necessary to address the identified challenges.

21. The Committee also peer reviewed the Third Environmental Performance Review of Azerbaijan. The Review's 18 chapters and associated recommendations (information paper No. 16) had earlier been examined by the ECE Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews together with Azerbaijani experts at a meeting held in Tbilisi from 15 to 16 September 2022.

22. The Deputy Minister for Ecology and Natural Resources of Azerbaijan presented key achievements and main challenges in advancing the environmental agenda for the sustainable development of the country within the substantive framework of the Third Review.

23. The rapporteur (Italy) designated by the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews shared key findings in selected areas of the Third Review (land management; and climate change) and the steps necessary to address the identified challenges.

24. The Head of the International Cooperation Department of the Ministry of Natural Resources, Ecology and Technical Supervision of Kyrgyzstan informed the Committee about main developments regarding the environmental agenda of the country and requested that the peer review of the Third Environmental Performance Review of Kyrgyzstan be postponed. The Review's 18 chapters and associated recommendations (information paper No. 17) had earlier been examined by the ECE Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews together with Kyrgyz experts who had participated online in a meeting held in Tbilisi from 13 to 14 September 2022.

25. The Chair of the Committee on Environmental Policy informed the Committee that, following a request from the Committee made at its special session in May 2022,³ the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews, with support from the secretariat, had prepared the revised mandate and terms of reference for the Expert Group on Environmental

³ ECE/CEP/S/2022/2, para. 52 (c) (advance edited copy).

Performance Reviews for 2023–2026 (ECE/CEP/S/2022/9, annex) and submitted them to the current session of the Committee for consideration and prospective adoption.

26. The Secretary to the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews presented an overview of recent and planned activities under the Environmental Performance Review Programme.

27. The Chair of the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews informed the Committee about the outcomes of the thirty-fifth meeting of the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews (Tbilisi, 12–16 September 2022) related to the upcoming Fourth Cycle of Environmental Performance Reviews. Ideas discussed by the Expert Group included: limiting the number of chapters per review and recommendations per chapter; organizing thematic workshops; promoting bankable recommendations; and elaborating road maps for implementing recommendations. A survey could be conducted of the members of the Committee on Environmental Policy in early 2023 to collect views for further consideration by the Expert Group. The Expert Group could prepare recommendations for the Committee's consideration at its session in autumn 2023. In the meantime, for the upcoming reviews of Montenegro and Tajikistan, during the preparatory missions, it could be suggested to limit the number of chapters; however, a limit on the number of chapters could not be imposed without a decision by the Committee.

28. Presentations made during the agenda item on environmental performance reviews were posted on the ECE website.⁴

29. The Committee:

(a) Adopted the recommendations contained in the Second Environmental Performance Review of Armenia (information paper No. 15);

(b) Adopted the recommendations contained in the Third Environmental Performance Review of Azerbaijan (information paper No. 16);

(c) Agreed to postpone the adoption of the recommendations of the Third Environmental Performance Review of Kyrgyzstan to its next session, while taking note of the commitment of Kyrgyzstan to provide to the ECE secretariat comments to the draft recommendations of the Environmental Performance Review (information paper No. 17), underpinned by complete and accurate information, at the latest by the end of 2022;

(d) Invited the ECE secretariat to assess the comments received from Kyrgyzstan and proceed with the necessary actions to finalize the recommendations of the country's Environmental Performance Review for consideration by the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews, as needed, and the Committee. The actions would be subject to the availability of financial resources and the continued commitment of Kyrgyzstan, including in-person participation in the meeting of the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews;

(e) Expressed sincere appreciation for the work of the ECE Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews, adopted the mandate and terms of reference of the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews for 2023–2026 (ECE/CEP/S/2022/9, annex), and requested the ECE secretariat to submit it to the ECE Executive Committee for approval;

(f) Welcomed the information provided on the activities of the Environmental Performance Review Programme and expressed its appreciation to the secretariat for the excellent work in support of the Programme;

(g) Welcomed the start of the Environmental Performance Review of Mauritania;

(h) Welcomed the next environmental performance reviews to be conducted: the Fourth Environmental Performance Reviews of Montenegro, the Republic of Moldova and Tajikistan;

⁴ See <https://unece.org/info/Environmental-Policy/Committee-on-Environmental-Policy/events/369000>.

(i) Took note of activities to prepare for the Fourth Cycle of Environmental Performance Reviews under the ECE Environmental Performance Review Programme;

(j) Invited the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews to prepare additional guidance on the conduct of the Fourth Cycle of Environmental Performance Reviews for the consideration of the Committee on Environmental Policy at its twenty-eighth session in November 2023;

(k) Took note of the information provided by the secretariat on resource mobilization for the ECE Environmental Performance Review Programme in 2021–2022 and thanked:

(i) Austria, Germany and Switzerland for their financial support;

(ii) France, Germany, Hungary, Italy and Portugal for providing expertise;

(iii) UNEP for providing expertise;

(iv) The United Nations country teams and the United Nations Development Programme for providing substantive and logistical support;

(v) Estonia, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Montenegro, Romania, Switzerland and UNEP for having delegated their experts to serve in and support the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews;

(l) Invited members of the Committee to nominate their representatives to the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews;

(m) Encouraged delegations to provide in-kind (expert) and financial support to the ECE Environmental Performance Review Programme;

(n) Expressed its appreciation for the close cooperation of the ECE Environment, Statistical, Sustainable Energy and Sustainable Transport Divisions, and Sustainable Development and Gender Unit, and the United Nations country teams, with the Environmental Performance Review Programme.

IV. Environmental monitoring, assessment and reporting

30. The Chair recalled that, at the Committee's previous special session, a representative of the secretariat had informed the Committee of the need to extend the mandate and terms of reference of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators until the end of 2023. The Committee had decided to address that matter at the current session.⁵ In order to allow the Committee on Environmental Policy to also consider and approve a new mandate and terms of reference of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment before the expiry of its current one (ECE/EX/2017/L.2 and ECE/CEP/AC.10/2021/4, annex) at its regular session in November 2023, an extension until the end of 2023 was also required for the mandate and terms of reference of the Working Group.

31. The Committee:

(a) Decided to extend the mandates and terms of reference of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment and the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators until end-2023 to allow the Working Group and the Joint Task Force to present new draft mandates and terms of reference after the next Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference to the Committee and, in the case of the Joint Task Force, the Conference of European Statisticians, and requested the secretariat to submit those decisions on extension to the ECE Executive Committee for approval;

(b) Took note of the proposal made to convert the Joint Task Force into a standing body and decided to have an in-depth discussion based on detailed information provided by the secretariat at the next regular session of the Committee in November 2023.

⁵ ECE/CEP/S/2022/2, paras. 64–65.

V. Annual programme of work of the Environment subprogramme for 2023 and outline of key components of the programme of work of the Environment subprogramme for 2024

32. The Chair informed the Committee that the programme of work of the Environment subprogramme for 2023 (ECE/CEP/S/2022/10) was based on the ECE proposed programme budget for 2023 (A/77/6 (Sect. 20)). It reflected the annual format presented in 2020 in line with General Assembly resolution 72/266 on shifting the management paradigm in the United Nations,⁶ with enrichments reflecting General Assembly resolutions 74/251 on programme planning⁷ and 75/243 on programme planning.⁸

33. The Chair further informed the Committee that the “Outline of key components of the programme of work of the Environment subprogramme for 2024” was contained in information paper No. 18.

34. In the ensuing discussion, representatives of the European Union and its member States, the Russian Federation and Switzerland took the floor. The representatives of the European Union and its member States and Switzerland expressed their full support to both documents, while the representative of the Russian Federation stated that, due to fact that the country had been blocked from participating in the Ninth Ministerial Conference, the country opposed the inclusion of a provision on achieving the outcomes of the Ninth Ministerial Conference in the programme of work of the Environment subprogramme for 2023.

35. The Chair suggested to the representative of the Russian Federation that a reference could be included in the programme of work of the Environment subprogramme for 2023 expressing explicitly that the country opposed a specific component of the programme. A representative of the Russian Federation further explained that the goal was simply to announce the position of the Russian Federation without including a reference in the document.

36. The Committee:

(a) Adopted the draft programme of work of the Environment subprogramme for 2023 (ECE/CEP/S/2022/10) and recommended that it be approved by the Executive Committee;

(b) Took note of the “Outline of key components of the programme of work of the Environment subprogramme for 2024” as contained in information paper No. 18.

VI. Closure of the meeting

37. Supported by the secretariat, the Chair compiled and presented a summary of the outcomes of the special session and the decisions taken. Following a discussion, the draft list was finalized and approved.

38. The Committee:

(a) Agreed to hold its next regular session in Geneva, on 1–3 November 2023;

(b) Requested the Bureau and the secretariat to follow up on the Committee’s decisions, including by preparing the documents and reports necessary for the Committee’s work at its next special session;

(c) Expressed gratitude to the Government of Cyprus for its hospitality and for hosting the Committee’s special session in Nicosia;

⁶ A/RES/72/266.

⁷ A/RES/74/251.

⁸ A/RES/75/243.

(d) Expressed gratitude for the work of the interpreters and the technical team in servicing the current meeting;

(e) Also expressed appreciation to the secretariat for servicing the work of the meeting.

39. The Chair thanked the participants and closed the meeting.
