

**ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE**  
**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**  
128th Meeting  
Geneva, 15 May 2023

**EXCOM/CONCLU/128**

**CHAIR'S CONCLUSIONS**

## FORMAL SEGMENT

Several delegations congratulated the newly elected Bureau of the Commission, wished the Chair well on his appointment, and thanked the previous Bureau for its work.

### Item 1 – Adoption of the agenda

1. The provisional draft agenda for the 128th meeting was adopted, as amended at the request of Germany, adding agenda item 3bis in the formal segment, entitled “Urban Development/Economic Commission for Europe tools”.

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

2. The conclusions from the 127th meeting of EXCOM (EXCOM/CONCLU/127/Rev.1) were adopted.

### Item 3 - Update on Special Procedures during the COVID-19 period

3. The Secretary of the Commission informed that, since the last meeting of EXCOM, no silence procedures had been administered related to formal meetings with remote participation. She noted that the special procedures, as contained in [ECE/EX/2022/L.15](#) and [ECE/EX/2020/L.12](#), were to expire on 15 May 2023. Given the improved health situation, no further extension was proposed. She thanked delegations and secretariat staff for their flexibility under difficult circumstances and concluded that the exceptional authorization of modified meeting modalities had successfully ensured business continuity.
4. Acknowledging the positive experiences made with some of the remote and hybrid working methods during the pandemic, she recalled that some delegations had encouraged the review of effective practices to consider their inclusion in future working methods, where appropriate. To this end, recent experiences and requirements would need to be studied, including, inter alia, technical, procedural, legal and budgetary implications and their implications for different intergovernmental and expert bodies of UNECE’s diverse governance architecture. She suggested to initiate informal consultations with interested member States and key stakeholders to scope the terms of a possible XB project proposal on the issue.
5. The representative of the European Union and its Member States welcomed the secretariat’s proposal.
6. The Chair concluded that EXCOM requests the secretariat to initiate informal consultations with interested delegations and key stakeholders to study opportunities for including remote and hybrid meeting formats in the regular way of working and identify related requirements and possible challenges, building on relevant experiences, especially in UNECE and UNOG. This process would translate into the development of an XB project proposal for consideration by EXCOM in due course on a review of UNECE meeting formats and related working methods.

### Item 3bis - Urban Development/Economic Commission for Europe tools

7. The Chair recalled that under this agenda item EXCOM would hear a briefing by the secretariat and would subsequently consider adoption of the extrabudgetary project contained in document ECE/EX/2023/L.9. He welcomed the Director of the Forests, Land and Housing Division, Ms. Paola Deda, who made a presentation to EXCOM on the UNECE tools for urban development.
8. The representative of Germany commended the significant number and the quality of tools that UNECE makes available to cities of the ECE region, noting that cities are key actors for green transformation and sustainable development. She added that Germany highly valued UNECE's support to Ukraine, especially to the cities of Kharkiv and Mykolaiv, and was willing to provide 4.7 million euros to plan sustainable urban solutions through a new UNECE project, which brought together 16 UN entities and was coordinated by the UN Resident Coordinator Office in Ukraine.
9. The representative of Greece expressed gratitude to the secretariat for the organization and substantive contribution to the 7th edition of the UNECE International PPP Forum, which took place in Athens from 3-5 May 2023 and convened more than 900 registered participants, included 300 in-person.
10. The representative of the Russian Federation commended the activities of UNECE in the area of urban development and welcomed the additional information provided by the secretariat. She stated that her delegation did not support the procedure used for approving the technical cooperation project, stating that the established practice of informal consultations would have offered a more productive approach. She stated that the project's implementation would only be possible when security conditions allowed, and that UNECE bore responsibility for the safety of involved UN staff.
11. The representative of Ukraine thanked Germany for the extrabudgetary project contained in document ECE/EX/2023/L.9, which is in line with the resolution E/ECE/2023/L.1/Rev.1 called *Economic and Social Effects of Russia's Aggression Against Ukraine* adopted at the last session of the Commission.
12. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the extrabudgetary project contained in document ECE/EX/2023/L.9.

### **INFORMAL SEGMENT**

#### Item 4 - Annual report on evaluation 2022 (for information)

13. The Executive Secretary presented the 2022 Annual Report on Evaluation to EXCOM for its information. It contains updates on evaluations conducted during the past year, future evaluation plans, the status and information on completed, ongoing evaluations, as well as the changes generated by the implementation of relevant recommendations. She recalled that all evaluation reports, management responses and progress reports were available at the Open UNECE section of the UNECE website.

14. The representative of the European Union and its Member States noted the importance of assessing, on a regular basis, the different activities of the organization, as a means to further improve the work of the organization. EU delegations had taken note of the inadequate resources allocated to evaluation in UNECE. This important topic should not depend on extrabudgetary funding.
15. The Chair concluded that EXCOM takes note with appreciation of the annual report on evaluations 2022 as contained in informal document 2023/20.

Item 5 - Evaluation of UNECE subprogramme 4, Economic cooperation and integration, and subprogramme 6, Trade (for information)

16. The Executive Secretary presented the Evaluation of UNECE subprogramme 4, Economic cooperation and integration, and of subprogramme 6, Trade, for information, explaining that in 2022, the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) had conducted the evaluation of both subprogrammes for the period 2018-2021.
17. The representative of Uzbekistan highlighted important steps taken in his country to improve citizens' welfare, such as the new Uzbekistan Development Strategy for 2022/2026, which includes attraction of private capital, strengthening investors' protection and liberalize foreign trade. Uzbekistan also continues to strengthen international collaboration in the sphere of trade, science and technology and in that regard, appreciates the activities of the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division of UNECE, especially two important studies on innovation for sustainable development review and the regulatory and procedural barriers to trade. His country also looks forward to further strengthening the competitiveness of the textile industry.
18. The representative of the Russian Federation said that she shared the conclusions of the OIOS report, especially related to the comparative advantages of subprogrammes 4 and 6, i. e. its analytical potential and its opportunity to present a platform for discussion for countries with transition economies and lack of practices. She noted with satisfaction the positive assessment of key areas of work, such as the development of standards of electronic business and ways to overcome barriers to trade. She welcomed the remote meeting formats used during the pandemic that had allowed a broader participation in the meetings. She deplored the politicization of UNECE work in the context of the conflict in Ukraine, which had a negative impact on technical cooperation in Central Asia, due to the freezing of Russian contributions. She supported the report's recommendations to develop a strategic plan for the division in order to strengthen connections and to attract resources to develop technical cooperation.
19. The representative of Kyrgyzstan welcomed the support rendered by the subprogrammes to the Kyrgyz integration in the global supply chain. He expressed profound satisfaction at his country being one of the in-depth case studies of the OIOS report. He noted several highly valued contributions made by subprogrammes 4 and 6, such as the joint launch of the road map of the Kyrgyz Republic on trade facilitation for 2021 and 2025, the support in the implementation of public private partnership projects in Kyrgyzstan, and the development of the export potential of the country, especially of priority agricultural products.

20. The representative of the United States welcomed the OIOS report and more broadly UNECE commitment to effective monitoring and evaluation. He suggested that the secretariat organize consultations with interested delegations to explore how to reduce the administrative burden, while maintaining the quality and relevance of its products and their relevance to the needs of member States across the ECE region.
21. The representative of the United Kingdom welcomed the evaluation report and the management response, hoping for a prompt uptake of the recommendations, in particular, the one on the need for integrated strategic planning. She called for greater prioritization of work streams and products, identification of efficiencies, streamlining of governance structures and stronger cooperation between divisions. She commended the ECT Division for their clear efforts to cooperate more with other agencies in the UN system and beyond, including the World Trade Organization. She concluded by emphasizing the importance of understanding the outcomes and impacts of the work and maintaining a line of sight to beneficiaries and users of normative products, including in the private sector.
22. The representative of Azerbaijan shared the report's conclusions, especially the positive assessment of subprogrammes 4 and 6 as a regional platform for policy dialogue and exchange of best practices that brought governments together to build consensus on economic cooperation, and as a reliable source of technical assistance to the specific needs of member States. Her country has benefitted from extensive support by the subprogrammes, both bilaterally and within SPECA, with products such as a study on regulatory and procedural barriers to trade and the innovation policy outlook process. An in-depth innovation for sustainable development review on her country addressed the areas of innovative and renewable energy, digitalization, trade barriers and opportunities. She also mentioned the High-Level Conference on Digital Transformation of Information Exchange and Supply Chains, held in Baku in October 2022.
23. The representative of the European Union and its Member States encouraged UNECE and its Divisions to undertake a critical assessment of the organization on a regular basis to ensure that it is fit for purpose. He added that while the activities of subprogrammes 4 and 6 were very diverse and provided a lot of added value for the UNECE member States, its governance structure was relatively complex and might need to be reviewed in the future.
24. The Chair concluded that EXCOM takes note with appreciation of the evaluation of UNECE subprogramme 4, as contained in informal document 2023/21.

#### Item 6 - Extrabudgetary projects (for approval)

25. EXCOM considered five extrabudgetary projects presented for approval, as contained in informal documents 2023/13, 22, 23, 24 and 25.
26. Regarding project 2023/25, the representative of the European Union and its Member States expressed overall support to the UNECE work on hydrogen, which is a priority area for the EU. He raised some queries about the specific scope of the project and its interlinkages with ongoing international activities, such as the *International Energy Agency* and the International Partnership for Hydrogen and Fuel Cells in the Economy, identified at COP26 in Glasgow as the coordinating body for standardization activities

on hydrogen. He suggested to study these coordination aspects in more detail and proposed to resume the discussion at a later stage.

27. The representative of Uzbekistan explained that his country was experiencing large scale reforms in the energy sector. Special attention was being paid to developing renewable source of base generation, especially for solar energy. A Ministry of Energy had been established to oversee the effective implementation of the planned reforms. Finally, Uzbekistan continued to strengthen international collaboration in the sphere of energy, especially by actively participating in the activities of the Committee on Sustainable energy.
28. The representative of the Russian Federation suggested that the secretariat to organize informal consultations with interested delegations on project 2023/25.
29. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the extrabudgetary projects contained in informal documents 2023/13, 2023/22, 2023/23 and 2023/24. Regarding project 2023/25, EXCOM requests the secretariat to initiate informal consultations with interested delegations as soon as possible, with a view to concluding consideration at next EXCOM (6 July). He further requested the Secretary of the Commission to keep the Bureau abreast of the progress made ahead of the next meeting.

#### Item 7 - Regional review meeting of the Global Compact on Migration

30. The Executive Secretary presented informal document 2023/26, which contained a background note by the secretariat for this agenda item, along with a suggested framework by IOM for the regional reviews.
31. The representative of the European Union and its Member States explained its proposal for a slightly amended draft decision, which incorporates earlier language on the issue.
32. The representative of the Russian Federation requested the secretariat to clarify (i) the UNECE mandate on migration and availability of resources to organize such meeting and (ii) the reason why this agenda item had been included in the informal segment of the meeting.
33. The secretariat explained that UNECE could serve as a neutral platform to bring together interested member States and relevant stakeholders from across the region, as there were no other platform or process in the region offering this unique convening capacity and the experience in organizing regional intergovernmental review meetings feeding into UN General Assembly processes. The substantive preparation of the meeting (except when it related to migration statistics) would lie with the United Nations Network on Migration and its Coordinator, IOM. The secretariat added that the mere convening of the meeting could be undertaken by UNECE within existing resources. Regarding the inclusion of the item agenda in the informal segment of the meeting, the secretariat clarified that this approach mirrored earlier EXCOM practice: At the 94th meeting of EXCOM, held in November 2017, the modalities of the intergovernmental negotiation on the Global Compact for safe, orderly and regular migration had been discussed in the same format.
34. The Chair concluded that pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 73/195, para 50, and 76/266, paras 68 and 75, EXCOM mandates the UNECE to convene, jointly with IOM, as the coordinator of the UN Network, an intergovernmental meeting to review the

implementation of international cooperative framework on safe, orderly and regular migration in the UNECE region, while respecting the voluntary nature of participation, the sovereignty and the different positions of the UNECE Member States. The meeting will be held back-to-back with the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the ECE region in March 2024. The modalities and agenda of the regional review meeting will be developed in close consultation with member States. There will be no financial implications for UNECE. Substantive contributions to the regional review meeting by the UNECE secretariat will be provided within the limits of its current mandate and activities in the area of migration (i.e. statistics).

Item 8 - Briefing by the Executive Secretary: Important new developments and key upcoming events.

35. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM of her attendance to the following recent meetings and missions:

- **27-29 April 2023, Tashkent:** Tashkent International Investment Forum 2023
- **4 – 6 May 2023, Nairobi:** CEB Spring 2023 session

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

- **24-26 May 2023, Leipzig:** International Transport Forum
- **30 May – 2 June 2023, Bratislava:** GLOBSEC 2023 Bratislava Forum
- **6-9 June 2023, Yerevan and Tbilisi:** Launch of the UNECE Innovation for Sustainable Development Review of Armenia and country visit to Georgia

37. The representative of Azerbaijan thanked UNECE and its Executive Secretary for the support given to SPECA, currently chaired by Azerbaijan under the theme “Transforming the SPECA region into a connectivity hub with global outreach”. The first ministerial level meeting of the SPECA participating states had taken place in April 2023 in Geneva in the margins of the Seventieth session of the Commission. The joint ministerial statement had endorsed several important work streams within SPECA, namely, to establish a UN Multi Donor Trust Fund, to initiate a UN General Assembly resolution to highlight the 25th anniversary of SPECA, and to develop a road map for the digitalization of multimodal data and document exchange along the Transcaspiian transport corridor using relevant UN legal instruments and standard. She also announced that a summit of participating states was planned for the end of the year. Finally, on behalf of the members of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS), she thanked the Executive Secretary for her continued support to the ongoing collaboration between UNECE and OTS, seeking an update on the state of preparation of a Memorandum of Understanding with OTS.

38. The Executive Secretary confirmed that discussions were ongoing about a possible MoU with the OTS. She was aware of diverging views within the membership on the issue and, in the spirit of transparency, had reached out to several delegations and invited inputs to the draft document, which was still pending. She looked forward to listening to the views of delegations.

39. The representative of the European Union and its Member States noted that EU delegations are cognisant of the mandate of the Executive Secretary to pursue and sign agreements with regional organizations. He affirmed that the EU is supportive of this

mission. With regard to the issue at hand, he reminded of Security Council resolutions S/RES/541 (1983) and S/RES/550 (1984), which called upon all States not to recognize the illegal secessionist and entity in Cyprus and not to facilitate or in any way assist the separatist entity. He also reminded that in November 2022, the OTS had announced at its last Summit that this illegal entity was extended an observer status to the organization. He thus recommended to consider the signing of a MoU with the OTS with caution, given the legal and political repercussions and the need to uphold the United Nations Charter and resolutions. He concluded by saying that this position was not and should not be seen as directed against the right of the OTS member States to pursue shared goals with UNECE.

40. The representative of Cyprus aligned herself with the statement by the European Union and its Member States and expressed support for the mandate of the Executive Secretary to pursue and sign agreements with regional organizations. She noted that by signing this MoU, UNECE would be expected to cooperate with the OTS and its membership. Bearing in mind that the OTS did not differentiate in its everyday activities between full members and those with observers status, such as the illegal secessionist entity in question, UNECE may be put in a position that would lead to violating relevant UN Security Council resolutions.
41. The representative of Armenia took note of the intention of the Executive Secretary to sign an MoU with the OTS and stated that Armenia respected the mandate of the Executive Secretary to enhance the regional cooperation. However, due to the lack of proper consultations, there were issues that needed to be further clarified, including with regard to legal aspects, bearing in mind that the OTS had no consultative status with the United Nations. He indicated that the OTS and its secretariat had made several highly offensive statements against Armenia and promoted distorted narratives directly and unequivocally infringing upon the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Armenia in gross violation of the UN Charter and international law. He encouraged to consult the membership well in advance in the case of politically sensitive MoUs and suggested to postpone the signing of the MoU in question to allow for further consultations.
42. The representative of Greece aligned himself with the statement by the European Union and its Member States and reiterated support for strengthening the cooperation between Europe and Central Asia, especially related to transport and energy. He noted that the OTS had no observer status within the United Nations and that, in the absence of consensus, the matter had been deferred at the General Assembly year after year since 2011. Moreover, Greece expressed its strong dissatisfaction regarding the way the Executive Secretary has acted. The signature of such an MoU would constitute a situation of a clear violation of UN Security Council Resolutions 541/1983 and 550/1984. In line of the above Greece called on the outgoing Executive Secretary to refrain from signing the said MoU.
43. The representative of Turkmenistan congratulated the UNECE Secretariat for the organization of the 70th session of the Commission. He supported the signing of a MoU between UNECE and the OTS, as one of the OTS objectives was to create favorable conditions for trade and investment, to facilitate trade procedures, to develop science and technology, and a number of other areas. These areas were close linked to UNECE's mandate. The MoU would allow to foster partnerships between Turkic States and the UNECE in order to achieve both agendas.



44. The representative of France aligned himself with the statement by the European Union and its Member States, and also acknowledged the concerns expressed by some individual countries, that signing a MoU with the OTS could encourage the recognition of a secessionist entity. He reiterated support for strengthening the cooperation between Europe and Central Asia, noting that economic cooperation is a core mission of the UNECE.. He suggested postponing the signature of the MoU, as there was no urgency in signing it over the next weeks, and better explaining its objective and content.
45. The representative of Serbia aligned himself with the statement by the European Union and its Member States and expressed full support to the sovereignty of the Republic of Cyprus. He urged to protect UNECE from further politization and to look for consensus.
46. The representative of Spain aligned himself with the statement of the European Union and its Member States and wondered how, when sensitive matters were at stake that had merited two resolutions from the UN Security Council and the possible interaction of non-states with the UN, communication and coordination with the concerned Member States had not been undertaken much earlier.
47. The representative of Uzbekistan as the Chair of the Organization of the Turkic States encouraged the signature of the MoU. He explained that this signature would promote and support UNECE efforts towards the development of multilateral regional cooperation.
48. The representative of Türkiye supported the signature of the MoU with the OTS. He noted that it was UNECE's responsibility to strengthen multilateral efforts in the region and that this was even more important if such efforts served economic integration and cooperation, as stipulated in the UNECE mandate. Signing a MoU between the two organizations was the right step to complement the bilateral efforts already undertaken and would solidify the existing work with UNECE, including SPECA. There was nothing controversial in the MoU draft text related to the specified areas of collaboration, which were all within the scope of UNECE's mandate and purely technical in nature. Further, the text had clear references to the collaborating OTS member countries. Regarding the claims raised, that Türkiye rejects, he noted that Turkish Cypriots had always provided detailed responses. Türkiye does not accept the politicization of the MoU issue and calls on all parties to act accordingly.
49. The Executive Secretary thanked all the delegations for their insightful interventions.
50. The Chair concluded that EXCOM requests the secretariat to organize informal consultations with interested parties on this topic.

#### Item 9 – Any other business

51. The Chair informed EXCOM that this was the Executive Secretary's last EXCOM meeting and thanked her for her service to the organization.
52. The Executive Secretary recalled her first EXCOM meeting in June 2017 and her initial remarks to EXCOM that were still relevant today: At the time, she had highlighted (i) the motivated and competent staff of UNECE and the relevance of its normative work; (ii) the changing times and the ongoing reform of the UN system in support of

delivering on the SDGs; and (iii) the need to strengthen resource mobilization and partnerships. She stated that she was proud of many achievements, including reaching gender parity in UNECE in the professional categories and above; providing 153 tools to its member States to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic; supporting Ukraine; establishing the UN Road Safety Fund; strengthening the work of the Commission session through the focus on a cross-cutting theme; and promoting youth inclusion in the UNECE debates.

53. The Chair wished Ms. Algayerova well in her next personal and professional endeavours and informed EXCOM that its next meeting would take place on 6 July in the morning.

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