

**ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE**  
**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**  
132<sup>nd</sup> Meeting  
Geneva, 13 February 2024

**EXCOM/CONCLU/132**

CHAIR'S CONCLUSIONS

## **FORMAL SEGMENT**

### Item 1 – Adoption of the agenda

1. The agenda was adopted as contained in ECE/EX/2024/1.

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

2. The conclusions from the 131<sup>st</sup> meeting of EXCOM (EXCOM/CONCLU/131) were adopted.

### Item 3 - Matters relating to the Conference of European Statisticians:

#### a) Meeting with the Chair of the Conference of European Statisticians

3. The Chair welcomed the Vice-Chair of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES), Mr. Anil Arora (Canada), who made a presentation to EXCOM on the achievements of the Conference over the past year and its plans for the future. He invited EXCOM to approve the Programme of Work of the Statistics subprogramme for 2024 and the mandates and terms of references of two Task Forces under the Conference and of the High-Level Group for the Modernisation of Official Statistics.
4. The representative of Uzbekistan expressed gratitude for UNECE support and highlighted Uzbek participation in the Bureau of CES, marking a milestone for Central Asia. He emphasized the importance of CES in improving national statistical systems, particularly in the digital age. Uzbekistan requested UNECE assistance in developing an overview of the implementation of international best practice in its national statistics.
5. The representative of Türkiye commended the CES for its inclusive and dynamic role in addressing emerging statistical issues and enhancing the international comparability of national statistics. She highlighted the significance of CES task forces in developing guidelines and recommendations, particularly in areas such as economy, globalization, migration, poverty, environment, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Türkiye actively contributed to these task forces and benefited from their work.
6. The representative of Switzerland reiterated commitment to continued collaboration with UNECE, particularly in the domain of data and statistics. She welcomed the existing cooperation between OECD and UNECE and expressed hope for its continuation.
7. The representative of the Russian Federation said the statistical services of the Russian Federation and CIS countries valued the productive cooperation in various areas, including modernisation of official statistics for the digital age. The Russian Federation would continue to support UNECE statistical work, including the technical cooperation projects.
8. The representative of Serbia underscored the role of UNECE in promoting innovative ideas and enhancing the quality of official statistical data. The Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia has based itself on CES work to create a decision support system intended to serve decision makers of various levels, citizens and local governments with reliable data through visually rich reports based on statistical analysis. He highlighted the active cooperation of Serbia with CES,

including in the conduct of the agricultural census in 2023, participation in the task force on data stewardship and workshops on modernization of official statistics.

9. The representative of Armenia welcomed the global assessment of Armenia's statistical system and highlighted the active engagement of the national statistical office in various CES task forces and working groups, as well as the CES Bureau. Armenia remained committed to close cooperation with UNECE to strengthen its statistical capacity.
10. The representative of the European Union and its member States supported the establishment of the new task forces that would tackle issues of strategic importance for official statistics, such as the changing role of official statistics in the new digital world, utilizing emerging technologies and ensuring access to data (including administrative and privately held data), to measure hard to reach groups. He commended the report "Data Stewardship and the role of national statistical offices in the new data ecosystem" discussed at the last CES plenary and looked forward to the continuation of the work to support States in taking up a stewardship role in different country contexts. The European Union and its member States recognized the importance of integrating statistical and geospatial information and the efforts of CES to form closer partnerships between geospatial experts and statisticians.
11. The representative of Belarus informed of national efforts to integrate innovative CES developments and achievements, including via a platform for reporting on SDG progress and improvements in gender-related statistics, which would be used in studies on the status of women in the family and the prevalence of certain forms of violence against women. Belarus actively participated in CES work on topics such as population and housing censuses. Belarus commended the practical significance of CES work in various statistical domains, including water and forest resources, national climate statistics, environmental accounting, integration of geospatial information and business demographics. Belarus expressed interest in continued constructive cooperation and assistance from UNECE.
12. The Chair concluded that EXCOM thanks the Chair of the Conference of European Statisticians for the comprehensive report and the Vice-Chair for its introduction. EXCOM appreciates being informed about the activities and achievements of the Conference and being kept aware of future directions of its work.

b) Decisions on matters relating to the Conference of European Statisticians

13. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the programme of work of the Statistics subprogramme for 2024, as contained in documents ECE/CES/2023/16 and ECE/CES/2023/16/Add.1. EXCOM approves the terms of reference of the Task Force on measurement of well-being for the period 2024–2025, the Task Force on hard-to-reach groups in administrative data sources for the period 2024–2025 and the High-level Group for the Modernisation of Official Statistics for the period 2024–2028 as contained in ECE/EX/2024/L.1. EXCOM welcomes the renewal of the partnership agreement between the ECE Secretariat and UN-GGIM: Europe for the period 2024–2026.

Item 4 - Matters relating to the Committee on Environmental Policy

a) Meeting with the Chair of the Committee on Environmental Policy

14. The Chair welcomed the Chair of the Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP), Ms. Elisabete Quintas da Silva (Portugal), who made a presentation to EXCOM on the achievements of the Committee over the past year and its plans for the future. She invited EXCOM to approve the Programme of Work of the Environment Subprogramme for 2024, the mandate and terms of

reference of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment for the period 2024–2028, and the extension of the mandate and terms of reference of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators until 31 December 2025.

15. The representative of the European Union and its member States highlighted the importance of reliable data for decision-making. The role of UNECE in fostering environmental assessments, monitoring and transparency was key in this context. He commended the good cooperation between UNECE and the European Environmental Agency. UNECE should continue to provide practical support to policy implementation, including through awareness raising and capacity building activities. Environmental Performance Reviews (EPRs) were cost effective instruments in promoting better environmental performance, as evidenced by strong interest from countries, including from outside the region. The European Union and its member States valued the regional, global and transboundary reach of UNECE environmental work. This work should keep up with global and technical challenges and deepen and develop the attractiveness of the UNECE multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs). These were a source of pride and revealed the importance of UNECE at the global level. He welcomed the addition of new Parties to the Water and Aarhus Conventions, the expected global opening of the Espoo Convention and the revision of the Gothenburg Protocol. He encouraged continued strong contributions to global processes, mentioning 2023 events such as the UN Water Conference and COP-28. In 2024, UNECE should continue to highlight the relevance of its work at the next World Water Forum, the Summit of the Future and COP-29. He looked forward to discussing the results of the work on the implementation of a region wide approach to sustainable infrastructure in the pan-European region in one of the first EXCOM meetings in 2025. He stated that the European Union and its member States welcomed the UNECE contribution to the assessment of the environmental damages caused by the Russian aggression against Ukraine.
16. The representative of the Russian Federation supported the efforts of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment and the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators. He stated that the Russian Federation, for political reasons, had not been invited to the 9<sup>th</sup> Environment for Europe Conference in Nicosia in October 2022 and that his delegation did not accept using the conclusions of that meeting as a foundation for work in the United Nations. The Russian Federation further stated that his delegation did not support the conduct of politicised consultations in UNECE on assessment of the environmental situation in Ukraine. The Russian Federation regretted the decision to relocate the Meteorological Synthesizing Centre East that had operated in the country for 30 years and did not believe that UNECE would be able to compensate the loss of the valuable work carried out by this independent scientific institution for the benefit of the Parties to the Air Convention. He said this decision had been taken in violation of procedures and strongly condemned the politization of UNECE environmental work.
17. The representative Armenia appreciated the Environmental Performance Review of Armenia, the training seminars on the practical application of the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment organized in 2023 with funding from the EU4Environment programme, and the cooperation under the Air Convention for analysis of national legislation and the development of emissions reporting. Armenia remained committed to advancing environmental sustainability through close partnership with UNECE, including on topics such as sustainable forest management, reforestation, management of water resources and amending the environmental legislation.
18. The Chair concluded that EXCOM thanks the Chair of the Committee on Environmental Policy 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 Environmental Policy

19. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the programme of work of the Environment subprogramme for 2024, as contained in document ECE/CEP/2023/5; the mandate and terms of reference of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment for the period 2024–2028, as contained in document ECE/CEP/AC.10/2023/2/Add.1; and the extension of the mandate and terms of reference of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators, as contained in the annex to document ECE/CEP-CES/GE.1/2021/3, until 31 December 2025.

Item 5 - Matters relating to the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT)

a) Meeting with the Chair of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT)

20. The Chair welcomed the Chair of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT), Ms. Sue Probert (United Kingdom), who made a presentation to EXCOM on the achievements of the Centre over the past year and its plans for the future. She invited EXCOM to approve the Programme of Work of the United Nations Code for Trade and Transport Locations (UN/LOCODE) Advisory Group and the extension of its mandate for the period 2024-2025.
21. The representative of Uzbekistan appreciated the support to Uzbekistan in enhancing sustainability and circularity in the cotton and textile industry. He also highlighted efforts towards the development of a national trade facilitation roadmap, and the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. Uzbekistan had experienced significant improvements in trade facilitation implementation rates. He mentioned the adoption of the roadmap for the use of UN/CEFACT standards for digitalizing multimodal data exchange along the Trans-Caspian corridor at the recent SPECA Summit. He welcomed the strategic partnership between UNECE and WCO in harmonizing data models for cross-border trade procedures.
22. The representative of the Russian Federation welcomed the work of UN/CEFACT in facilitating and simplifying trade procedures, including the preparation of recommendations and the updating of standards. He highlighted successful pilot projects, such as the transboundary exchange of electronic consignment notes and CMR for vehicle transport between the Russian Federation and Belarus, based on UN/CEFACT standards. A similar pilot would be conducted in the Eurasian Economic Union countries in 2024-2025. The Russian Federation welcomed efforts to modernize UN/LOCODE. The contributions by UN/CEFACT to enhancing circularity and digitalization were timely and useful. He stated that the recent UN/CEFACT Forum in Bangkok had strengthened the partnership between UNECE and ESCAP and suggested that future editions could be organized in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. He expressed satisfaction about a more balanced composition of the Bureau of UN/CEFACT after the recent elections of representatives of the private sector and also representatives of countries where UN/CEFACT is being implemented. With regard to a potential review of the rules of procedure of UN/CEFACT, he urged all involved stakeholders to take into account the interests of different parties and make this process fully transparent and comprehensible, in order to ensure continuing trust and avoid undermining existing mechanisms of cooperation.
23. The representative of North Macedonia highlighted the longstanding cooperation between North Macedonia and UN/CEFACT. She emphasized the significant progress in trade digitalization, particularly with the introduction of paperless customs procedures, the enhancement of interoperability, and the implementation of a national Single Window system as a unique achievement among Western Balkan countries. She highlighted the recent technical

cooperation workshop organized in Skopje in cooperation with UNECE, with a focus on trade facilitation, data sharing and Single Window for the Western Balkans. The event had provided insight into the EU regulation for electronic freight transport information and the use of UN/CEFACT standards and the multimodal transport reference data model. She stated that UN/CEFACT had contributed to the significant improvements in trade facilitation highlighted by the UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation. North Macedonia remained committed to continued cooperation with UN/CEFACT.

24. The representative of the European Union and its member States appreciated the role of UN/CEFACT in delivering tools and standards to simplify global trade. He highlighted the importance of the cybersecurity updates to UN/LOCODE and the work on environmental, social, and governance traceability for sustainable value chains. The European Union and its member States welcomed ongoing discussions about governance and increasing government participation in UN/CEFACT activities, suggesting closer coordination with other trade and economic development initiatives.
  25. The representative of the United States emphasized the importance of the upcoming election for the UN/CEFACT chairmanship in 2024. He invited member States to consider identifying a new candidate, possibly from government, for this crucial role.
  26. The representative of Kyrgyzstan underscored the critical role of UN/CEFACT in trade facilitation and e-business standards, particularly for landlocked countries. Kyrgyzstan was participated in the UN/CEFACT Bureau, where it led activities in the trade facilitation domain. Kyrgyzstan had made significant progress made in implementing its national trade facilitation roadmap and was planning to eliminate paper-based documentation requirements for import and export of essential goods. He also underscored the significant improvements in trade facilitation highlighted by the UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation.
  27. The representative of the United Kingdom highlighted the implementation of the Electronic Trade Documents Act in 2023 as a significant milestone in trade digitization. She welcomed the continued support and collaboration of UN/CEFACT in British initiatives to reduce trade friction, such as through the ecosystem of trust pilots where the government partnered with a range of consortia to test new ways of sharing data and assurances around the border. She echoed the positive comments regarding the regional improvements in trade facilitation highlighted by the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation and the strategic partnership between UNECE and the World Customs Organization.
  28. The representative of Georgia highlighted national efforts in implementing digital solutions in the transport sector, including the maritime Single Window and Port Community system, which were in line with the EU Association Agreement. A pilot version of the national maritime Single Window would be launched in early 2024, with full implementation expected by fall 2024.
  29. The Chair concluded that EXCOM thanks the Chair of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) for the comprehensive report. EXCOM appreciates being informed about the activities and achievements of the Centre and being kept aware of future directions of its work.
- b) Decisions on matters relating to the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT)
30. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the Programme of Work of the United Nations Code for Trade and Transport Locations (UN/LOCODE) Advisory Group, as contained in document ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2023/23, as well as the extension of its mandate for the period 2024–2025.

## INFORMAL SEGMENT

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

31. Regarding the project contained in informal document 2024/4, the representative of the Russian Federation stated that his delegation took note of efforts by UNECE to make eTIR operational among Contracting Parties. As the project results could be of interest to many UNECE member States, he invited the secretariat to be transparent and to make its reports on activities and results readily available.
32. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the extrabudgetary projects contained in informal documents 2024/4 and 2024/5.

### Item 7 - Evaluation on the role of the Economic Commission for Europe to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in the context of the United Nations development system reform

33. The Executive Secretary presented the results of, and management response to, the evaluation on the role of UNECE to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in the context of the United Nations development system reform as contained in informal document 2024/6 to EXCOM. She recalled that all information relevant to this evaluation was available on the UNECE website.
34. The representative of the European Union and its member States appreciated the transparency of the secretariat demonstrated by the presentation and took note of the proposed actions. He said that technical cooperation was an important area of UNECE activity which contributed to economic integration across the UNECE region and the implementation of the SDGs.
35. The Chair concluded that EXCOM takes note of the results of the evaluation on the role of the Economic Commission for Europe to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in the context of the United Nations development system reform, as contained in informal document 2024/6.

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

36. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM that the UNECE 2024 Regular Budget (RB) had been adopted in December 2023 and that this budget had grown beyond recosting for the first time since 2010. The positive news was mitigated by the considerable impact of the continuing liquidity crisis and recruitment freeze experienced by the UN Secretariat. With 96 per cent of its RB consisting of posts, UNECE had little flexibility to seek cost savings and would be unable to fill the 18 RB posts that were currently vacant. This could inhibit programme delivery. Potential further closures of the Palais des Nations and additional restrictions in service by UNOG and the Department for General Assembly and Conference could lead to other impacts.
37. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM that UNOG had terminated the conference modalities of hybrid or remote access to formal calendar meetings on 22 January 2024 with no grace period. This would impact upcoming UNECE events such as the Regional Forum for Sustainable Development or the Global Methane Forum. UNECE was in discussions with UNOG to explore transitional arrangements. She informed that other Regional Commissions continued to offer hybrid modalities.

38. The representative of the United States expressed concern about the impact of the cessation of hybrid meetings on attendance at the Global Methane Forum, and urged the secretariat to work closely with UNOG to find a creative solution.
39. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM about two Memoranda of Understanding under preparation: One with JCDecaux and Saatchi and Saatchi to extend the ongoing collaboration between these two organizations and the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Road Safety for the implementation of the Global Road Safety Campaign through 2025, and one with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe to enhance UNECE work on and with local authorities.
40. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM of the following recent meetings and missions:
- **30 November – 13 December, Dubai:** COP28
  - **14 and 15 December, Yerevan:** Ministerial Meeting of the Landlocked Developing Countries on the topic “Enhancing equitable, affordable, and inclusive transport connectivity as a driver for more sustainable and resilient economies in LLDCs”.
  - **16-17 January, Davos:** World Economic Forum
41. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM about the following upcoming meetings:
- **14-15 February, Brussels:** Mission by the Executive Secretary to Brussels to engage with officials from the European Commission
  - **20-23 February 2024, Geneva:** 86<sup>th</sup> session of the Inland Transport Committee
  - **11 March, Geneva:** Regional Review of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration
  - **13-14 March 2024, Geneva:** 2024 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development
  - **18-20 March 2024, Geneva:** 2024 Global Methane Forum

Item 9 – Any other business

42. The Chair informed EXCOM that the secretariat had provided the Bureau with a draft note on proposals for the cross-cutting theme for the 71<sup>st</sup> Commission session, to be held in 2024. It contained input from the sectoral Committees and entities reporting directly to EXCOM. The Bureau was reviewing the material and would circulate it to member States shortly to initiate informal consultations on the issue.
43. The Chair informed EXCOM that its next meeting would take place on 25 March 2024 in the afternoon.

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