

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
133rd Meeting
Geneva, 25 March 2024

EXCOM/CONCLU/133

CHAIR'S CONCLUSIONS

FORMAL SEGMENT

Item 1 – Adoption of the agenda

1. The agenda was adopted as contained in ECE/EX/2024/2.

Item 2 – Chair’s conclusions from the last meeting

2. The conclusions from the 132nd meeting of EXCOM (EXCOM/CONCLU/132) were adopted.

Item 3 - Matters relating to the Standing Working Group on Ageing

a) Meeting with the Chair of the Standing Working Group on Ageing

3. EXCOM heard a pre-recorded presentation from the Vice-Chair of the Standing Working Group on Ageing (SWGA), Mr. Martin Amberger (Germany) on the achievements of the Working Group over the past year and its plans for the future. Mr. Amberger invited EXCOM to approve the Programme of Work of the Population component of the Housing, Land Management and Population subprogramme for 2024.
4. The representative of the Russian Federation acknowledged the important role of the SWGA in key events such as the ICPD30 conference. He expressed support for the SWGA and did not object to the decision tabled for EXCOM approval.
5. The representative of Germany expressed support for the SWGA and recalled that Germany participated in its bureau and in the task force to develop the new Regional Implementation Strategy of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, as well as contributing financially.
6. The representative of the European Union and its member States appreciated the work of the SWGA in preparing policy adaptations to realize the potential of living longer lives and acknowledged the important role of the Standing Working Group in ICPD30.
7. The Chair concluded that EXCOM thanks the Vice-Chair of the Standing Working Group on Ageing for the comprehensive report. EXCOM appreciates being informed about the activities and achievements of the Standing Working Group and being kept aware of future directions of its work.

b) Decisions on matters relating to the Standing Working Group on Ageing

8. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the programme of work of the Population component of the Housing, Land Management and Population subprogramme for 2024, as contained in document ECE/WG.1/2023/5.

Item 4 - Matters relating to the Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry

a) Meeting with the Chair of the Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry

9. EXCOM heard a pre-recorded presentation from the Chair of the Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry (COFFI), Mr. Peter Blombäck (Sweden), on the achievements of the Committee over the past year and its plans for the future. Mr. Blombäck invited EXCOM to approve the Programme of Work of the Forests and the Forest Industry Subprogramme for 2024, and the extension of the mandates of five Teams of Specialists for 2024-2025.
10. The representative of Armenia appreciated the contributions of past UNECE studies on forest management and forest landscape restoration to identifying the major challenges and gaps in the sector in Armenia. Sustainable forest management, creation of reliable and up-to-date forest inventory, afforestation and reforestation, conservation of biodiversity and biosafety were priorities for the government. The creation of the forest inventory was the most urgent issue to be addressed in order to meet the ambitious targets the country has set for itself under the Paris Agreement. Armenia appreciated the cooperation with UNECE in this context.
11. The representative of the Russian Federation supported UNECE endeavours in sustainable forest management. The outcomes of this work and the technical cooperation projects bolstered cooperation among member States. He emphasized the importance of boreal forests in addressing climate change and biodiversity loss and urged continued efforts to raise awareness of their ecological significance at global UN fora. In the context of the importance of the forest industry for the circular economy and for ensuring sustainable development in UNECE countries, he hoped the secretariat would analyze the new certification methods introduced by some countries or their unions, and provide information about possible innovations in the forest products market, their impact on producers and end users. The secretariat should work consistently on streamlining and enhancing regional cooperation, taking into account the opinions of various interested stakeholders, approaches, methods of use and analysis of forestry information for the purposes of strategic planning, research activities and international reporting.
12. The representative Switzerland underscored the essential role of UNECE work in promoting the environmental and social benefits of forests in combating climate change and biodiversity loss while strengthening the forest-based economy. She commended collaborative efforts among COFFI, the European Forestry Commission, Forest Europe, the European Forest Institute and the European Environment Agency.
13. The representative of the European Union and its member States stressed the urgency of addressing threats to forests amidst the triple planetary crisis. He supported continuation of work in the key areas of focus outlined in the COFFI Chair's report, including aligning UNECE forest work with global processes, enhancing the role of forests for urban development through the implementation of the San Marino Regional Urban Forestry Action Plan, applying circularity to forest-based industries, and developing data and statistical tools as well as the nexus approach, the latter in particular for the energy-forest, water-forest and food-forest nexuses. The European Union and its member States appreciated the work on supporting international data collection and circular bioeconomy. He highlighted the good cooperation developed with the European Union, the European Environment Agency and Forest Europe.
14. The Chair concluded that EXCOM thanks the Chair of the Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry 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 Forests and the Forest Industry

15. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the programme of work of the Forests and the Forest Industry Subprogramme for 2024, as contained in document ECE/TIM/2023/10, FAO:EFC/2023/10; and the extension, for the period 2024-2025, of the mandates of the Teams of specialists on boreal forests, on forest products and wood energy statistics, on monitoring sustainable forest management, on sustainable forest products and on forest communication (Forest Communicators' Network), as contained in document ECE/TIM/2021/2-FO:EFC/2021/2, annex II.

Item 5 - Matters relating to the Inland Transport Committee

a) Meeting with the Chair of the Inland Transport Committee

16. The Chair welcomed the Chair of the Inland Transport Committee (ITC), Ms. Hannie Meesters (the Netherlands), 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 Transport Subprogramme for 2024, the establishment of a new Group of Experts, the extension of the mandates of two Groups of Experts, and the updated Terms of Reference of four Working Parties. She also invited EXCOM to take note of requests made by the ITC and some of its subsidiary bodies regarding hybrid meeting servicing.
17. The Chair recalled that a note by the secretariat had been circulated, informing that the Working Party on Rail Transport had requested that the Revisions Committee on the Model Rules on the Permanent Identification of Railway Rolling Stock receive translations of parliamentary documents into all United Nations languages, given its global role. He informed EXCOM that the Secretariat was reviewing the potential programme budget implications of this decision and would bring the issue to EXCOM once this review was complete.
18. The representative of the Russian Federation welcomed the adoption of the ITC Strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in inland transport. He highlighted the commitment to low-carbon transformation in the national transport sector through state investment programs and initiatives such as electrification of railways, development of electric transport, and transition to alternative fuels. He commended UNECE contributions to strengthening multilateral cooperation for enhanced road safety. The Russian Federation remained concerned regarding the incomplete fulfilment of the European Agreement concerning the Work of Crews of Vehicles Engaged in International Road Transport and continued to experience problems with the certification of technical components and national cryptographic keys for digital tachographs. He emphasized the importance of the European Commission's Joint Research Centre fulfilling its obligations. The Russian Federation advocated for enhancing the effectiveness of the ITC and its subsidiary bodies, seeking depoliticised and constructive cooperation to achieve the transport-related SDGs in the region.
19. The representative of the United States expressed satisfaction with the last two meetings of the ITC and remarked on the strong ministerial representation from outside the UNECE region at the most recent meeting. The United States encouraged the ITC to look beyond advancing strictly EU-centric policies and regulations.
20. The representative of Switzerland underlined the key role of the ITC in developing and facilitating transport across the region while shoring up security, effectiveness and environmental performance. Switzerland welcomed the adoption of the ITC Strategy. She supported the proposal on hybrid work sessions and highlighted that these would help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

21. The representative of the European Union and its member States welcomed the adoption of the ITC Strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, acknowledging its significance in mitigating climate change. He highlighted the key role of the ITC in managing international transport conventions, as well as the increasing number of Contracting Parties to these conventions, and commended the adaptability of ITC vis-a-vis technological developments, such as digital technologies and autonomous vehicles. The European Union and its member States welcomed the Unified Railway Law and encouraged accession to it. He expressed concern regarding the recent changes in the servicing of hybrid meetings by UNOG. Given the large number of meetings organized in the area of transport, he sought clarification on the options remaining to follow discussions virtually.
22. The representative of Armenia expressed interest in strengthening cooperation with UNECE, particularly in road and railway communications and ensuring road safety. He recognized the potential of UNECE to contribute to the development of a comprehensive transport infrastructure in Armenia and the broader region. Armenia sought technical expertise and legal support from UNECE for improving national transport legislation within the framework of UNECE conventions and other legal and technical tools.
23. The representative of the Netherlands welcomed the adoption of the ITC Strategy and looked forward to its successful implementation.
24. The Chair concluded that EXCOM thanks the Chair of the Inland Transport Committee 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 Inland Transport Committee

25. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the decisions on matters relating to the Inland Transport Committee as contained in ECE/EX/2024/L.6.

INFORMAL SEGMENT

Item 6 - Extrabudgetary projects (for approval)

26. Regarding the project contained in informal document 2024/13, the representative of the Russian Federation inquired whether the adoption of standards to take into account gender issues in national quality infrastructure would not create new barriers for trade. He said that new mandatory requirements for the safety of goods and services often created additional difficulties for local businesses due to the need to adapt products, and could impede exports even more than dues, taxes and charges. Regarding the gender component of the project, he asked if it related to expansion of the rights and opportunities of women in quality infrastructure bodies or to the development of standards. Finally, he inquired why a non-UNECE country (Benin) was listed as a beneficiary and how the beneficiaries were chosen.
27. A representative of the UNECE secretariat responded that the intention of the project was to render the quality infrastructure for trade gender-neutral. It would not create any new standards, nor any new barriers to trade, but would aim to correct disparities that already existed. In reply to the second question, he said that the project would address both the expansion of the rights and opportunities of women in quality infrastructure bodies and gender issues in the development of standards, by creating review committees in the beneficiary countries to address these two aspects. This dual focus was in line with the programme of work of the UNECE Team of Specialists on Gender-Responsive Standards. Finally, he clarified that Benin had been

selected pursuant to a request from the donor to have a beneficiary from outside the UNECE region.

28. The representative of the Russian Federation said he would need to consult with his capital based on the provided answers and requested that the consideration of the project be deferred to the next meeting of EXCOM.
29. The representative of the Netherlands recalled that the entry into force of new disciplines on services domestic regulation, announced at the 13th WTO Ministerial Conference in February 2024, obliged adherents to ensure that measures relating to the authorization for the supply of a service do not discriminate between men and women. He stated that the Russian Federation had also adhered to the Declaration containing these disciplines and thus shared the same obligation.
30. The representative of the European Union and its member States supported the project and regretted the efforts by the Russian Federation to obstruct its approval. He called on the chair and secretariat to ensure that the project could be approved at the next meeting of EXCOM.
31. The Chair concluded that EXCOM approves the extrabudgetary projects contained in informal documents 2024/10, 2024/11, 2024/12 and 2024/14. The EXCOM Bureau would consider how to proceed with project 2024/13.

Item 7 - Important new developments: Briefing by the Executive Secretary

32. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM about two Memoranda of Understanding under preparation: One with the Development Solutions Institute Foundation to facilitate the implementation of the Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing, focusing on activities linked to sustainable finance for infrastructure and smart cities, and one with Artolution to promote UNECE efforts on helmet safety.
33. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM that UNOG maintained its decision to terminate servicing of hybrid meetings, and expressed concerns that this would impede the participation of youth and civil society at intergovernmental fora.
34. The Chair informed EXCOM that Switzerland had sent a letter co-signed by 123 UN Member States to UNOG on this topic. As a General Assembly resolution was necessary to mandate UNOG to service hybrid meetings, he urged delegations to liaise with their counterparts in New York and highlight the importance of the issue.
35. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM of the following recent meetings and missions:
 - **12-13 March, Geneva:** UNECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development
 - **18-21 March, Geneva:** Global Methane Forum
 - **22 March, Paris:** World Water Day 2024 celebration hosted by UNESCO (remote participation by the Executive Secretary)
36. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM about the following upcoming meetings and missions:
 - **22 - 26 April 2024, Geneva:** UNECE Resource Management Week
 - **23-25 April, Paris:** Mission to Paris to attend the Ministerial meeting of the OECD Committee on Science, Technology and Innovation and the Turkmen Energy Investment Forum

- **8 - 10 May, Istanbul:** 8th UNECE International Public-Private Partnerships Forum
- **20-22 May, Bali:** World Water Forum
- **11-13 June, Berlin:** Ukraine Recovery Conference
- **13-16 June:** Astana International Economic Forum
- **20-21 June, Geneva:** 72nd plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians
- **24-26 June, Geneva:** 17th session of the Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public-Private Partnerships
- **27-28 June, Limassol:** UNECE Forum on Education for Sustainable Development

37. The Executive Secretary informed EXCOM that the Director of the Sustainable Development Unit, Ms. Monika Linn, and the Director of the Sustainable Transport Division, Mr. Yuwei Li, would be retiring shortly, and thanked them for their service to the UN.

Item 8 – Any other business

The Chair informed EXCOM that its next meeting would take place on 1 July 2024 in the afternoon.
