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INFORMATION NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

Subject: United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE): Special session of the Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP-SS) (Geneva, 23–25 February 2016)
- Statements by the European Union and its Member States

Delegations will find in the Annex for information a compilation of the abovementioned agreed statements on the main CEP-SS agenda items, as delivered during the meeting.

**United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE):
Special session of the Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP-SS)
(Geneva, 23–25 February 2016)**

- Statements by the EU and its Members States -

Agenda item 3) The Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference

3b) *Official substantive documents*

Thematic document: improving air quality for a better environment and human health

The EU and its Member States appreciate the opportunity to give their view on the thematic document which shall be prepared for the Batumi Ministerial Conference, and the constructive cooperation in preparing this document. The structure and the content of the report is in line with the earlier comments of the EU and its Member States.

We are convinced that in the up-coming decades a large reduction of emissions of these substances into the air can be achieved with positive impacts for the citizens and the whole region. As stated in the report, in fact, air pollution still has considerable effects on the environment and health.

That these effects are significant will also be shown by the Assessment Report that is in preparation within the framework of the Convention on Long Range Transboundary Air Pollution. We are pleased to hear now that the report will be presented soon. The EU and its Member States took note of the summary for policy makers of that report and it is clear that the achievements for Cleaner Air as a result of the implementation of the LRTAP Convention and its Protocols are very substantial.

The EU and its Member States can agree with forwarding the thematic document to the Environment for Europe Conference.

Thematic document: Greening the Economy

The EU and its Member States welcome the thematic document on Greening the Economy which is meant to facilitate the Ministerial discussion on this issue.

In general we think that the document is well balanced and poses the right questions for the Ministers to encourage an interesting discussion and exchange on experiences and challenges.

3d) Summary for policy makers on the Assessment report under the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution

The EU and its Member States took note of the draft executive summary for policy makers of the assessment report, which is developed in the context of the UNECE Convention on Long Range Transboundary Air Pollution (CLRTAP). The document provides a thorough compilation of the most recent knowledge on air quality. It provides an overview on the effects on health and nature and the corresponding costs. It lists solutions which are already available and shows that also the economy will benefit from a transition to a cleaner air. It describes the scale of the problem and emphasizes the importance of international cooperation combined with action at national and local level. It explains the synergy with climate and energy policy and possible effects of the global warming up. It concludes with the importance of ratification of the protocols under the LRTAP Convention and makes a link with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's).

The EU and its Member States are of the opinion that the Batumi documents on air quality should be in line with the conclusions of the assessment report. The EU and its Member States hope that the final report will facilitate the future policy developments within the UNECE and that it will also serve as an important source of information for Governments on the further steps that need to be taken to abate air pollution. Finally, the report should also help the general public to get a better understanding of the impact of the air quality in our daily living and working environment.

3e) Astana Water Action

The EU and its Member States take note of the draft final report on the implementation of the Astana Water Action, which is developed in the context of the work of the Committee on Environmental Policy of the UNECE and appreciate the good presentation made today. The Astana Water Action is a collection of actions for improving the status of water and water-related ecosystems through sustainable management. The document provides an overview of the progress on the implementation of the Astana Water Action in the period 2011-2016 and summarizes the actions undertaken by 18 countries and 4 organisations. It identifies the achievements, challenges and lessons learnt and views expressed by the countries on the usefulness of the actions and their possible follow-up.

The EU and its Member States welcome the report and support the general conclusion that, while the implementation period of the AWA ran to the end of 2015, it is important to continue the good work and build on the momentum reached so far. They consider as clear benefits from AWA the strengthening of political (and sometimes financial) support for sustainable water management, the added value of international co-operation for transboundary water resources management and the exchange of information. This counts in particular for issues requiring long-term commitment such as climate change, water quality and cooperation at river basin level.

Finally, we took note of the very informative brochure you sent around last week and it would be interesting to hear an update at the side event in Batumi.

3f) *Draft annotated provisional agenda*

The EU and its Member States welcome the draft annotated agenda for the Ministerial meeting. We believe that it provides a relevant mix of politically interesting topics and also gives the opportunity to learn from experiences gained in the pan-European region.

Regarding the title of the first substantive item on the agenda, we believe that the first alternative is more relevant in terms of the link between the activities on UNECE level and the Agenda 2030 and not so much on the level of national implementation of the SDGs.

On the topic of 'Keeping the pan-European environment under review' we are concerned that this debate might result in a very technical expose: instead of ministers, delegates are invited to consider key findings in a panel. We think that it is important to prepare politically relevant questions in advance of the meeting.

We believe that the format for discussing the main themes (green economy and cleaner air) provides a good opportunity for interactive discussions between politicians, private sector representatives and NGOs. We think that this format could result in very effective exchanges.

3f) *Draft organization of work*

The EU and its Member States welcome the draft organization of work of the Batumi Conference.

With regard to the part of agenda item 2 on MEAs and their relation to SDGs, we are not convinced that a 2 minute intervention by 45 delegates would be the most relevant and effective way to address this topic. We think that having a moderator prepare the questions, that could then be answered from the floor, would lead to a more effective debate.

Regarding the parallel sessions on Green economy, we believe that the balance between the first and the second part is a little bit askew: while the part on cooperation is important, we do not consider that it requires a debate of 50 minutes. On the other hand, the other three topics may benefit, in our view, from extra time to allow for a useful exchange on experiences and challenges.

Finally, on a very practical note, regarding the registration procedure, we wonder if it could be possible to register for next CEP-SS and the Efe Conference at the same time, i.e. already opening the registration desk on Monday.

3g) *Proposed Conference outcomes*

Strategic Framework for Greening the Economy and the revised list of possible green economy actions

The EU and its Member States welcome the revised strategic framework for Greening the Economy, and particularly the proposal on the Green Economy Initiative (BIG-E) to support the implementation of the Strategic Framework. We stress the fact that there is no need for an additional inter-institutional framework that will review the actions announced in Batumi.

The suggested template to submit voluntary actions, is in our opinion well fit for harmonising the identified actions in order to be comprised and launched in Batumi.

This interactive mechanism has the merit to keep the system alive even after the Batumi Conference, with a view to evaluate progress in 2018 as part of the mid-term review of the Batumi Conference main outcomes.

Furthermore, in line with our comments on the draft Ministerial Declaration, we would prefer not to mention yet the next Ministerial Conference in para 40 of the strategic document.

In para 23, we suggest to change the first line, so that it reads: Green Economy is important to influence consumption patterns that have to be sustainable and equitable.

The EU and its Member States greatly appreciate the work that was done on streamlining the list of Green Economy Actions by the expert-group under the leadership and commitment of Switzerland and Martine Rohn in particular.

The EU and its Member States welcome the restructuring and shortening of the list: actions are now focused and coherently aligned. In order to address the framework conditions for policy some actions are more generic, other actions however are specific (where necessary and adequate) as to give more concrete examples. It is an inspirational list and thus it is important that the voluntary, living and inspirational aspects of the actions prevail.

Draft Ministerial Declaration

*GENERAL COMMENTS **

The EU and its Member States welcome this revised draft of the Ministerial Declaration that will be adopted at the Environment for Europe Conference. We appreciate that many of our earlier comments have been taken on board.

In general, we can accept the outline of the draft Ministerial Declaration. We would have liked to acknowledge the good cooperation with a wider number of organizations, including financial institutions and scientific organizations, that are not mentioned at all in the text. We do not wish to add a long list to the draft Declaration, but perhaps just include a more general reference which recognizes their valuable work in the EfE process. We are flexible on the wording and can come back to that later in the discussion.

In response to last weeks' Steering Committee on ESD, we would like to make a link in the Ministerial Declaration between this Declaration, and the separate declaration on ESD that will also be adopted in Batumi. We would also like to recognise and take advantage of the links between this process and the Environment and Health Ministerial process and promote their collaboration. We believe that the negative effects of air pollution, the links between action to reduce air pollution and to tackle climate change should be made more explicit, as well as the costs deriving from air pollution

* Delivered in CEP plenary.

With regard to the handling of the voluntary action lists on air and green economy, we propose to be consistent with the formulations previously used for the Astana Water Action. We also expect that paragraph 5 will be revised on the basis of the latest developments on the Conference outcomes on the green economy. We also believe that the reference to UNEP LIVE should be modified to reflect that it is still under construction, so we suggest to focus our message on the regional reporting systems, such as SEIS and the Environment State and Outlook Report as our regional contribution to global environmental reporting. We are not in favor of launching any new kind of reporting systems apart from what already exists.

As mentioned before, we believe that at this moment it is too early to make any reference to a possible next ministerial meeting in the framework of the Environment for Europe process. This decision should be based on the interest of countries in the Pan-European region and on the mid-term review.

More in detail, and in addition to the points just mentioned, we have a number of specific textual comments on the declaration, which we propose to make when we come to the detailed examination of the text, and depending on how you intend to organize our work here on the draft Ministerial Declaration, Madam Chair. [we suppose that the Ministerial Declaration will be discussed para by para to solve the bracketed texts]

Finally, we hope we can reach an agreement at this meeting on a final text of the Declaration.

*DETAILED COMMENTS ON THE AMENDMENTS TO THE DRAFT DECLARATION ***

On the text of the Declaration, including the bracketed text, the EU and its Member States have the following comments and suggestions:

Para 2: we see value in adding a reference to the information-sharing and SEIS role in the Efe proces;

Para 3: We suggest adding a reference to SCP and to the 10 year framework programme on sustainable production and consumption at the end of sentence to draw attention to its significance. We would also welcome the second option in brackets [thinking, acting..] as it gives more content to the message.

Para 4: we prefer a third, that is “financial instruments”; we would like to refer to business practices along the value chains. Furthermore, we would like to strengthen the text on public participation, by suggesting an alternative wording to the two proposed, ie actively support. Last but not least, we proposed to add new text on the need to further strengthen and scale up ESD recognising its vital role in a transition to a green economy and in promoting sustainable development.

Para 5: staying in line with the Ministerial Declaration in Astana, we would prefer to “endorse” the pan-European strategic framework for Greening the Economy, and to “invite countries to implement it” and “to report on progress to CEP”. We believe the whole paragraph will need to be revised to reflect the different nature of the Conference outcomes on green economy. We leave that in your hands, Chair, with the help of the Secretariat.

** Used in the Drafting Group.

Para 6: We propose additional and alternative text on the wider significant negative effects of air pollution, its link with climate change as well as on the major costs deriving from air pollution; on developing national measures for emissions reductions; we would also like to mention UNEP among the bodies inviting to support countries in their efforts to reduce air pollution

Para 7: to stay consistent with para 5, we prefer to “endorse” the Batumi Action for Cleaner Air, and to invite countries to implement them and “to report progress to CEP”. The reference to SEIS in this paragraph is of a more general kind, which means that we would like to move the last sentence to para 2.

Para 8: we prefer a stronger wording and urge countries to ratify rather than invite them.

Para 10: as UNEP LIVE is still under construction, we suggest to focus our message on the regional reporting systems, such as SEIS and the Environment State and Outlook Report as our regional contribution to global environmental reporting. We are not in favor of launching any new kind of reporting systems apart from the already existing ones.

Para 10 bis: we suggest a new paragraph to enhance further the close collaboration between the EfE and the European Environment and Health process, that will have its 6th Ministerial Conference take place in 2017. The political outcome of the Batumi Conference on air quality in particular, given the links with human health, will provide valuable input for preparing the discussions for the upcoming Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health.

Para 12: we suggest ‘support’ the role of RECs.

Para 13 bis: this additional paragraph is to acknowledge the important cooperation with other actors than the ones explicitly mentioned, and recognise the role that financial institutions and the private sector can play.

Para 16: The EU and its Member States believe that it is too early in the process to already announce the next EfE-Ministerial Conference at this moment. While we are in general open for having another Ministerial Conference in 4 or 5 years time, we do believe that this decision should be based on the interest of the countries in the region and the outcome of the scheduled mid-term review after Batumi

[Belarus suggestion withdrawn]

Agenda item 5) Presentation and exchange of views on the second United Nations Environment Assembly ***

We wish to thank UNEP for its presentation.

With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction, the international community achieved remarkable breakthroughs in 2015 towards a new universal, transformational and integrated paradigm for sustainable development.

*** This statement was delivered in a shorter version due to time constraints.

The real success of these agreements relies now on our ability to cooperate in implementing them. The EU and its Member States are fully committed to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and we believe that the United Nations Environment Assembly has a key role to play in delivering the environmental dimension of the Agenda, as the global authoritative voice on the environment. It provides Environment Ministers with the opportunity to show their commitment and give political guidance on the implementation of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda.

To make progress in achieving the SDGs in an integrated manner, UNEP should work closely with relevant UN bodies and programmes and with the regional commissions, including the UNECE. With its strong background in addressing issues such as air quality and water but also important cross-cutting topics like access to justice and environmental information, the Pan-European region has a lot to offer in sharing experiences.

We also welcome the focus theme on Health and Environment of the High-Level Segment of the second session of UNEA, which strongly echoes our work in the UNECE.

The goals and targets of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development cannot be achieved without the active participation of all relevant stakeholders, which we continue to encourage strongly at all levels.

We welcome the good progress made in the preparations of UNEA-2 last week in Nairobi and trust that this work will continue towards a successful outcome in May, with concise and appealing messages to the global community, IGOs, citizens and business across the globe.

Thank you.
