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INFORMATION NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations
Subject: United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE): Twenty-third session of the Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP 23) (Geneva, 14–17 November 2017)
- 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 23 agenda items, as delivered during the meeting.

**United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE):
Twenty-third session of the Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP 23)
(Geneva, 14-17 November 2017)**

- Statements by the European Union and its Members States -

Agenda item 3: Sustainable development in the region

- The EU and its Member States thank the Bureau and the Secretariat for preparing the document on the role of the Committee in supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The document gives a thorough overview of the Committee's ongoing work on the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and provides a range of possible new future activities for consideration and further discussion.
- Generally, we would like to reiterate our opinion that it is important to make full use of existing processes and/or mechanisms, focusing on added value, within existing available resources and avoiding any duplication of efforts, whilst integrating and promoting cooperation, peer learning and exchange of best practices among the relevant actors in the region. In this regard, the EU and its Member States will continue to support the work of the CEP. We also appreciated very much the presentations on national experiences in implementing Agenda 2030 and the SDGs made this morning and the discussion that followed.
- We welcome the proposal to work more closely with other sectoral committees, including through joint sessions and exchange of information and experiences. We also support the idea that the CEP would propose to the ECE Executive Committee to encourage other sectoral committees to conduct mapping of their sector sub-programme processes and activities that support countries in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- We believe that consolidating those mapping exercises into one would contribute to the identification of potential joint activities in achieving the SDGs, in particular to address nexus themes between different topics. As mentioned earlier, the idea of joint or back to back meetings of relevant committees should also be further explored.
- With regard to the suggestions made (in para 34 of doc ECE/CEP/2017/15) on sharing information at Committee meetings on how the Committee's outputs have been reflected in reports and interventions we would like to underline that this should not amount to reporting obligation on national level.
- With regard to the concrete proposal how the Committee should take part in the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development we believe that it would be advisable to consult with the Secretariat and the Executive Committee in order to come up with the most effective way to collaborate, taking into account also the collaboration schemes of other Committees.

- For the 2018 High Level Political Forum which will review progress towards a number of SDGs which are highly relevant from the environmental perspective (goals 6, 7, 11, 12, 15), a discussion of relevant issues in the Regional Forum will be particularly important.

Agenda item 4: Multilateral environmental agreements

- We welcome very much this round-table discussion and appreciate the opportunity of an open exchange of views during the Committee session with the participation of the Chairs and other representatives of the ECE Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs).
- We thank you for the information provided today on the wide range of activities under the MEAs and in the background document also on the outcomes of the informal joint meeting between the representatives of the governing bodies of the ECE MEAs and the Committee on Environmental Policy.
- The EU and its Member States acknowledge the work done by the Secretariat and Chairs on identifying the MEAs role in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and welcome steps being taken to align, as appropriate, MEA activities, strategies and work with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and we have heard many good practices today how this is done.
- We welcome the good examples of cooperation between the different conventions mentioned in the presentations such as recent guidelines on land use planning (TEIA and Espoo) and several joint guidelines prepared by TEIA and the water convention. Such joint activities can save resources while multiplying impact.
- The role of ECE Multilateral Environmental Agreements in helping achieve the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals is indisputable. Matters covered by these Multilateral Environmental Agreements are wide, from transboundary water and air pollution to industrial accidents, impact assessments, access to information, justice and public participation. Thus, MEAs and their effective implementation continue to play a key role to contribute to better levels of environmental protection and health: in all these fields environmental action needs good cooperation and active players committed to promote the concept of sustainable development worldwide. The MEA representatives have presented good ideas how we can promote their work in that regard and we will be happy to reflect further on them.
- Therefore, we encourage all countries to ratify, or accede to, and implement the multilateral environmental agreements developed in the UNECE region.

Agenda item 5: Follow-up to the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference and preparation of the mid-term review of the Conference's main outcomes

- The EU and its Member States take note of the document on the outcomes of the survey on the Batumi Conference and thank the Secretariat for the work done.
- We welcome and appreciate the document prepared by the Bureau on the organization of a mid-term review of the Batumi Conference's main outcomes. We support the proposal for organizing the mid-term review, including combining the event with the twenty-fourth annual CEP session, but consider that one day should be sufficient to address the topics for discussion.
- We also support the approach of preparing short mid-term review reports on key topics. Taking into account the lessons learned from the mid-term review of the Astana Conference. We welcome the idea of keeping these reports short and focused but without compromising their quality. The mid-term review will be taking place together with a regular CEP session and a significant amount of documents is expected for both.
- Regarding the format of the mid-term review, we believe that using a mix of different interactive formats will allow the most efficient use of time and the best results.
- We encourage the effort to involve a wide range of stakeholders, including business representatives, representatives of civil society and others, and propose to involve also youth organizations. We believe that dialogue and cooperation with relevant organizations and other stakeholders are essential in promoting Environment for Europe initiatives.
- The EU and its Member States are looking forward to further developments regarding the preparation of mid-term review and are ready to contribute with further inputs and ideas.

Agenda item 6: Environmental monitoring, assessment and reporting

Renewal of the mandate and terms of reference of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators (ECE/CEP/2017/12)

- The EU and its Member States take note of the document “Renewal of the mandate and terms of reference of the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statistics and Indicators” (ECE/CEP/2017/12).
- The EU and its Member States welcome the proposed mandate and stress the importance of focussing the future work of the JTFESI primarily towards assisting the countries in the production of the agreed environmental indicators across the pan-European region as basis for comparable assessments and reports at various levels.

- We welcome the interest of countries across the region in gradually improving the Methodological Guide for Production of Indicators at pan-European level (ECE Guidelines). In our view, JTFESI is expected to support effectively the revision process in light of the recent developments in the area by focussing more on data quality criteria, use of international agreed standards, and methodological developments. This will facilitate comparability across countries for aggregation and analysis purposes and furthermore support the effective use of indicators in the regular assessment process.
- Considering the broad scope of SEIS development in support of regular assessment and reporting in the region we propose replacing in the whole Terms of Reference (ToR) the current narrow formulation of “SEIS data production methodologies” with “SEIS principles”¹.

*Modalities for the regional environmental information and assessment network of networks*²
(ECE/CEP/2017/14)

- The EU and its Member States take note of the document “Modalities for the regional environmental information and assessment network of networks” (ECE/CEP/2017/14).
- The new mandate of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment rightly encourages further collaboration between the European Environment Agency (EEA) and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), in particular to improve the link between the UNEP’s Global Environment Outlook process and the EEA’s State of the Environment Report.
- In view of the new mandate, it is our opinion that a more streamlined plan of activities for the WGEMA work until 2021 is a priority. Consequently, the idea of the WGEMA being a network of networks at this stage is in our view neither a priority nor a solution to address these new challenges.

Outline of activities leading up to 2021 of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment (ECE/CEP/2017/13)

- The EU and its Member States take note of the document “Outline of activities leading up to 2021 of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment” (ECE/CEP/2017/13).
- The EU and its Member States considered the proposed activities for the WGEMA up to 2021 and the tasks put forward. As mentioned before, more streamlined plan of activities is needed in order to set up clear priorities against the limited resources available.

¹ For further information see: <https://www.eionet.europa.eu/seis/principles>.

² The document on the Network of Networks and the Outline of activities for WGEMA needs to be seen and analysed/commented together as it relates to WGEMA itself proposed to play the role as network of networks (position not endorsed by many active actors in the region and substantial donors) at least at this stage – UNEP, EEA, countries such: Switzerland etc.).

- We recognise that a considerable challenge for UNECE (and WGEMA) in the following period is how to correct the current geographical imbalance (with the EU countries almost absent) against the tasks and the mandate given. In this regard, solutions and, options on how to increase participation and stimulate interest for all UNECE members in this work on the basis of concrete deliverables should be put forward for discussion and considerations to the CEP.
- Given the current activities in the EU towards streamlining environmental reporting it is our view, that in the coming period the work on the SEIS development at pan-European level should be better coordinated with the future of e-Reporting.
- Lastly, a regular review of performance against the tasks proposed is important in order to allow the CEP to make any necessary readjustments and prioritisations of work based on the resources really available. The mid-term review of the Environment for Europe process in 2018 will represent a first opportunity to assess the work of the WGEMA against the new mandate.
- Lastly, a regular review of performance against the tasks proposed is important in order to allow the CEP to make any necessary readjustments and prioritisations of work based on the resources really available. The mid-term review of the Environment for Europe process in 2018 will represent a first opportunity to assess the work of the WGEMA against the new mandate.

Agenda item 7: Environmental Performance Reviews

- The EU and its Member States take note of the document ECE/CEP/2017/11 prepared by the Expert Group on Environmental Performance Reviews (EPRs) and welcome guidelines on how the EPR can support the achievement and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals.
- We recognise the important contribution of the Economic Commission for Europe Environment Performance Reviews (ECE EPRs) Programme as an effective and practical policy tool to assist the country under review to organise the monitoring of SDGs, as well as provide recommendations to address any challenges with their implementation. This is particularly relevant, considering that EPRs provide independent reviews of countries on their progress in achieving domestic and international environmental policy commitments.
- We note the proposed options on how EPR-relevant SDG goals and/or targets can be incorporated into the contents of the EPR report. While countries should maintain flexibility in the topics of the EPRs, we support an option where the SDGs are integrated to the extent possible into thematic chapters. Only such SDGs which are relevant but do not fit into thematic chapters and issues of general governance relating to SDG implementation should be addressed in the chapter Legal, Policy And Institutional Framework or a separate chapter.

- The ECE/EPR and OECD/EPR processes, although with their own specificities, should exchange experiences with the integration of the SDGs into the performance reviews and explore in which way they could benefit from mutual learning and even apply common approaches, especially in the overall context of supporting the monitoring and implementation process of the SDGs.
- Let me also say that we would appreciate that a greater acknowledgement be made of the significant contribution from the EU as an institution, as well as the EU Member States, to this process over the years, ranging from systematic financial and expert support, to sharing of information and knowledge.
- We look forward to work with our partners in the framework of the EPRs in supporting the achievement and follow-up of Sustainable Development Goals in the pan-European region.
- With regard to the recommendations of the environmental performance reviews of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Mongolia we hope that further activities by these countries will allow for a full implementation of the adopted recommendations.
- Finally, the EU and its Member States also highlight the importance of the EPRs presented yesterday. They reflect the usefulness of the Programme for the countries in our region, already under its third cycle, with Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and also, in the case of Mongolia, the positive experience of going beyond the UNECE region, as an example of cooperation between regional commissions and sharing of good practices and underline the importance of SDG`s in the process.

Agenda item 8: Cross-sectoral activities:

c) European Environment and Health Process

- The EU and its Member States thank the UNECE and the WHO Regional Office for Europe for the work carried out in view of the Ostrava Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health as well as the Government of the Czech Republic for hosting the meeting and congratulates them for the outcomes achieved.
- As the adopted Ministerial Declaration adequately reflects, health impacts constitute a major driver for an ambitious environmental policy and there are clear links and synergies that need to be explored between both policy areas.
- The recent Lancet Commission report on pollution is a dramatic evidence for that when it notes that pollution is responsible for an estimated 9 million premature deaths: three times more deaths than from AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria combined.

- We support the commitments taken in Ostrava aiming at addressing persisting gaps in environment and health in the region, namely the development of national portfolios of actions on environment and health. We will also follow up on the commitment to nominate the environmental sector focal points for the European Environment and Health Task Force and for the Working Group on Health in Climate and urge all countries to do so as well, as soon as possible. We are confident that these will be the key actions to take to further promote and enhance policy coordination between both sectors.
- The EU and its Member States also thank the Bureau and the Secretariat for preparing the document on the possible arrangements for a joint secretariat for the European Environment and Health Process (ECE/CEP/2017/18).
- Let me once again say that the EU and its Member States recognise the close interlinkages existing between environment and health and believe that the health benefits of environmental action should be clearly identified and maximised where possible: we had a clear example of that also at the Batumi Conference with the Clean Air Action and with the BIG initiatives on green economy.
- However, we should bear in mind that the ECE does not have resources available at present to engage fully in a joint secretariat, as described in the first scenario. Opting for a limited enhanced participation of the ECE in the Process would be more beneficial in balancing the process, yet it will also, as described in the second scenario, need resources to ensure the continuous employment of additional dedicated staff.
- The EU and its Member States are not in support of dedicating additional core budget resources for the process. Therefore, we have a clear preference for the third scenario.
- However, should there be extra budgetary resources be made available by interested countries for additional work by UNECE on the process, we would support this, taking into account that a stronger engagement from the environmental side would be useful so as to ensure that the process is linked back to environment ministries and environmental policies in the different UNECE countries.
- Should no such extra budgetary resources become available, we would nonetheless encourage the ECE to remain a strong partner in the European Environment and Health Process. As member of the Task Force and its Bureau, the ECE would have the opportunity to participate in the decision-making and in the preparation of future conferences.
- We are convinced that, regardless of the chosen scenario, taking into account the increasing relevance of the challenges of the environmental impacts on health in the region, a wider engagement of the Environment Ministries in the Environment and Health process would be essential to tackle the challenges in a more effective and integrated manner.

Agenda item 11: Terms of Reference

- The EU and its Member States thank the Bureau for preparing the first draft of the Committee's revised Terms of Reference.
- Following the request from the Secretariat in February 2017 the EU and its Member States submitted preliminary comments on the text of the ToR to bring it in line with recent developments and in particular with the UNECE mandate for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development on a regional level. We appreciate that our comments have been taken into account in drafting the text. We also recognize the relevance of additional amendments incorporated into the draft ToR, in particular regarding the Environment for Europe ministerial conferences, environmental performance reviews and Shared Environmental Information System.
- Furthermore, we appreciate the explanation provided on the basis to amend the current ToR in relation to the ECE Reform from 2013. Although we consider that the current Terms of Reference of the Committee on Environmental Policy are still largely relevant, we are open to support the prospective adoption of updated ToR.
- From a specific point of view, we believe that the item 2)g)ii), about the "contribution of the Committee's work to the United Nations Environment Assembly" should be clarified with regards to the formal preparatory process of UNEA meetings, which takes place essentially through the Committee of Permanent Representatives to UNEP.
- We look forward to a discussion with our partners on this matter at this CEP meeting and we are ready to take active part in the drafting group that you have just proposed, Madam Chair.

Agenda item 12: Rules of Procedure

- The Rules of Procedure for the CEP were discussed on previous sessions of the Committee and the EU and its Member States have been actively participating in these discussions, also providing comments and amendments on the draft text of the RoP prepared by the Bureau on which there was no consensus.
- In this situation we believe that there is no pressing need for adopting the RoP of the CEP. The EU and its Member States consider that the Committee has developed over the years a good practice, which has allowed it to work well and to deliver results. Moreover, there are ECE RoP in place that should be followed by all subsidiary bodies of ECE, in the absence of more specific rules.
- Therefore, the work of the CEP can continue on the basis of current practice and in line with the ECE RoP and, where applicable, the RoP of ECOSOC, taking into account the agreed guidelines on procedures and practices for ECE bodies adopted by the Commission on 11 April 2013 (Commission Decision A(65)). We therefore agree with the recommendation of the Bureau.

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