



**Economic and Social
Council**

Distr.
GENERAL

CEP/1999/2
16 July 1999

ORIGINAL : ENGLISH

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

(Sixth session, 20-24 September 1999)
(Item 9 (c) of the provisional agenda)

FURTHER ACTION ON SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION PATTERNS

Note by the secretariat *

1. Consumption is a determinant of sustainable development and its economic, environmental and social dimensions. It has important implications for the level and pattern of production and for related demands for natural and environmental resources. According to Agenda 21, the unsustainable pattern of consumption and production, particularly in industrialized countries, is the major cause of the continued deterioration of the environment. The Fourth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" (Århus, 1998) recognized that changes in consumption and production patterns must lie at the heart of the transition towards a sustainable ECE region, and expressed concern that developments in the countries with economies in transition may have the effect of strengthening unsustainable consumption patterns (ECE/CEP/41, annex II, para. 21).

2. Environmental policies have traditionally focused on changing the supply-side (production) processes. This approach is being increasingly supplemented by demand-side measures to influence consumer behaviour. Governments at various levels are looking, in particular, for effective policy instruments and tools that encourage demand for environmentally sound goods and services in key consumption domains such as housing, food, energy, transport and recreation. Initial lessons that can be drawn from recent studies in ECE and other forums

* Prepared pursuant to a decision taken by the Committee on Environmental Policy at its fifth session (ECE/CEP/63, para. 20).

demonstrate that packages of both supply-side and demand-side measures pursued by governments at various levels jointly or in coordination, appear especially promising in moving towards sustainable consumption patterns.

3. The experience gained in the ECE is summarized in chapter I. A description of activities of other international organizations on sustainable consumption patterns is annexed. The present note concludes with a detailed outline for possible further action by the Committee based on the above-mentioned experience and information.

I. RECENT ECE EXPERIENCE

4. In response to the recommendation of the Environmental Programme for Europe (EPE) to make changes to consumption patterns and individual lifestyles through awareness raising, technical regulations and economic incentives, the Committee on Environmental Policy, in cooperation with the Committee on Human Settlements, organized a Workshop on encouraging local initiatives towards sustainable consumption patterns. At the invitation of the Government of Austria, it was held in Vienna on 2-4 February 1998. The Workshop examined:

- C Concrete examples of community-based initiatives for sustainable consumption and their effects on the environment, employment and competitiveness;
- C Barriers to the promotion of sustainable consumption projects, such as regulations, economic and fiscal disincentives;
- C Ways and means by which central Governments can both eliminate these barriers and encourage individuals to adopt sustainable consumption behaviour;
- C Opportunities for raising public awareness and promoting partnerships between central Governments, local and regional authorities, and major groups such as business and industry and consumer organizations.

5. The Workshop discussed in detail a series of national reviews of sustainable consumption projects in three consumption domains: housing; consumer goods (including food) and services; and recreation and tourism. Case studies on policies promoting sustainable consumption in six European cities were also analysed.

6. The Workshop recognized that influencing consumer behaviour was an important point of a broader long-term strategy towards achieving environmentally, economically and socially sustainable consumption patterns. It agreed that Governments at various levels should have instruments in place to motivate people to choose a lifestyle that minimizes the overall impact on natural resources and the environment in a life-cycle perspective. The Workshop voiced the need for central and local governments, especially in transition economies, to coordinate actions to promote sustainable consumption patterns. It called upon ECE to launch a pilot project on good practice for undertaking joint initiatives between central and local

governments on selected sustainable consumption issues such as urban transport management and land-use planning. The Workshop results were transmitted by the Committee to the Århus Ministerial Conference (ARH.CONF/BD.3 and 4).

7. The Vienna Workshop had several positive effects: it created a network of government officials from both the national and the local levels, experts and representatives of intergovernmental organizations and NGOs, and it presented an exchange of experience through the preparation of the Workshop's discussion papers and case studies. The Workshop also encouraged a cross-sectoral view of the problems and issues, while involving policy makers and experts from different fields and governmental levels, including representatives from both the Committee on Human Settlements and the Committee on Environmental Policy, and letting them work together.

8. An informal consultation took place in Apeldoorn (Netherlands) in July 1998 to discuss possible further work. It was attended by representatives of the Environment Ministries of Austria and the Czech Republic, the cities of Apeldoorn and Porvoo (Finland), Global Action Plan (GAP) International and GAP/St. Petersburg (Russian Federation), the World Resources Institute (United States), and the ECE secretariat. Participants expressed their strong interest in furthering the work in ECE on sustainable consumption patterns. Various options were discussed and specific proposals were put forward, such as:

(a) The organization of a workshop on partnership arrangements involving central and local governments, the business community, NGOs and citizens groups, and funding mechanisms to support local initiatives;

(b) The development of a pilot study in selected cities to assess progress made towards sustainable consumption patterns. The assessment, to be made by a team of experts from interested cities, national governments, NGOs and the ECE secretariat, would focus on a limited number of priority issues such as urban planning and traffic. (This exercise would lead to a tested and internationally agreed assessment methodology);

(c) The launching of a publicity campaign on local initiatives through the organization of special events (meetings, round tables, press conferences), media programmes, publications in national and international press, preparation and circulation of leaflets, brochures and posters;

(d) The initiation of a project which would focus on selected areas (e.g. transport, spatial planning, energy conservation and household waste management) where joint action by Governments at different levels and other actors may lead to a substantial reduction in the overall impact (from a life-cycle perspective) on human health, natural resources and the environment, while maintaining and improving the quality of life and employment.

9. In the light of the Vienna Workshop's results and proposals by the Apeldoorn consultation, the Committee on Human Settlements, at its fifty-ninth session in September 1998, agreed to undertake, in possible cooperation

with the Committee on Environmental Policy, a project on sustainable urban environmental performance, and to consider a detailed project outline at its next session on 13-15 September 1999 (ECE/HBP/110).

II. FUTURE FOCUS ON URBAN TRANSPORT PATTERNS AND LAND-USE PLANNING

10. The Committee on Environmental Policy could now build on the successful results of its cooperation with the Committee on Human Settlements and combine the expertise of both Committees to address the link between urban transport patterns and land-use planning.

11. The second pan-European report on the state of the environment identified transport as one of the main reasons of environmental degradation. The report warned that a transformation to a more sustainable pattern of transport would not be easy to achieve because there is considerable political momentum behind the traditional approach to infrastructure development, and public transport is losing out to private transport everywhere in Europe (*Europe's Environment - The second assessment*, European Environment Agency, Elsevier Science Ltd., Oxford, 1998). Sharing this concern, the Environment Ministers in Århus acknowledged that governmental policies were failing to keep pace with the growth in traffic and decided to take action to secure a sustainable and environmentally sound pattern of transport by promoting the use of public and non-motorized transport, reducing transport volumes and by other means (ECE/CEP/41, annex II, para. 16).

12. Nearly everywhere in the ECE region the private car has become a major means for commuting to the workplace/business, education services, shopping areas and leisure destinations, including second homes. Countries in transition face unprecedented growth in the use of private cars and profound changes in the established patterns of mobility, which in the past put the emphasis on public transport.

13. There is a growing recognition in many developed market economies of the need to consider land use and transport patterns in an integrated manner, together with their environmental implications. Such an approach should be applied in countries in transition. In fact, there is strong evidence that the prevailing means of transport shapes land-use modes. For example, new transport infrastructure affect future demand for travel and land. The creation of new transport networks around cities stimulates the decentralization of services and retail trade and has a considerable impact on suburban land use. In their turn, land-use practices influence travel modes and demand. Higher densities can reduce the separation of city's functions and activities and stimulate the growth of public transport demand; certain threshold densities are required for viable public transport systems. Other factors, such as income, car ownership and the degree of public transport development, determine travel behaviour.

14. Integrating land use and local transport policies, strategies and plans means more than just making sure that they complement each other, although that is also important. It means integrating thinking and action across all

policy areas and at all levels of decision-making. Land use and local transport policies are linked to policies on health, education, economy, environment and social welfare, as well as national and regional policies. This also means that public and private sector interests have to be taken into account. Local authorities have a key role to play, but national governments should set up a supportive framework for local initiatives towards sustainable consumption patterns.

III. POSSIBLE METHODOLOGY AND ORGANIZATIONAL SET-UP FOR A JOINT PROJECT

Objectives

15. The joint project of the two Committees would promote the environmentally sound management of local transport integrated with sustainable land-use planning, particularly in countries in transition. More specifically, the project would:

- Facilitate the exchange of information and experience on planning, regulatory, economic, financial, organizational and other measures to achieve environmentally sound urban transport and sustainable land use;
- Promote networking among environmental and municipal policy and decision makers, urban and regional planners, researchers, and representatives of the private sector and citizens groups dealing with transport management and land use;
- Generate policy recommendations and practical guidance to public authorities at various levels.

Scope

16. The project would make it possible to evaluate:

- Prevailing traffic patterns and trends in urban and adjacent areas, and transport-related impacts on the environment and human health;
- The driving forces behind these patterns and trends, including the role of urban design and structure, land use, transport infrastructure, income growth and lifestyles;
- Initiatives launched by central and local governments to mitigate excessive demand for urban transport, to widen travellers' choices and to shift the demand towards environmentally sound transport modes.

17. Particular attention would be given to the development of a strategic approach to integrating urban transport management with land use and planning. Such an approach may cover:

- Setting specific targets for achieving local transport systems that are economically, socially and environmentally sustainable. These could

include targets for emission reductions and energy consumption by transport mode or targets for the development of public transport;

- *Planning instruments* that aim, inter alia, at:
 - Creating a foot-fit urban structure - mixed land use for housing, work, shopping, leisure and recreation, both for new and for existing city quarters
 - Locating facilities that generate traffic of people, i.e. offices, public service and retail centres, close to traffic terminals
 - Improving the attractiveness and quality of residential areas to discourage certain socially-oriented trips
 - Creating a network of green corridors connecting every residential area with natural landscapes, forests and parks to discourage car travel to sports and recreation facilities
 - Creating or restoring local markets to promote demand and supply of local agricultural products
 - Linking urban, suburban and inter-city transport to reduce the need for private car connections
 - Upgrading and extending the public transport infrastructure
 - Constructing safe and secure cycle lanes and parking facilities to make the use of bicycles a real alternative for transport, especially in city centres
 - Creating pedestrian zones and safe and secure footpaths;

- *Regulations* such as:
 - Environmental impact assessment of transport-infrastructure and land-use projects to mitigate the increase in or to reduce travel demand
 - Traffic restrictions for vehicles (in inner-city areas, in environmentally sensitive areas, for freight transit, on week-ends and holidays in tourist areas, etc.)
 - Parking and public transport requirements in land-use permits for airports, railway stations and social facilities (e.g. stadiums, concert halls and hospitals)
 - Parking limitations in areas where there are effective public transport alternatives;

- *Economic and financial instruments* such as:
 - Road and fuel taxation to internalize the costs of accidents, congestion, pollution, noise and use of public space in the total transport costs, and to finance environmentally sound transport programmes
 - Parking pricing systems for car traffic limitations in city centres
 - Financial management strategies to support public urban transport;

- *Other measures such as:*

- S Public information and participation
- S Institutional arrangements to coordinate transport policies at local, provincial and national levels.

Working method

18. A joint steering group would be established for the project. It would be composed of some 10 to 15 experts from central and local governments, the private sector, the academic community and NGOs. In cooperation with the secretariat, the steering group would:

- C Examine practical experience, at national, regional and local levels, with the promotion of environmentally sound local transport integrated with sustainable land-use planning; the results of the work would be discussed at a workshop in spring 2001;
- C Develop, on the basis of the workshop's results, guidelines for governments for subsequent submission to a joint ad hoc meeting convened by the two ECE Committees in early 2002. The guidelines would then be transmitted to the fifth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe" (September 2002, Kiev).

19. The proposed action would contribute to the implementation of the EPE recommendations on sustainable consumption patterns and on environmentally friendly transport (ECE/CEP/25 and Corr.2). I would also supplement the ongoing follow-up activities to the Regional Conference on Transport and the Environment (Vienna, 1997).

Annex

ACTIVITIES ON SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION PATTERNS IN OTHER FORUMS

1. Since 1995, the work programme of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) on sustainable consumption and production patterns has covered five areas: (1) trends in consumption and production patterns; (2) impacts on developing countries; (3) effectiveness of policy instruments; (4) national voluntary initiatives; and (5) the extension of the United Nations Guidelines for Consumer Protection to include aspects of sustainable consumption. Changing consumption and production patterns was the subject of a comprehensive review at the seventh session of CSD in April 1999. The Commission evaluated progress made so far and discussed priorities for the period 1999-2002 on the basis of the Secretary-General's report on changing consumption and production patterns and background papers. It added to its work programme on sustainable consumption and production patterns the following four priority areas: (a) effective policy development and implementation; (b) natural resource management and cleaner production; (c) globalization and its impacts on consumption and production patterns; and (d) urbanization and its impacts on consumption and production patterns. Progress on work and concrete results will be reported to the Commission at its tenth session in 2002.

2. An international workshop on "Consumption in a Sustainable World" was hosted by the Government of Norway in Kabelvåg, Norway, in June 1998. The workshop had the objectives of accelerating international action and building partnerships between developed and developing countries. The meeting focused on practical examples of efforts to promote sustainable consumption in all regions of the world, bringing together pioneers from business, government and citizen organizations. The recommendations from Kabelvåg were presented to CSD at its session in 1999.²

3. A substantial contribution to the debate on sustainable consumption patterns was the 1998 Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Programme. It focused on "changing today's consumption patterns - for tomorrow's human development." The report marshals environmental, developmental, technological and moral arguments to present a critique of consumption patterns that are inimical to human development. It concludes that the need is not so much for more consumption or for less, but for a different pattern of consumption - consumption which is less environmentally damaging and less socially harmful. It insists that strategic choices of industrial countries as the world's dominant consumers will be critical in determining the future.³

4. Under its sustainable production and consumption programme, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has been promoting clean production, life-cycle assessment, eco-design, environmentally sound products, and better definition of the sustainable-consumption concept. In 2000-2001, UNEP will contribute to a broader worldwide dialogue on consumption pattern issues generally and will further develop its initiative with the advertising and

marketing sectors to define their role in moving to more sustainable consumption patterns⁴.

5. The work of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on sustainable consumption focused in 1995-1998 on the conceptual framework (particularly eco-efficiency), policy instruments, indicators, and sector- or issue-specific work (individual transport behaviour, water and paper consumption, and governments as consumers)⁵. In 1999-2000, OECD intends to use its sustainable consumption indicators to identify those elements of consumption patterns that are likely to have the most significant impact on environmental sustainability. This work will be supplemented by further examination of concepts on sustainable consumption patterns including globalization aspects, and by developing two sets of case studies. The first will concentrate on different instruments for demand management (economic instruments, information-based instruments and participatory decision-making mechanisms). The second set of case studies will concentrate on four major consumption categories (food, housing, transport and leisure). Under the case study on transport, for instance, the substitution possibilities between transport and electronic communication, and the involvement of consumers in the provision of infrastructure for transport and for electronic communication will be considered.⁶

6. The Fifth Research, Technological Development and Demonstration Activities (RTD) Framework Programme of the European Community, 1998-2002, covers a number of aspects of sustainable consumption including organic farming, electronic commerce, teleworking and telelearning, telemedicine, telematic systems for transport and tourism, sustainable mobility, and renewable energy. For instance, the RTD on "Sustainable mobility and intermodality" is intended to help break the link between economic growth and increased traffic volumes; reduce the negative impact of transport modes; and encourage their more sustainable use. Particular attention will be paid to intermodality and how best to integrate the respective strengths of the various modes of transport in order to provide user-oriented door-to-door services for both passengers and freight.⁷

7. A group of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from central and eastern Europe has launched a regional initiative for Sustainable Consumption and Production in Central and Eastern Europe (CEECAAP). Two reports were published under this initiative in 1998. The first one analysed how consumption and production patterns have changed in the context of political, economic and social transformations in countries in transition, and proposed a policy framework and actions that could promote sustainable consumption and production in this subregion, and contribute to global sustainability⁸. The second report examined in more detail some of the environmental and social impacts of globalization and changes in consumption and production patterns currently being experienced in economies in transition. It argued that the transformation of transition economies into consumer societies undermined many sustainable practices, such as pro-local markets, organic agricultural systems, public transport, and low-waste household management⁹.

8. Other NGO initiatives on sustainable consumption include the EcoTeam programme for households of the Global Action Plan, the "sustainable markets" project of the International Institute for Environment and Development, work on media and advertising by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, and sustainable cities initiatives by various city associations.

Notes:

¹ *Comprehensive review of changing consumption and production patterns: Report of the Secretary-General*, E/CN.17/1999/2, United Nations, N.Y., 1999.

² *Consumption in a Sustainable World*, Report of the Workshop held in Kabelvåg, Norway, June 2-4 1998, Oslo, Ministry of Environment, Norway, and International Institute for Environment and Development, London, 1998.

³ *Human Development Report 1998*, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), New York, Oxford University Press, 1998.

⁴ *Preparations for the Seventh Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development*, UNEP/GC.20/42, UNEP, Nairobi, 1999.

⁵ *Sustainable Consumption and Production: Clarifying the Concepts* OECD, Paris, 1997; *Sustainable Consumption and Production* OECD, Paris, 1997; *Towards Sustainable Consumption Patterns. A Progress Report on Member Countries Initiatives*, OECD, Paris, 1998.

⁶ *Towards More Sustainable Consumption Patterns. Draft Work Plan* ENV/EPOC(98)18, OECD, Paris, 1998.

⁷ *Commission of the European Communities. Proposals for Council Decisions Concerning the Specific Programmes Implementing the Fifth Framework Programme of the European Community for Research, Technological Development and Demonstration Activities (1998 to 2002)*, COM(98)305.

⁸ *Impacts of Economic Globalisation and Changes in Consumption and Production Patterns in Central and Eastern Europe and Other Countries in Transition* CEE CAP Regional Secretariat, Medium Ltd, Slovenia, 1998.

⁹ *Lost in Transition: Local Markets and Sustainable Practices* CEE CAP Regional Secretariat, Medium Ltd, Slovenia, 1998.