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STATISTICAL COMMISSION and ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Forty-seventh plenary session
(Neuchâtel, 14-16 June 1999)

**Matters arising from the May 1999
session of the Economic Commission for Europe**

Note by the secretariat

SUMMARY

The 1999 annual session of the Economic Commission for Europe was held in Geneva from 4-6 May 1999. This note provides an overview of the parts of the session which are relevant to the Conference of European Statisticians. Mr. Garonna attended the session on behalf of the Conference.

Several issues are of direct concern to the Conference. One concerns the Regional Adviser in Statistics. The Executive Secretary of the ECE has decided that due to a reduced resource base for the ECE's Regional Adviser programme, there will be no Regional Adviser in statistics in 1999, and only one (instead of two) in Transport.

Also, all Principal Subsidiary Bodies, including the Conference, were asked to review their operational activities (technical assistance) programmes and report back to the Commission. This topic will be discussed under agenda item 5 in the Conference's agenda.

The Commission's programme prioritization process has been revised. It is therefore proposed that the Conference's bureau should make a new draft, according to the new proforma, for decision of the Conference.

The decisions and recommendations of the annual session of the ECE are not controversial, and they are consistent with the procedures and policies of the Conference. A draft decision of the Conference concerning the outcome of the Commission session with reference to the Conference is given in paragraph 20.

I. ISSUES DISCUSSED AT THE COMMISSION SESSION OF RELEVANCE TO THE CONFERENCE

a) Consequences of the financial crisis in the ECE region

1. The ECE secretariat prepared a conference room paper for the session which outlined some proposals for a UN/ECE contribution to the economic and social reconstruction of Southeast Europe, once the conflict in Yugoslavia has been settled.
2. The ECE initiative was welcomed by all the delegations and there was general agreement that the ECE's mandate, expertise and experience make the ECE qualified to assist in the re-construction process. The conference room paper was considered by ECE Member states as one that provided a basis for further action for the ECE. They proposed that a special Ad Hoc Task Force within the ECE be established to consider this. In particular, it was thought important that the financial contributions to cover such a comprehensive recovery programme had to be fully explored. Several delegations also stated that this should be done together with other international institutions and organisations to ensure that the post-conflict stabilization and reconstruction programmes will be properly coordinated. It was further underlined that the programmes should cover all the countries that have been affected.
3. All PSB Chairmen had been invited to attend the Commission session, and Mr. Garonna attended on behalf of the Conference. He stressed the importance of using an approach which would involve the PSBs, and stated that ECE has specific areas of expertise which could contribute much to such a recovery programme. He gave the example of the development of national accounts which, after the second world war, contributed immensely to the post-war economic reconstruction. The Executive Secretary said that when the paper will be redrafted it will include a reference to the need for PSB involvement.

b) Operational activities and cooperation with regional/subregional groupings

4. The document which provided the basis for discussion under this item outlined ECE's operational activities and its cooperation with subregional organisations, such as technical assistance that the ECE is providing to the Southeast European Cooperative Initiative (SECI) and the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA).
5. The Commission concluded that the PSBs are well positioned to identify better the needs for technical assistance in their respective areas, and therefore it recommended that they should be more actively involved in

preparing the documents that serve as the basis for discussion of this subject. In general it was felt that more financial support should go to technical assistance and that this should be concentrated on countries most in need. However, several delegations, including the European Union, thought the ECE does not do enough work in the Mediterranean region. The European Union also recommended a closer coordination with their aid activities to transition countries to avoid duplication.

6. Many delegations expressed concern over the cut in the number of regional advisors and the fact that the Statistical Division no longer has a Regional Adviser. The Deputy Executive Secretary stated that this situation arose because between 1998 and 1999 there had been a cut of 21% in the ECE's Regional Advisers Fund. The ECE is asking for more funds for the 2000/2001 biennium. All PSBs were therefore asked to review their operational activities at their next annual session and to give their views to the Commission at its May 2000 meeting. This topic will be discussed under agenda item 5 in the Conference's agenda.

c) Issues related to the work of the Group of Experts on the Programme of Work with the participation of Principle Subsidiary Bodies.

7. Under this agenda item the Commission reviewed a report by the Group of Experts (from national missions to the UN in Geneva) which suggested revising the prioritization process so as to make it simpler and clearer. The new system would introduce a proforma for individual PSBs, accompanied by an explanatory note. The proforma would ask for specific information regarding the "clusters" or main subject areas of activity. It would consist of a table of clustered activities, requiring PSBs to assign a priority level to each cluster, and to indicate the number of regular budget professional staff within the secretariat allocated to each cluster of activity. The proforma would also ask PSBs to identify activity options in the event of an increase or decrease in the budget.

8. The recommendations of the Working Group, which were adopted by the Commission, are:

- All PSB activities using ECE regular budget resources should be included in the prioritization exercise
- The three-tier system of prioritization should be maintained, but PSBs which account for less than 5% of total ECE resources (Human Settlements, Timber and Sustainable Energy) may, if necessary, prioritize their activities on a two-tier basis;
- A proforma should be produced for individual PSBs to complete during the prioritization exercise;

- An explanatory note should be produced to accompany the new proforma; and
- The Chairman or a representative of the Group of Experts should attend the annual meetings between the Bureau of the Commission and the PSB Bureaux. Other informal meetings between the PSB and the Group of Experts could be arranged as necessary.

9. In view of this, it is proposed that the Conference's Bureau should make a new draft prioritisation of the Conference's work programme according to the new proforma approved by the Commission, for review by the Conference at its 2000 plenary session.

d) Cross-sectoral concerns including intersectoral linkages

10. The Commission gave strong support for cross-sectoral approaches. It discussed in detail sustainable development and gender mainstreaming. Concerning the former topic, the discussion focussed on environment and transport; environment and energy, and environment and health.

11. The Commission agreed that the Committee on Environment Policy should have over-all responsibility for overseeing all activities of the ECE from a perspective of sustainable development.

12. Mr. Garonna informed the Commission about its role in coordinating environmental indicators compiled by international organizations.

13. As for gender mainstreaming the Commission agreed to convene a regional preparatory meeting, towards the end of 1999 or early in 2000, for the preparations for the 2000 review of the implementation of the Beijing platform for action. The document which served as the basis for discussion of this item described the role of gender statistics in the Conference's programme of work.

e) Follow-up to ECOSOC Resolution relating to the regional commissions

14. The Commission endorsed the increased interagency cooperation. The work undertaken by ECE together with UNCTAD, UNEP, WHO and WIPO was welcomed.

f) Cooperation with European institutions and Pan-European organizations and sub-regional organizations

15. The Commission endorsed ECE's approach to reinforce its cooperation with other pan-European organizations, addressing issues of regional integration in fields complementary to those of ECE.

16. As far as statistics is concerned, the co-operation between ECE Statistical Division and OECD and Eurostat was highlighted. The European Commission stated that the cooperation between Eurostat and ECE in the field of statistics was a model for the cooperation.

g) Proposed programme budget for 2000-2001

17. Except for adjustments for inflation and changes in exchange rates, the ECE budget for 2000-2001 will remain unchanged, compared with the 1998-1999 budget.

18. The Executive Secretary regretted that, because of a reduction in funding for the Regional Adviser programme, he had decided that there would be no Regional Adviser in statistics during 1999. He asked the Commission for support to ensure sufficient funding for the next biennium.

19. The General assembly has previously rejected a proposal to switch to result-based budgets. However, it agreed to test the concept on an experimental bases and ECE has been selected to participate in this exercise. A prototype budget according to this concept will shortly be distributed to member countries for their consideration.

II. DRAFT DECISION BY THE CONFERENCE

20. The Conference may consider that its method of work and its operating procedures are already largely aligned with the ones which were called for in the discussion that took place at the Commission session. The Conference therefore may wish to:

- a) note that its methods of work and its operating procedures are already largely aligned with the recommended practices called for at the Commission session and in Commission decision A(53);
- b) thank Eurostat for facilitating the participation of representatives of central and east European countries and of CIS countries in the annual plenary sessions of the Conference of European Statisticians and in selected other high priority meetings in the Conference's work programme, by permitting representatives of the statistical offices of these countries to use the European Commission's PHARE and TACIS funds to finance their participation in these meetings;
- c) request the Bureau of the Conference at its autumn 1999 or spring 2000 meeting to look into the possibility of prioritising the Conference's work programme in the manner which has been recommended by the Group

of Experts on the Programme of Work (see E/ECE/1372), for review by the Conference at its 2000 plenary session; and

- d) agree that the ECE Statistical Division is already collaborating closely and in a partnership relationship with Eurostat, OECD, the UN Statistical Division and other international organizations in carrying out the Conference's programme of work and also, to a considerable extent, in the secretariats' collection of statistics from ECE member countries.

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