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COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

Ninth session, 4 - 6 November 2002
(Item 3 of the provisional agenda)

**MATTERS ARISING FROM THE FIFTY-SEVENTH SESSION OF
THE ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE (ECE)**

Note by the secretariat

1. The fifty-seventh session of the Commission took place from 7 to 10 May 2002. The full proceedings can be found in document E/2002/37-E/ECE/1395. All Commission documents may be downloaded from the ECE web site (<http://www.unece.org>).

General recommendations

2. Two round tables were organized based on the deliberations of the ECE Spring Seminar on Labour Market Challenges in the ECE Region (Geneva, 6 May 2002). In his concluding remarks, the Chairman of the Commission highlighted, among other things, that to achieve a sustainable economic and social development in the region, of which the labour market was a very important element, the issue had to be approached from a holistic and comprehensive perspective. He stressed the necessity for the short-term considerations and long-term strategies as well as the global, regional, national and local policies to complement one another.

3. The Executive Secretary of ECE underlined the need for ECE to be actively involved in the preparatory process for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, South Africa, August-September 2002), the Ministerial Conference on Ageing (Berlin, September 2002) and the World Summit on the Information Society.

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The economic dimension of security in the ECE region

4. Under the agenda item on economic aspects of security in Europe, the representative of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Mr. Jan Kubis, underlined the achievements brought about by the close cooperation between OSCE and ECE. He highlighted, in particular, cooperation on specific activities such as the promotion of the Aarhus Convention.

5. The Commission felt that while it was not a security agency, it could contribute to ensuring a more stable and safe environment in the region through its ongoing work in the various sectors. However, it was stressed that ECE should avoid duplicating the work of other regional and international organizations and institutions and build on its recognized areas of expertise.

6. The chairpersons of the principal subsidiary bodies were invited to re-examine their work programmes in the context of security and safety. This was expected to provide a basis for a cross-sectoral analysis of the challenges and potential threats to security relevant to ECE work. The Executive Secretary was encouraged to continue to monitor this aspect of the activities of the Commission.

Strengthening the organization

7. The Executive Secretary presented a document on “Strengthening the organization”, a self-assessment of ECE which had been prepared as part of the initiative of the Secretary-General to continue the process of strengthening the Organization in the light of the United Nations Millennium Declaration's principles and priorities.

8. The Commission welcomed the opportunity to comment and to discuss the proposals set out in the self-assessment document. It felt, however, that further discussions were still required, in particular on the following issues: introducing more policy dialogue and a social and security dimension into ECE work, reforming the ECE intergovernmental structure, strengthening the role of the annual session and the Bureau, as well as the proposed orientation of technical assistance and operational activities.

9. In summary, the Commission suggested that it should focus its activities on the areas where it held expertise and comparative advantage and added value. Further, ECE should build on these strengths, especially in the area of norms and standard-setting, and strengthen their monitoring and implementation. The Commission also pointed to the necessity of having focused work programmes corresponding to the needs of all member States, taking into account the mandates of other United Nations bodies.

Reporting from principal subsidiary bodies to the Commission at its annual session

10. The ECE Steering Group made a number of recommendations to strengthen the overall coherence of and communication in ECE. As regards the principal subsidiary bodies and the Divisions concerned, it was recommended that they should present their work to member States once a year, possibly during the annual session.

11. The member States proposed furthermore that, for the annual session, a brief formal document should be prepared by each principal subsidiary body outlining its accomplishments, problems and challenges. The document should also provide information on its structure and that of its subsidiary bodies, as well as the rate of participation by member States. In addition, where relevant, it should describe the status of the main ECE conventions and agreements together with the number of ratifications and accessions.

Technical assistance and operational activities

12. The Commission agreed that further improvements needed to be introduced to make this important area of work more efficient, transparent, result-oriented, as well as more demand-driven. Other issues noted by the Commission were: focusing on the less developed transition economies when projects were planned and implemented, raising further extrabudgetary resources, increasing cooperation with other international and regional organizations, and improving horizontal coordination.

13. A particular point was made with regard to the need for support of the participation of experts from low- and middle-income transition economies in the principal subsidiary bodies and their related activities, which it was felt should be addressed within the framework of the UNECE technical assistance programme. The Commission proposed to review these issues at an adhoc session later in 2002.

14. The Committee on Environmental Policy is invited to consider whether there should be any changes to its programme in the light of the Commission's statement.

Other business

15. Under other business, the representative from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) reported on the progress of three Interregional Technical Cooperation Projects in the Mediterranean, including the one on the sustainable management and protection of internationally shared groundwaters led by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia.